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

FRED CHARLES THOMAS, JR

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INTERVIEW

Q: Fred, why don't we start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and a bit about your family.

THOMAS: I was born on 15 November 1927. My father was then stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He was a first lieutenant of cavalry. He was a troop commander there with the buffalo soldiers.

Q: Oh, yes, these were the...

THOMAS: The black soldiers, 10th Cavalry. He also commanded what was left of the detachment of Apache scouts. It was an interesting post, and I'm now working on some history of that for my grandchildren.

Q: I went down there and saw it about four years ago. They've got a nice museum there and all that.

THOMAS: He lived in what is now a general-officer's house. These were the old officers quarters there on the post that faced on to the parade ground. I was born in the dispensary there.

I was a baby, I think six or eight months old, when he was transferred to Fort Des Moines, Iowa, where he became an officer in the 14th Cavalry. We were there for maybe four years, where two of my sisters were born.

The horse cavalry was breaking up; my dad didn't like tanks, so he thought he'd try the Army Air Corps. He'd come out of the Naval Academy; because he was chronically seasick, he took a commission in the Army. We went down to Randolph Field, Texas, but he ended up having the same trouble flying airplanes that he had riding on ships. Then he took a transfer to the Quartermaster Corps and became a supply logistics contracting officer. He got in a big fight, I remember as a boy, with the Borden milk people at Randolph Field, because he insisted upon giving the contract for the milk there to a local dairy that was underbidding Borden. They went after him. They sent people to try to bribe him and to threaten him. They said they'd get him out of there, which they did.

They had him transferred to the Philippines. My mother's health wasn't good, and the Army had promised not to send him to an unhealthy post. Despite this promise, we were transferred to Fort Mills, Corregidor, which was the island in the entrance to Manila Harbor. It was a great adventure for a boy of my age at that time.

Q: When was this, in the early '30s?

THOMAS: This was the mid-'30s. I had a horse, and I remember going up to Fort Stotsenberg to visit some of my parents' friends, who were there with the 26th Cavalry, and going on maneuvers with the regiment to Lingayen Gulf and back through Bataan peninsula. Down from there when the...

Q: That's where the Japanese invaded.

THOMAS: It was a very adventuresome time for a boy, let's put it that way.

We came back after a two-year assignment there; my father was assigned to the quartermaster school, as a student, in Philadelphia. I spent a year in the south side of Philadelphia learning what it was to be around tough gangs and how to get along in a school where you had gangs. It was mostly Italian and black toughs. But I had to learn to

use my fists, and that was another sort of educational experience. We lived in a middle class ghetto called Girard Estates that had been built there by Mr. Girard for preachers and soldiers, military officers. It was in the middle of this very poor section of the city; so you had this real mixture.

From there, his next assignment was a place called Jeffersonville QM Depot, Jeffersonville, Indiana. It's right across the river from Louisville. He was a major by then. I can still remember, there, he got in a lot of trouble with Senator Minton. It was because he was trying to prevent the sale of cast iron to the Japanese. He had a lot of this under his control. There were local commercial interests that would have profited from this sale; therefore they went after him through this senator. A big investigation. It was all over the front page of the papers. In the end, they had to apologize. The apology was carried in the back pages, in small print. The usual thing.

I was brought up in what you might say was family where honesty and courage as a government servant meant something.

There, he became sick, very sick. There is still a lot of question in my family's mind as to why. There was a lot of experimental medicine going on, and there were a lot of people, because of this political thing, that wanted him out of that post. He ended up at Walter Reed, with a complete nervous breakdown. This just didn't fit. They'd shot a lot of stuff into him. I'm asking for records now; I'm looking into all this, to try to find out more of really what went on.

He'd been highly decorated in World War I, and he'd been the only cavalry officer to be decorated for cavalry action in World War I. His troop commander, when he was a 2nd lieutenant and had a platoon, was by then a major general and was going to Europe in the Second World War. He came to see my Dad. I was present when he was there. He told my father there were two stars waiting for him if he'd get out of the hospital and take over a division. But his health never came back.

Then he was forced into retirement, with complete disability. We moved to a small town, temporarily, to find out what we wanted to do, called Cambridge, Ohio. We stayed there a year, and then we went on to Lewisburg, Pennsylvania because we found a house my mother liked. Because he thought he was going to die, we bought this house. He had to crawl up the stairs, he was in such bad shape.

I was sent to a military prep school (Augusta Military Academy, Fort Defiance, Va.) because of the problems he was having. I had three younger sisters. I, of course, like my father, wanted to be a military officer. I really didn't belong being one; I was about 110 pounds, soaking wet, and didn't have the physique for it. But I managed to graduate first in my class (June, 1945) from a military school in Virginia and got the honor-graduate appointment to West Point.

When I arrived at West Point, the doctors looked at where I was born and said, "You're an Army brat."

I said, "Yes."

And they said, "Well, you're 15 pounds underweight, but we're going to cut your height by two inches."

So I was officially two inches shorter than I really was, and they let me in. But I didn't last but a month or two. I just physically passed out. And so they told me, if I resigned and got my health and some size on me, I could come back.

I resigned and was very unhappy and very disappointed with myself, like a lot of people can be at that age.

We lived in Lewisburg where Bucknell University is located.

Q: Let's have a date or two here. When did you go to West Point?

THOMAS: Nineteen forty-five.

When I returned home, I entered Bucknell. I had just barely finished the summer out at West Point. They asked me what I wanted to take; I was typically cocky, thinking no private college could be as tough as a service academy, as my father had been a Naval Academy man. So I said, "What's the toughest course you folks give?"

They said, "Electrical engineering."

I said, "I'll take that."

Even though I had no idea what I was getting into, I signed up for a course in electrical engineering.

At the end of my first year, I still had this hope to go back to West Point. To try to get my health up and get to be a bit bigger, I enlisted in the Army, hoping to get an Army appointment.

When boarding the special train of recruits and draftees in Harrisburg bound for Ft. Meade, Md., the non-com at the train station put me in charge of the train because of my previous service at the military academy. It was October 1946 when I arrived at Fort Meade, Maryland, There, I took the AGC tests and received very high scores. They shipped me off to engineering basic training at Fort Belvoir.

At Fort Belvoir, there was great pressure from returning veterans who wanted out of the service. They didn't want to take the time to train new recruits. This created a shortage of

training cadre. For example in our training company, we had only one officer who was my company commander, a captain. He noted I had previous service. He sent for me and asked me my background. He said, "Well, hell, you could train people in basic training. You know all this stuff." (A cadet out of VMI was there with me who was given the same treatment. They needed cadre sgts.)

So I was suddenly made a cadre sergeant, and I ended up training troops rather than being given training. I had my own platoon, which consisted of 90 people. Forty-five of them were toughs from New York and from Philadelphia. The other 45 mostly had doctorate degrees. They had been exempt all during the war because of their education, and they were already working on the Manhattan and the rocket projects. But the Army had suddenly decided to draft them at the end of the war. They were due to be made senior sergeants the minute they got out of basic training, but they had to go through basic training. I ended up being their cadre sergeant.

I called these fellows together because I knew I was dealing with two different types of people; because they were a lot older than I was, maybe ten years my senior, I said, "Look, you're married, you want your wives to come here, and there's a lot of horse shit that goes on in this place. It's the nature of basic training. I'll make sure you get to see your wives on the weekend if you make sure that we do this horse shit right. When I blow that whistle, I want everybody out there in line first. Now you guys ought to be able to figure out scientifically how to do it that way."

Well, it was a great experience, because these fellows did figure it out. When some of these kids tried to create problems, they made sure the problems didn't exist. I made a compact with those fellows; some of them offered me jobs later.

Anyway, it was an interesting experience. By the time that one tranche of people went through the system, they began closing my company down; I stayed with the unit until the end. My CO had recommended to the post commander that I be given an Army appointment to West Point. Again I was found wanting in weight.

Then I was ordered to go to the West Coast, to a replacement depot, for shipment to the Far East. I took leave and I ended up at Camp Stoneman.

Q: I went through Camp Stoneman in early '52.

THOMAS: I got into Stoneman in early '47, maybe the 1st or 2nd of January. But I kept being held up; I wasn't put on the ship. And I kept complaining. They had me in this sergeant's barracks. But it gets very discouraging when you just sit there and people go through.

Q: I know, because there's nothing to do there.

THOMAS: Nothing to do and no place to go. At last, I got a call from the orderly room of this holding company I was in to come down. And here was a Colonel Fisher, who was chief of chaplains for the West Coast. He said, "You know, I baptized you."

I said, "Oh, yes, I remember Mother talking about you."

My mother had written to Colonel Fisher. My father didn't know about it. Colonel Fisher had placed a hold on me, that is, until he lined up a job for me there on the West Coast, as a chaplain's assistant. I looked at him and I said, "I'm my father's son. I don't want a job like that. You get me on the first ship out of here. The first ship."

We went out to dinner; he took me home. He agreed to that, so that ended that business.

I ended up on the first ship out. I was made the sergeant in charge of the Military Police detachment. My superior was a Military Police Captain. There was a major who was troop commander on the ship. It was a military transport, and you had all these different messes. You had an officers' mess, an enlisted men's mess, a ships officers' mess, and they had all grades of food. I was brought up by my old man who used to say, "You feed the horses, then the men, and then yourself." They put us all up in the fo'c'sle of this ship, all together, the MPs. The food in the enlisted men's mess was crap, so we had a ratline, and we'd go and steal food from the ships officers' mess. I can still remember being called in by this captain, who said, "Do you need more Military Policemen? There's a lot of pilferage going on from the ships officers' mess."

I looked at him and said, "Captain, any more men in my detachment and that pilferage will get worse."

He got the point.

It turned out that ship was going to Korea. We landed in Inchon, Korea sometime in January of '47. And it was colder than hell; I nearly froze to death. Anyway, I was due to be sent to an engineering construction group headquarters, at a place called Yongdungpo, Korea. You've been in Korea.

Q: Oh, yes, it's just south of Seoul.

THOMAS: It was pretty bleak. The present ambassador to Korea and I were bunk-mates.

Q: Who's that?

THOMAS: Jim Laney, a native of Arkansas and a Yale graduate. He later became a missionary out there and more recently was President of Emory University. The present administration appointed him ambassador to Korea. But then we bunked next to each other and became very close friends.

I'd only been there a month or two when a call came from 24th Corps headquarters in Seoul for me to report to the sergeant major of the Corps. Verbal orders. I went up there and I said, "Well, what's this all about?"

He said, "Your name came out with two other names when we ran the computer..." They had these punch cards. "With a very high AGC score." He said, "We need somebody like you to be attached to the United States-Soviet Joint Commission, which is reopening. He ordered me to report to Brigadier General Weckerling at the Duksu Palace. The Duksu Palace was just across and down the street from the Bando Hotel, and inside a big compound.

I reported to General Weckerling, who was a brigadier general directly assigned from G-2, Washington, intelligence. He took my stripes off and put U.S.s on my collar and said, "From now on, you're Mr. Thomas, and you'll eat and be housed with the special troops for the 24th Corps; they'll give you a room out there. I'll send a car for you every morning." It was the damndest thing. My company commander had a Jeep to run around in, and I was being picked up by a fancy sedan. Anyway, that was my introduction to political work.

Q: Obviously, you were seeing this from an enlisted man's viewpoint, but I want to catch your viewpoint at various times. What was Korea like in 1947?

THOMAS: It was so backward; it reminded me of China in the 1930s, when my father and I visited China. Beggars everywhere, filth. You'd come to work and go through that gate, and here'd be people dead in the gateway, in the wintertime, corpses. The smell of feces everywhere. The dust. It was just backward Orient at that time. It was the worst of the worst.

As a matter of fact, during the interim between when I was assigned this job, when I was sitting out there at Yongdungpo, this fellow Laney and I dreamed up a scheme to get out of Korea by enlisting in the paratroops. Neither one of us was very big, about my height(5'10"); I was pretty skinny and so was he. There were no paratroopers in Korea. The closest units were in Japan. We went to this recruiting sergeant where they were looking for paratroopers, at 24th Corps headquarters in Seoul. Well, this paratrooper looked at the two of us and told us, "You don't belong in the paratroopers. You guys are much too little." So that ended that.

Q: As soldiers, did you have any contact with Koreans, particularly?

THOMAS: Not immediately but later on in that job. I started out with Weckerling, and I was doing sort of gofer work with the command, but intelligence command work, digging up...

The Draper Report, I remember that was a big report at the time. The Draper Commission Report. It was all top secret. Draper was Under Secretary, or an Assistant Secretary of

Defense, who was visiting various places around the Far East. The Defense Department's instructions indicated that the report concerning the situation in Korea was to include many multi-colored charts to make quick reading and comprehension possible.

So I was given the job of arranging the publishing of these many multi-colored charts and getting the job done in a hurry. It was done by a topographical unit located on the outskirts of Seoul. I went out there and introduced myself. General Weckerling called ahead and said I'd be coming, "Mr. Thomas." When I arrived, they said, "What do you want? We'll do anything you want." So I had this group of young people there working about 24-hours a day, with shifts going, putting out these top-secret charts, in color, of everything that you could think of, economic data, etc., to get it done in time for this Draper Report. I can sort of remember falling asleep in the big, fancy room, trying to get it all put together, because I'd been working long hours through the whole three-week period.

Once it was together, General Weckerling gave me some money to buy a few cases of beer and some snack food to give these guys a party. As I was leaving this beer party, they handed me an envelope, and they said, "Don't open this until you get back to your room." When I got home, I learned the great advantage of first-class documentation. It turned out this unit not only made maps and charts, but also made all the documentation for everything we did in Korea. In this envelope was a mess pass for every mess in the command, with my name on it, including a pass for the general officers' mess, and every other officers' mess. Several extra PX ration cards were included so I could get extra cigarettes, everything you needed. It was a real education on the value of good documentation.

Out of this, I began to notice these guys when I'd go to the PX. There they'd be with duffel bags repeatedly going through the cigarette line and filling the duffel bags... They could buy a carton of cigarettes for 90 cents, and they could sell it for maybe $5 to $10 dollars in military scrip. They were all making a quick profit. But you couldn't move this money out of the country because you couldn't account for it; it was that funny money. They'd take this money and buy the fanciest things in the PX, like fancy cameras. They all had lockers full of fancy stuff.

But by then, Jim Laney, who had been with me at the engineering unit had become an agent in Army CIC. As an agent they make you a "Mister" CIC agents worked for us. They came in and we gave them their orders of what we wanted collected, and they collected it. Jim and I were sitting in my office, which was in a vault in the basement of the museum building there. It was an actual vault. It was a weekend evening, when suddenly the fire engines alarms went off. You could hear it all over town. The fire was out at the edge of town. We were fire chasers and we wanted to find out what was going on, so we jumped in Jim's Jeep and rushed out there. This same topographical unit was burning to the ground. All these guys lost all their loot. They never profited from it all.

Q: Was there any contact with the Korean Army?

THOMAS: Oh, yes, later. Then I was moved to another job because Weckerling went on to something else. I became the Boy Friday to a man named Dr. Ernst Frankel(Ph.D.). Ernst Frankel was later among those who founded the Free Berlin University. He was a noted scholar on constitutional law, and he helped write the Korean Constitution. He was a GS-18 or equivalent in those days. But he was a typical nice Jewish man who didn't know how to handle the military. He didn't know how to use his rank. He and his wife had no children. They treated me as a son, in a way. I was invited for Sunday dinners. I worked for him for a couple of months, and then he was off to something.

There was a group there that was doing the legwork for the POLAD. It was called Political Advisory Group. It was made up of ex-State and -Foreign Service types who had been in the military when they joined the group. Some of them had been with OSS, left State during the Second World War. The head of group had been a State officer, had his doctorate in Chinese studies and was the son of missionaries to China, named Clyde Sergeant. He got to know me there on the Joint Commission because we were all working in one area. He asked me to join his group as the biographic officer. I was to set up the biographic files for Korea (they didn't have anything like that), with the idea that these would end up being the embassy's biographic files.

When I started doing this, I quickly realized that if you tried to do this the normal government way, with a lot of liberal people around, especially in many of these government departments, you'd get nowhere. This was "spying." So I was not above a bit of prevarication, if I had to, to get my job done. I remember going into the Ministry of Health, in this military government, and I'd deal with, let's say, the advisor to the deputy minister. The deputy minister was a Korean, but the advisor was the guy you talked to, because we were running the place. And so I'd say, "The Ford Foundation is planning to give medical scholarships here; however, we want to know the level of medical education of all the doctors in the country." I wanted help to make up a proper form, both in English and in Korean, that would give me that data. Then I asked it sent all over the country, filled out, and returned. With the police force, it was a similar approach. With the military, it was a different form; everyone was given a different story.

The only person who ever questioned me, who ever said, "Hey, is there any truth in what you're telling me?", was the colonel who was the advisor to the military - the Korean Constabulary, they called it. He wanted to know who the hell I really was. So I gave him Mr. Sergeant's number, and he called Sergeant up. And after he got it straightened out with Sergeant, he agreed to go along with what I was doing.

I collected, in every profession, in every area, masses of files. I was then in the process of getting them translated and put into some organized fashion, because everything was Dewey Decimal System. I had clerks working for me.

I was still a sergeant, but with a "Mister," status; then my enlistment was up. My boss said "We want you to continue here; the State Department wants you to continue. State is

willing to put up a P-1 slot," (which was the lowest professional grade) "for you to become a professional here." So I took a discharge. But I had to get my parents' permission, because I still wasn't 21. I became a P-1 in the State Department and continued to do just what I'd done.

I then began to work with a man named Leonard Bertsch. He was sort of the senior political officer for the command. I'd go to meetings with him with Koreans, and we'd meet with people such as Kim Kyu-sik, Kim Ku and other leaders of the Korean Independence movement. I'd listen. We had interpreters, because neither one of us spoke any Korean, to speak of. Bertsch was a Holy Cross/Harvard Law graduate, who'd arrived in Korea in either late 1945 or early '46 and had been with the Commission from the beginning. He was the action officer for the State Department on what had then been the policy of supporting the coalition effort for a coalition government. This effort was very anti-Rhee. Rhee was considered a right-wing extremist, and the State Department looked on him that way. Now Hodge didn't. Hodge was a very right-wing guy.

Q: This was General Hodge.

THOMAS: General Hodge, yes. "Hodgie, Bertschie, Lurchie" they used to say. Hodge was the commanding general of XXIV Corps, a lieutenant general; Lurch was the military governor of Korea, a major general; and Bertsch was a first lieutenant. He was later a P-5; he took a discharge there. He was the guy who was managing this whole coalition effort. I got to meet many Koreans, moving around with him, during my last six months there; that's after I became a civilian and worked with him.

But the whole thing blew up. After that article by George Kennan in Foreign Affairs under the pseudonym, Mr. X, Sources of Soviet Conduct, you could just feel it in the Commission; you could feel there was this complete change in attitude about this whole effort of ours to work with the left and to try to get the left and the right to work together for a unified Korea. We'd been trying to do this.

Somebody had to be the scapegoat for this change in policy. Bertsch was very bright, but also irritated the hell out of some of these older officers, who couldn't keep up with him. He had a photographic memory. He'd read something and he'd remember it. Anyway, he ended up having to take the fall for this coalition effort. By then, they had closed the Commission down.

Q: This was the Soviet...

THOMAS: U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission. And they'd pulled those of us who were over at the Soviet Commission, who had been with Political Advisory Group, the few of us who were left. Sergeant had left there by then. Most of them had gone back to the States, gotten out of the military, that type of thing. I was given a desk in the G2 bullpen, along with all these lieutenant colonels. Bertsch was made my assistant. They were really going to knock him down, until they could ship him out of there. So, for about three weeks, he

ended up working for me. It was very degrading, because I felt he was a first-class man and what they were doing to him was unfair. He was being accused of mollycoddling Communists and all of this. There was an awful lot of corruption going on among some of the officers there, stories that you heard within the intelligence community. There was a fellow named Goodfellow, who'd gotten in trouble. Even the CIC was selling stuff on the black market to obtain extra-operational funds. This spilled over and had a detrimental effect on intelligence operations that were going on at that time. They tried to implicate him in currency exchange corruption.

But it was years later that some Koreans talked to me about Bertsch and those meetings. I was asked to do some research about this period. The grant that was to come from Korea University suddenly was cancelled because a new dean had been appointed. I just didn't have the money to go running around without some support. Bertsch's widow offered to let me see all of the personal letters that he'd written about that period to her, which nobody had ever seen. They concerned the first year of the Joint Commission and all his efforts working with the Korean political leaders who were on the Coalition Committee. Maybe later, when there are fewer financial demands on family resources, I will be able to do this on my own.

Q: What was the feeling, in your position, while you were working with the Joint Soviet-American Commission? How did you feel about it?

THOMAS: Well, I felt that it was a very frustrating thing. The Soviets were not about to compromise. That was very obvious. This was all an exercise in futility. I felt we were dealing with people, as a country, that were much more sophisticated, in terms of double dealing and all these things that were going on, than we were. Compared to both the Soviets and the Koreans, who'd lived through the Korean provisional government, where they were killing each other and fighting the Japanese through assassination and all this, we were sort of babes in the woods. I felt this, in terms of most of the things we attempted. And a lot of the information we were obtaining was colored by our own perceptions of what Asia was.

I can still remember the night of the Korean election to elect the National Assembly of Korea. It was to be overseen by the U.N. All American troops were under curfew; they weren't allowed out. I was put on detail to UNTCOK to observe that election. There was this group of people including UNTCOK delegates and staff that was allowed to act as observers; I was one of the observers. There were an awful lot of shootings and fighting at the polls. But the election went off. And it was a very adventurous day for me.

That evening, I went to an early-evening movie. Because Jeeps were stolen, we had a parking lot that was guarded; my Jeep was parked in a parking lot. As I was going to get it, the lights of a car flashed on a man whose face was bloody and he was staggering. His coat flew open, and here was an American .45 hanging on a lanyard underneath his coat. I knew civilian Koreans (he wasn't in the military) weren't supposed to be armed. I wasn't armed, but I started to follow him. We went down one of these little back alleys, where it

was blacker than hell. I could hear the click of this thing. When it stopped clicking, I'd stop. Every time I did, I backed against the wall. One time, I backed into somebody. And it was a policeman back in there.

By the time we got things straightened out (he spoke some English, I spoke practically no Korean), we went to a police station outside of there. There was somebody there who spoke good English, and I explained what I'd seen. So we all went back together.

I can still remember being back in there. They gave me a pistol. On the ground, they'd found this guy hidden behind a log with his pistol. In the end, they talked him into backing out. He came out with his hands up, and they hit him. I never saw somebody beaten up so badly in my life. I felt sick about it. They took him to the police station.

The next morning, I can still remember, Colonel Watlington, who was the G2, calling me in and saying, "Well, we got somebody out there doing his own arresting. You shouldn't be doing this type thing. You'll get yourself hurt."

But I can still remember that was the election day, that first election. There were a lot of problems on both sides. I couldn't say it was a completely fair election.

Q: I'm speaking as a former enlisted man, too, and I know there are guys who do nothing but just horse around and have a good time. But there are also the ones who are sort of observing things around them and all. And you were with a group that was doing that. What was the impression of the men and the officers of General Hodge and his rule at that time?

THOMAS: A lot of the people I was moving with were what you'd call the bright guys. The enlisted men in a headquarters engineering battalion had to be somewhat educated even to be there except for the truck drivers. The professional people at the Commission were all very bright. Among the troops I was living with, you had the band living out there, but I didn't get to know them. You had one or two other people who had come for the same reason I'd come, with high AGC scores.

One fellow, Charles (Chuck) Allen, was out of Swarthmore. His father was a medical doctor in Swarthmore, Pa. He was assigned to write the nightly intelligence newsletter for the top officials, the general officers, that came out early every morning. He had access to all the intelligence going on in Korea, everything. He was a liberal guy, and he saw an awful lot of this as being crap, as being unfair. You know, right-wing extremism. He felt some of these people we'd thrown in jail were being falsely accused, and he didn't like it; so he started writing letters to these people in these jails down in southern part of Korea. Suddenly, when the authorities realized this guy, Allen, who was responsible for writing and had access to all the top secret stuff, was the author of these letters, they canned him. Allen was not happy with the Osu Rebellion and all those things that went on at the time and how it was handled.

I got to know people who were working in the information and the education end of the command, they were soldiers who worked for STARS & STRIPES. Someone in the U of Maryland program there asked me to teach a course in analytical geometry which I did for one semester. Fellows such as these were in the educational program. Therefore they were much more liberal in their outlook. They didn't think too much of Hodge and the whole approach to how we were handling Korea or the Koreans.

Q: I know, when Hodge first came in, it was said he sort of brushed aside the Koreans and went to the Japanese.

THOMAS: What he did was to go to the people who spoke some English; he went to the extreme right-wing landlords who'd participated and worked along with the Japanese. He looked on them as being Western educated and they could do the most good.

The people who'd fought for Korean independence and who'd been in all types of troubles (such as a man named Cho Pong-am, with whom I later got very much involved; he'd been in prison and been tortured by the Japanese; he became the first minister of agriculture in the first Rhee government in 1948 and later ran against Rhee; I was the American who had the closest relationship with him), were not asked for anything or talked to any extent.

The only time we were involved with those types of people was this Coalition-Committee effort on the part of Bertsch, where I got to know Kim Ku. If you know the history of Korea, Kim Ku was a revolutionary who planned the assassination of one of the Japanese princes, by his assassination squads in Shanghai. Kim Kyu-sik was a gentleman-scholar type who was sort of the scholarly Confucian who headed the Coalition Committee. And then you had Yo Ung-hyong, who was another one of the leaders who was somewhat left and a scholar anti-Japanese type. They were all in this thing called the Coalition Committee. Kim Ku and Yo Ung-hyong were both assassinated with Rhee's sponsorship.

When the Coalition Committee was ended, when Bertsch and that whole effort was shot down, that effort, (which the State Department had been pushing up until then) went out the window, Bertsch took the fall.

I was just young enough and junior enough that I didn't get hurt in all this. But I could see people above me who were getting hurt, and very unfairly hurt. And this went on for years.

Q: You were a part of this group assembling this biographic data.

THOMAS: I was the head of that group. Sergeant ran the whole political intelligence effort of which this project was just one part.

Q: What was your impression of the status, at this very important period, the post-World War II, the de-occupation of Korea by the Japanese and all, of the educational situation in Korea?

THOMAS: Well, that's a very interesting and excellent question. Out of my experience there (and not just out of this first tour there, but I was there a good many years over the period, off and on until '59), I came to the conclusion that the Japanese, as imperialists, were really probably better in some ways than the Brits, the French, or the Dutch, for this fundamental reason: they took all the good jobs for themselves--the president of this, the president of that, the head of the bank, but they also felt that if Korea and Taiwan were to be properly exploited, you had to have an educated work force. So they pushed basic education. That, along with the Confucian value system that pushed education, made it so that the Koreans, when we went in there, had a 90-percent literacy rate. This was true also, I understand, in Taiwan. With that as a background, even though these people didn't have experience as head of the bank, you could create leaders more quickly in that situation. Whereas, in India, where I later served, you had a few top people and then the rest; the few at the top became the new domestic imperialists which creates a wholly different situation.

Q: A very, very interesting insight into that. Our intelligence, at least the part you were dealing with, where was it focused? Was it on what was happening within South Korean ranks, or were we looking at North Korea? What were we looking at?

THOMAS: It was my impression that we were at the most basic level of trying to understand Korea and the Koreans. That is why I was involved in the more bureaucratic aspect of assembling this basic form of data. It took some doing, and it took a lot of organization, a lot of forms and a lot of time getting them printed. I knew I didn't know the right questions to ask for a doctor's form, but I knew where to go to get it. So I was managing this thing.

Along with this (because that got to be dull at times), I was going with Bertsch to these meetings and listening to all this stuff. I would be reading all the latest minutes from what was happening, and the fights over the political parties and whom we were going to recognize as a political party, and the registration of political parties.

You can say the whole period there, in terms of what I was doing, was a mixture of things, with biographic form collection as my base. But people would come to me and say, "Can you find out..." I remember a lieutenant colonel of military intelligence (MI) coming to me and saying, "I hear you have a connection into Khabarovsk, Siberia. Can you find out so and so." Well, my connection there was a connection with a Korean, whom I knew, had some connections there. So I went and threw the question at him. I don't know how he got his answer, but he got me an answer. It was that type thing. So, in time, you got to know people, and people got to know you.

After this many years, I don't remember the names of some of these people. I can remember some of the people who were on the Commission, like Monegan and Paul Sturm, who was a Foreign Service officer. Some of them were economists, some of them political types. Some of them had been with OSS, but they'd previously been with the Foreign Service or State. So you had a real mixture, a mixed bag.

Q: What about north of the 38th Parallel at that time, was that completely cut off?

THOMAS: No, we had an operation running there, a big operation, being run by a Colonel Ko

Q: A Korean colonel?

THOMAS: He was running this for G2 XXIV Corps, in terms of order of battle. He had a whole slew of agents, and this thing developed over the years. But it was going back then, and I knew about it. And it was probably the most effective low-level-order of battle intelligence operation going.

Now the highest-level thing going that I got wind of... And I didn't get wind of this in terms of North Korea. Some of this, it's hard for me, in telling stories, to keep it all exactly chronological. But this happened in a period that I wasn't there. You see, I left right before the government was formed. After the election, I was offered a job in our embassy, but I came back to go back to school. But after the government was formed and the first cabinet appointed (and this has to do with North Korea, because you asked about North Korea), Rhee was looking around for people who had the capability to be cabinet ministers. He had a limited number of educated people to call on. One of the people he'd heard about was a captain in the British Royal Navy(Reserve), Captain Shin Song-mo, who had commanded merchant ships, but under military control, during World War II. Of course, how many Koreans get to be a captain in the British Navy, even as a reserve? So the word got back, somehow, I think, through the British Embassy, that they had this captain who was an educated man. And then they had another man who was educated, named Yi Kuk-no, who had been to school in England, I think to the London School of Economics. And they might be helpful to the Korean government in forming a new government.

In my research on what was happening, after I got back there in '52, I started noticing that Shin Song-mo was no longer in the cabinet, but he had been the second minister of defense, just as the war was breaking out. There were all sorts of stuff in the files, and from people I talked to, about the fact that he'd been accused of corruption in smuggling between North and South Korea.

When I started looking a little deeper, I found out that he'd been on a ship coming out and had bragged he was working for MI6, British intelligence. Here he was no longer anything, but he was still around there. While reading these older files that we had in the embassy, most of which we'd gotten from US CIC, and trying to fit pieces together in

terms of what had happened while I was away, in terms of cabinet personalities, the files indicated that this friend of his, Yi Kuk-no, who had been mentioned by the British, instead of coming south to help in the government, had gone north. And he became minister without portfolio in the North Korean government.

It also was strange to me to find that the two ends of this smuggling route, one had Yi Kuk-no on it, and the other had Shin Song-mo, the defense minister. So I started thinking double-think. I thought there might be more to this than just smuggling, especially since MI6 is maybe involved here. There were some files that indicated that Shin Song-mo had been warning the command and everybody else that there was a war coming with North Korea.

After I retired, I went to the Archives and pulled some files on Shin Song-mo because some of that stuff had been declassified. These files clearly indicated that Shin was predicting the coming of the war constantly during the spring of 1950. Embassy reporting indicated this fact. However, much of it was discounted as scare tactics to obtain more military aid. My guess is that if we were to just try to find out where we had the hardest information that said a war was coming we should look at what we were obtaining from the British from their clandestine sources via CIA liaison with them.

Because, as I've learned since, the Armed Forces Security Agency failed to predict the Korean War. I was the first one at the Archives after they opened these files, and they showed them to me. They said, "We just opened this stuff up, so you can see it." And they gave me these documents that showed that NSA was created because of the failure of ASA. And the failure of ASA was that nobody was allowed to put any requirements on them but the military. We, in the State Department, had been saying, "Look, Korea is a problem." But they weren't listening. If they had been listening to their radios out there, they'd have known this thing was coming.

Q: You're talking about the security agency, the people who eavesdrop on communications, essentially, and decoding...

THOMAS: Sure. But you can tell a war is coming if you're told to do it and you're doing it in any depth, because you get tactical stuff. They knew what was wrong, and that was why, in these documents NSA was set up. They said, "You boys failed, and the State Department wanted you to do this." When they set NSA up, State became one of the organizations which could place requirements on NSA. This change came out of the Korean War.

Q: Well, you left there in 1948, and then what?

THOMAS: I went back home. Because I wanted to get away from home, I applied to Princeton and was accepted. But then I realized my father had three other children in school. Since I had the GI Bill and if I went to Bucknell, which was in my hometown, I could afford to join a fraternity and have some spending money, but if I went to

Princeton, I'd be the poor boy. So I decided I'd rather be better off, and I stayed at home and went through Bucknell where I received a degree in electrical engineering. I was, frankly, a bit bored with it all. But, because my father had been in the military, I joined what was called the PLCs. I don't know if you ever heard of them.

Q: No.

THOMAS: Well, that's the Marine Corps.

Q: Oh, that's the Platoon Leadership Course.

THOMAS: So I went through that program and was to be commissioned a second lieutenant of Marines when I got my degree. You had to have your degree to get your commission.

Q: You got your degree when?

THOMAS: Well, I was due to get it in June of '51.

Q: Which was high Korean War.

THOMAS: I was at Quantico when the war broke out, summer 1950, in the Marine Corps for my PLC training. And I remember the colonel there, hearing about me and my Dad, said, "We're thinking of starting a horse Marine to go to Korea. Would you be interested in a horse Marine regiment?"

I said, "Sure, but, you know..."

They were just starting to fool around with helicopters at this point.

I came back from that Marine assignment that summer, and it was in the fall of that year I got a letter from Douglas Heck, who was chief of the biographic unit in INR in State and later ambassador to Nepal, I believe.

Q: He just recently died.

THOMAS: I got a letter from Doug Heck, who'd talked to all these people about my work setting up all those biographic files and doing all that work as a P-1 in State out there many years before, and he asked me down for an interview. Well, I came down here; he wanted me to quit right away and go to Korea. Well, I didn't have my degree, and my father said, "Hell, no, you've got to get a degree."

I went back and talked to the president of Bucknell, a fellow named Hildreth, who later was ambassador to Pakistan, and he said, "If I were you, young man, I'd just quit college and go take that job."

But Heck said, "Well, we'll try to hold it for you."

So I went back to Bucknell and was finishing out, when a strange thing happened. I took a final exam in a course called Transient in Electrical Circuits. This was a high-level mathematical course, where you had to solve using differential equations, heavy-sides methods, and Laplacian transformations. You had to solve these problems that you ran into in the laboratory situation, all three ways, and turn them in.

The lab instructor in this course was in the same church as my father but he hated my father and my father hated him. Professor Miller was very disliked on the campus.

I was loaning my lab reports to a physics major, who was taking his master's degree in physics at Bucknell. All this mathematics he'd never had, and he was having a hell of a time, so I just loaned him my papers; he was copying my lab reports. Well, he was getting "A's" and I was getting "D's", on the same reports. I could see this, but I couldn't tell, because I'd ruin the other guy's... So that was that.

Anyway, on the final exam for this course, which was not a take-home, you had to do it there, and it was under high-pressure speed, I solved the problems. Two of them, I jumped a lot of places to come up with my answers. I did it in my head, and I came down here and came up with the right answer. But the professor didn't want to believe that I had. He figured I'd copied this from somebody, because there were chunks missing. But it was a matter of speed. So he gave me a flunking grade. I argued with him but he said, "The grades are already in. You flunked." And you had to have this course to graduate. When I showed him how I'd done this, mentally, he still said, "Okay, I made a mistake, that's too bad, but that's that. I'm not going to do anything about that guy who gave you these bad lab grades." It was crap.

Well, as a matter of fact, it ended up with a hell of a big fight, with people going to the president of the university on my behalf.

But, anyway, as someone later put it, it was a blessing in disguise. I was due to be commissioned a Marine lieutenant, but I couldn't be commissioned because I didn't have my degree. I went down to Drexel, which was an engineering school in Philadelphia, and took the same course, Transient in Electrical Circuits, and got an "A".

In the meantime, I was in touch with Heck. Heck said, "We've still got this job slot for you in Korea."

I said, "I've got the Marine Corps on my back."

He said, "I think we can handle that. Since you're going to Korea, I think we can handle it."

In the end, there was an argument, but the Marine Corps wrote me and said we understand you're going to Korea with the State Department, and that they have a more important job for you.

So I ended up with that job rather than being commissioned a second lieutenant. In a few months, I was taking training here in Washington. While I was in my training course to get ready to go abroad, they wrote a letter and asked me to resign my commission because they couldn't call me to active duty. So I ended up being a non-Marine at that point.

I was shipped off to Korea as a staff officer, and I didn't know the difference. The State Department was always sort of Greek to me. I knew what these "P" ratings were, but I got to Korea and assumed I was no different from these young officers who were all FSOs but some of them weren't about to give me the time of day.

Q: You got to Korea when?

THOMAS: I got to Korea in May 1952. I'd been told here in the Department that Muccio soon would be transferred out of there but it wasn't known there publically.

Q: By this time, the embassy was back in Seoul.

THOMAS: No, it was in Pusan, Korea.

Q: But we held Seoul, didn't we?

THOMAS: We'd gone back in. We'd lost Seoul, but had gone back into Seoul. But we weren't back in there as an embassy.

Q: I was stationed, as an airman second class, at Yangtze University. I was with the Air Force Security Service, a Russian monitor.

THOMAS: Is that right? Well, then, having been with that, you might want to read those papers I saw, because they talk about that's how the NSA got started. It was because of the fact that they weren't listening for that, before the war.

Q: So you were working in Pusan?

THOMAS: Yes.

Q: What were you doing?

THOMAS: I was the biographic officer, because that's why they'd hired me. I set up the biographic files, plus I did domestic political work. We had a chief of political section named Rolland Bushner. Did you know Rolland at all?

Q: No.

THOMAS: Well, Rolland was a first-class officer, but he resigned later and went with FOREIGN AFFAIRS magazine. We didn't have any American women in Pusan when I first got there; it was terrible. There were no women clerks; you couldn't find anything in the file room. It was a mess. The embassy was in an old bank building. Lightner, who was the DCM, was a breath of fresh air compared to Muccio. Muccio was dour, in a way. I tried to make a joke the first day I arrived, and he said, "Well, if you don't like it here, get on an airplane." It was just a joke. But he wasn't there that long until he was called back for a consultation.

I got there about May 20th. We were in the middle, or soon thereafter, of one of the biggest political crises that had ever occurred, in terms of President Rhee wanting to make sure he got reelected president of Korea. Soon thereafter, we put Chang Myon on a hospital ship, to hide him from Rhee's goons. We were manipulating a great many things. I was involved in this, with the rest of the political section.

First of all, let me tell you, the political section was made up of, I think, four or five officers. I'd been hired because I knew something about politics there and people in the Department talking about my moving around with Bertsch and the Coalition Committee. So I knew some people there, and I knew my way around. This place didn't floor me. They had a fellow named Walter Drew, who would read newspapers all the day long, translations of newspapers, and then write up political stuff. It was pretty dull stuff, but he wrote well. Although, Drew had spent many years in Korea from MG days, he was very introverted and didn't get to know people. Another officer was Phil Manhard, who was a first-class collector and people person. He and I hit it off.

Q: He had just, not too long before, been in Shandong.

THOMAS: That's right, and he was a Chinese-language officer. He'd been down on Koji-do, or one of those islands, with a general, looking after the Chinese prisoners of war. But he and I became sort of buddies in the political section.

I shared a house with the head of the economic section, a fellow named Gordon Strong, who was a State officer and the labor attaché'.

It became pretty obvious to me that there was a group of women there called the Nak Nong Club, which was basically an intelligence organization being run by Rhee's people. These were grass widows, upper-class types.

Q: Korean?

THOMAS: Koreans, who were sort of sicced on lonely American senior officers. Gordon Strong had a live-in girlfriend, who spoke pretty good English, and he was telling her everything that went on in that embassy, every night.

I reported this to Lightner. From then on, at our staff meetings, nothing of importance was discussed. Then there would be a rump staff meeting, with Bushner, Lightner, Drew, Manhard, and myself, around Lightner's desk. We only had one staff room we could all get into. If you went in there, everybody knew it. So the only way you could have a meeting without the rest of the embassy realizing you were having a meeting was to go up to Lightner's office, which was next door to the ambassador's. By then, I think he had taken over as chargé and taken over what had been the ambassador's office, which was no great shakes either.

But that's how we ran the place. We each had assignments, picking up stuff. I would be out talking to people. I knew some military officers that I'd gotten to know before, both in the Navy and in the Army.

Q: You're talking about Koreans.

THOMAS: Koreans, yes. And politicians I'd gotten to know.

I can still remember a funny story, if funny stories have their place in this. I was out one night, and I had a Jeep station wagon I'd taken out there so I could get around. With me was the labor attaché, and we were out visiting a Korean politician in the National Assembly. It was out in one of these back districts where you had to crawl up a mountainside and go into a shack, because that's the way everybody was living. I'd parked my car down here, but on the telephone poles were these big signs, in yellow, saying: OFF LIMITS DISTRICT. NO AMERICAN TROOPS. Since it was raining hard, I said, "No sense both of us getting wet." Our car was parked where it was somewhat protected; I pulled up and parked right below this area to wait for him to come down. As I sat there, parked, there was a bang on my window. I looked up and there was a big burly American MP sergeant who said, "Don't you know you don't belong here? This is off limits."

I looked at him and I said, "I don't think you understand, sergeant. You have no jurisdiction. I enjoy diplomatic immunity."

He looked at me for a few moments, and said, "I don't give a damn when you got your shots. Get the hell out of here."

Q: What was your impression of the Rhee government sitting down in Pusan? By this time, in the summer of '52, essentially South Korea was as South Korea is today, although the country was devastated, the embassy was in Pusan, and all.

THOMAS: The embassy was very anti-Rhee, the whole group of us were; Muccio hadn't been. Muccio had gone with Rhee out of Seoul, he and MacDonald and a few other officers.

Q: Donald MacDonald.

THOMAS: Yes, we were friends. (He was one of the best Korean specialists in the service, and a very fine man. He should have been made ambassador there.) They'd gotten out of Seoul and stuck together. So they'd been through the hard times together, with this fellow Shin Song-mo, the then defense minister, whom I was talking about, and many in the cabinet, they all went south. They suffered together, so there was a certain amount of camaraderie there. But Muccio was pulled out of Korea and sent back to the States. He'd been trying to protect Rhee and had done everything he could, but Rhee misread what was going on. Rhee felt that Muccio had done him in, and went after him, using money, because Rhee understood the system of using money with politicians in the U.S. Congress. He had his connections with the extreme right wing of the American government, including Stiles Bridges and others. Many of these names I don't remember anymore, because we're talking a long time ago. But at the time, I knew pretty much. There were people I knew of at that time within the government whose names I don't remember now.

Let me preface this, in terms of my approach to a country like Korea. If you paid for much information, you really didn't get what you really wanted. You had a lot of intelligence agencies there, of all numbers and stripes, collecting information, most of them buying it. I could go into war stories about various ones and stupid things. I'll give you one as an example a little later.

Anyway, because of this, I came to the conclusion that most of what they were furnishing was either concocted or was manipulated, because these people were much more used to manipulating others, in terms of the type things they'd been involved in, especially Rhee. Rhee was manipulating our government back here. I was trying to find out all I could about that, for my own protection and our embassy's protection, because I knew that we weren't going to be popular due to the fact that we were not siding with him in this fight with the National Assembly. That was very obvious.

Rhee suddenly turned to a person named Lee Bum Suk. Lee Bum Suk was a Korean general in Sian China who had been commander of Kwangbok Army under the OSS, Eagle Project, I think it was called, in China, which had a youth corps connected to it.(Later known as the Northwest Youth Corps. He had been the first minister of defense in the Rhee government.) The Kwangbok Army had worked with our OSS against the Japanese. Clyde Sergeant, my boss in the Political Advisory Group, had been the American OSS officer in charge in Sian. I had gotten to know Lee Bum Suk through Clyde Sergeant back when I'd been there in '48, and I knew his background. He was another Chiang Kai-shek, sort of what I call a Christian fascist. You know that type? He was very straight and reminded you of Chiang Kai-shek, very military in his bearing and very black and white. Well, he was brought in to be the hatchet man for Rhee.

The National Assembly, in the past, had elected the president. The president, by this time, had come to the conclusion that there was not going to be any presidency for him if he had to depend upon that damn National Assembly. So he'd better get the constitution

changed to make it a popular election for president. The whole issue was to change the constitution. This took a good many votes, a lot of arm twisting and bully-boy tactics. We were trying to protect the majority of the members of the National Assembly, including Chang Myon and others that we considered democrats, against this pressure.

Q: You were saying...

THOMAS: I was trying to put out my basic theory in terms of how you got decent information. We had all this stuff coming in from every intelligence agency, but it was all paid for. In a country as poor as Korea, you could hire anybody. Agents for intelligence services were cheap, and you could have hundreds of them, but it didn't mean you were learning anything of any importance. So I decided that the best thing to do was to read their stuff with a grain of salt, but to really get to know the players as best I could, and get to know people around the players, who would have reason to truly know what they were talking about.

I soon realized that, in a place like Korea, there's a loyalty on the part of the Koreans to Korea. But there is no loyalty to a government. Governments come and go, and it's politics. So if you could get the Korean you were dealing with to feel that your interests were the same as his, as it related to country, but maybe not the government in power, you could learn a hell of a lot, and they'd tell you anything you wanted to know. So this was the approach I took.

Most Americans equate government and country. Therefore, if you feel that way, you'd treat a guy who was telling you things out of school as a traitor. But you just can't do that. If you do that, you're hobbling yourself, and that's not the truth of the matter. I mean, who in the hell could be, in a big way, loyal to Mr. Rhee, except a few of the hangers on of Mr. Rhee?

Out of all this, I wanted to find out what he was up to, so I got people who were on his staff, male secretaries on his staff, I got to know people in politics.

I didn't mess with the Foreign Office. I soon realized that the Foreign Office was not in the power loop.

Q: That's so often the case, in many countries.

THOMAS: And yet I couldn't convince my fellow Foreign Service officers who were used to that. They thought they'd deal with the American desk chief. I remember Bill Jones; I had trouble trying to convince him. He later became chief of the political section, and he wouldn't listen to me. He was a State officer who came out there, first post.

I used to say to anybody who wanted to know anything about Korea, "You don't deal with the ambassador from Korea, ever, if you really want to know what's going on, in terms of a feedback from their own government. The guy who counts is the DCM. The DCM got

his job because Rhee put him there to keep an eye on the ambassador. The ambassador is a Foreign Office front man to go to parties, but he doesn't have the power." This was the way that government operated. I could talk to a guy like Manhard, because he understood this. But you'd go to a lot of these people who came out of Europe, they didn't have a clue. And it was very hard to tell them.

Out of all this, we were trying to protect ourselves. So I was getting information from talking to various people (it was so long ago, I don't remember who). But I was getting a good deal of information on Rhee, because he was mad at the embassy. He was mad at Muccio because he thought Muccio was screwing him back here. Muccio was not but he wasn't willing to accept that; at least that wasn't what he was hearing. He was going after Muccio and going after us; I was collecting all the data I could on that. And it was all sensitive, because we're talking about American politics, and money going to American politicians, and who and what and when.

When I got it all together, there was a chief of political section there, named Rolland Bushner, and he and I got along great, because I'd pointed out to Rolland that... in his political section, for my money, was... because my function was basically the biographic function and to get all this data on people together and to find out what was happening and to also liaise with the intelligence organizations that were there, for the embassy, like INR does it back here. I'd go to the CIC chief and talk to him, get their stuff, and they'd send stuff over, and the military intelligence people, and the CIA had a big station there, and they'd send stuff over, and NSA people would come in with their little satchel. It was ASA in those days, but still war period.

Anyway, out of all this, we got to know an awful lot about what was happening. And if you knew who you were talking to and could sort of cull this information, cull the good from the bad, you could come up with a reasonable picture.

But just at this point, we got a new DCM and ambassador. He took a dislike, immediately, to the chief of the political section, Bushner. Bushner could feel it, and so could I. He didn't take a dislike to me, but he took a dislike to Bushner.

Q: The new ambassador was Ellis O. Briggs.

THOMAS: Yes, and the new DCM was Niles Bond. Briggs seemed to like me, but it was still too early to know. But we could feel that we were going to get a new political chief, even though Bushner hadn't been there that long.

So I said to Bushner, "What are we going to do with all this information?"

He said, "You know we're not going to get it by Briggs. He's not going to want to put all this stuff down and send it in. But you know you've got the right, as biographic officer, to send biographic reports. And nobody even bothers to read them."

So we sat down and put all this data in a biographic format, using the names of people. But it was really what was going on there, including who was buying whom and where the money was going and all this. An update on Rhee, an update on this guy, anybody who was involved, in a batch of these biographic reports. We got it all typed up, and I made up an INR pouch, directly to INR, for this stuff. Didn't even take it to the ambassador--it's just biographic reports. And we shipped it all out. Didn't say a word.

Within two weeks of getting it all out of there, Bushner was out of there himself. As we were going to the airport, he was dictating to me the last of this stuff that he knew, so I could use it later.

Anyway, it got to Washington. And Bushner, in the meantime, who was better known (because this was my first post and I didn't know my way around Washington, to speak of), wrote somebody in the Department that he knew, saying, "Go over and get your hands on those bio reports at INR." Well, they went over to INR, which I think was in Annex I, that brick building on the corner there, and got in. The reports were Top Secret, but they got to them. Well, here all this data was. It told exactly how they were going after Muccio, etc., and this stuff was put away. This will come up later in my story. That's the reason I tell it, because it helped save an ambassador's career later.

Anyway, they kept going after Muccio, and they were after Lightner. But, a guy like Rhee, didn't know who we were; we were just little lieutenants. But the whole system was against him.

In the end, Lee Bum Suk, using strong arm methods, was able to bully the National Assembly into changing the constitution. And Rhee got reelected president.

But in that election, a popular election, a man named Cho Pong-am had the audacity to run against him. Cho Pong- am had been a real patriot. He'd joined the Communist Party and then left the Communist Party. But all during the ''30s he was thrown in jail, beaten, starved, tortured by the Japanese. He was Rhee's first appointed minister of agriculture, and got himself fired for trying to look after the agricultural interests of the poor farmer. Of course, they were out to rob the farmer of everything they could; he fought them, so they ended up getting rid of him.

CHO Pong-am comes along in my story later. I didn't get to know him at this point. I got to meet him, but I didn't get to know him. We met and talked, as diplomats talked to people at parties. I can still remember the first party where I met him, an UNCURK party. But it wasn't until a few years later that I got to be his friend although we were acquaintances; he knew who I was, and I knew who he was. That was in the summer of 1952.

Q: Nineteen fifty-two was the election of Rhee?

THOMAS: Reelection. You see, he'd been elected by the National Assembly in '48.

Q: Did you get any feel for how Ellis Briggs felt about Rhee?

THOMAS: Ellis Briggs and I got to be friends. Very few Foreign Service officers know how to shoot a gun; I was brought up around a cavalry post, so I could hunt. And Ellis was a great hunter. He had expensive shotguns and he liked to hunt. When I hunted with him, I had to dress like a gentleman, not like a... you know. Anyway, I arranged for hunts for him. He had a daughter and a wife who came out there. I think his daughter was sort of interested in me, and the Briggs family liked me. So I was a favored fellow there with Briggs. I found his daughter charming, but she didn't turn on my chemistry, so I wasn't going to get involved. I'd take her out to parties and that type thing. He liked to drink martinis. He'd been in Czechoslovakia, and he didn't believe in big embassies; he disliked them. When he first got there, he announced that although he couldn't cut the embassy , he was going to cut it his way. In other words, he would create a circle of people, and the rest of the place could just float. I was one of the favored few in that circle. Our staff meetings were usually held at the residence. It was in Pusan; he moved to Seoul before I did. He made me the political representative for our government, in Pusan, and gave me his house and his chauffeured car. I was living pretty high on the hog. I had this big place that was an embassy residence in Pusan for a few months, while he was in Seoul. All the official guests had to come through Pusan to get to Seoul. I can remember I had Bill Bullitt as a guest. Do you remember Bullitt?

Q: Yes, William C. Bullitt.

THOMAS: He came through. I can still remember him. The first evening he was there, I had a dinner for him and he asked me my background. I told him, and you've heard it all. He said, "What are you doing in the Foreign Service? You have no money. To be a Foreign Service officer, you've got to have some money. You don't belong in this business." Well, he took off one night and went to Seoul on a train. When he came back, he became ill with the flu. I ended up having him for a week. By the end of the week, he decided I was all right, but he was a bit of a snob.

Another such guest was Mrs. Robert Low Bacon, whose house is now the home of DACOR. She was a lot of fun and saved a fancy table cloth, which had been used at the dinner in her honor. Some red wine was spilled on it. She went to the rescue with the salt shaker- she emptied it on to the stain so that it couldn't set and be permanent. Later in the States, she had me to a small luncheon in honor of Eisenhower's chief of staff who got in trouble over the fur coat. She proposed I join the Cosmos Club and lined up a invitation to join but I wasn't a joiner. She was called the Perle Mesta of the Republican Party.

Q: Bullitt also became sort of the darling of the right wing. In fact, I've heard it said that if MacArthur had been elected president, Bullitt would have been his secretary of state.

THOMAS: I believe that.

Q: Did you get any feel about how Bullitt looked at Rhee and the situation in Korea?

THOMAS: Oh, they were all pro Rhee. By then, the Republicans were in; the Eisenhower crowd had taken over. We'd had G. David Schine and Roy Cohn come through. And, boy, did that sicken me.

Q: Can we talk about that a little?

THOMAS: Sure. When they came through, I can still remember Lightner calling me. It was Sunday. By then, something had happened and I'd moved out to a place called Hialeah Compound. We were still in Pusan, Briggs hadn't arrived yet, and Lightner was still chargé. This whole thing was on against homosexuals and corruption in the system, but basically it was big on "going after"individuals. I got this call asking me and the consul, Charlie Borell to come in and could the consul come in (the consul and I lived in the same house) for an emergency staff meeting at the embassy. Charlie Borell was well connected. He was the consul, but his brother had been best man at one of the Rockefeller's weddings, and another one of his brothers had been chairman of General Motors. So Charlie was sort of the little guy with a family that had a lot of power. Anyway, it was Charlie and me. The security officer didn't live out there with us, but I remember he was there. The political chief was there and the economic chief. I don't think they had anybody else, because it was a meeting to talk about what these guys were supposedly interested in. Well, I just wished I'd had a tape recorder.

Q: We're talking about Cohn and Schine.

THOMAS: Yes, at this meeting, these guys sat there and told stories that just sickened you. I can't remember them now, but they were so sickening, I said, "Oh, for a tape recorder." And these guys are investigating us!

Q: You mean Cohn and Schine were telling stories.

THOMAS: About what had happened in their previous posts. And everybody was running scared. They were being given VIP treatment.

Q: These were...

THOMAS: Two young guys.

Q: Two young guys who were rampant homosexuals themselves.

THOMAS: But I didn't know this at the time.

Q: But looking at the accounts afterwards.

THOMAS: Oh, for sure!

Q: But running basically out of McCarthy things.

THOMAS: That's right.

Q: Roy Cohn became sort of a cult figure for being the sickest of the sick as far as an evil lawyer. ... died of AIDS. And Cohn died early, too.

THOMAS: Yes, that's what I felt, listening to these guys. I'd hear these terrible men. And we looked at each other, but nobody was going to say anything, because we knew these men were there to play hatchet jobs, so we just listened.

Q: They were enjoying the power of what they had done.

(In retrospect, the policies concerning homosexuals adopted by the administration were terrible. Many fine and capable people were ruined by those policies. Over the years, I learned of several persons, whom I had known, who were forced out of the Foreign Service because they were considered a security risk. The worst security risk I had observed was Gordon Strong who drank too much and told all to his Korean mistress while in bed with her. Because I didn't procure prostitutes along with the other young men then in Korea, I was placed under surveillance by the embassy security office. When I realized what was up, I invited a young pretty Korean girl to my home one evening. I kept her there late looking at slides and then spirited her out of my house in a suspicious manner. The surveillance of course was meant to see it all. They did and I was not bothered further. Years later, after our marriage, that same security officer and his wife came to dinner at our home. After dinner, when we were alone, I kidded him about his false suspicions.)

THOMAS: Their power. And all I hoped for was a tape recorder.

A story I forget to tell you in terms of this, because of what was happening, is the corruption had gotten worse. At this time we were negotiating an economic agreement. I was not a person who really took much interest in the economic agreements; I had my hands full doing what my job was. But I did know that there was a lot of hanky panky going on in it. I got word that there was going to be a sellout of American interests at a meeting, a clandestine meeting, off the record. And this came from some Koreans I had talked to. I mentioned it to Lightner, and he said, "If you can find out more, do so." Well, I found out when and where this off the record meeting was to take place. This retired American admiral, who had been sent out from Washington to negotiate this agreement, turned out to be a very corrupt guy, one of those right-wing types. The details are lost from my memory at this point. I'd gotten this from Koreans that he was going to sell out the American side, and there was real, personal corruption involved. This clandestine meeting was between him and a man named Paek Tu-chin who was at the time the finance minister. He had been stealing us blind. It involved the American AID program.

The only American present would be the admiral, but there would be some other people there, because this admiral didn't speak Korean.

Somehow or the other, somebody there had been able to get the use (and this was very strange) of the kitchen of the U.N. mess hall in Hialeah compound. Around a big working kitchen table, on a night that the kitchen was empty and there were no cooks there. It was a summer evening, not cold or rainy, and they had these steel windows that opened up. I went and planted myself outside the windows of that kitchen. I lived a block away. I sat there on a little stool. It was dark and nobody could see me, and I could hear what was going on inside. Once again, I said, "Oh, for a tape recorder here." In those days, you didn't have something like this, you had these big things, you had to have a power source; so no way.

The day after hearing all this and taking a few notes, I went in to talk to Lightner. And he said, "Well, it's your word against his, and you know where this is going to go. If we try to say this, why, it's going to cause all hell a poppin' and what have we proved." It was terribly corrupt, and there was nothing I could do. I was there alone; it was my word against this man's word.

Out of that experience, Lightner decided that since I was learning things and keeping him informed, I would handle any of the hot items that came along. I remember one item came along that Lightner asked me to take care of, and I said, "Well, why don't you ask the security chief to do this?"

He said, "Because the security chief has got a problem of his own." Which I didn't know. The security chief was a bachelor and was womanizing in a big way.

Anyway, it turned out that the Defense Department came to the embassy for support; a cable that went directly to him which he showed me, asked the embassy to look into what was wrong with the American Military Police unit in Pusan. They thought something was wrong there, but they had to have outside opinion. They gave some clues. They said they knew some of these people were involved with an American there who was in the foreign-trading business, who had a big house there and a yacht. And they gave his name and who he was.

I started moseying around; I got in with the crowd and got to know him. and was invited to his house. There were girlie parties pretty much every evening there. And here was the whole Military Police unit, of all levels and ranks, at these girlie parties, at this man's house; it went on constantly. It was a bit like a nightclub, really. He was smuggling all types of stuff in and out of Korea.

I wrote up my report about what I'd found and who was at these parties. I said, "I can't prove anything, but it would indicate that he's got them all bought off with booze and women."

The embassy suddenly got a cable, a couple of weeks later, asking me to arrange for embassy trucks (we had a whole fleet of trucks there of our own) to be at this military airport outside of Pusan. To tell no one, but to be there with this many trucks. I got out there, and off these military aircraft came a whole company of MPs, including their commanding officer. I was in a staff car, and the company commander got in with me and said, "Take me to the MP headquarters. We're going to arrest everybody right now, on the spot!" They turned the place over, and that whole MP unit went out on the same planes, that same day. It was the fastest thing I ever saw.

Q: Well, back to Cohn and Schine. Besides hearing these two young twerps talking about their escapades, did they come around? Did we have a reading room or anything like that?

THOMAS: No, they didn't want to read anything. They didn't want to look at any files. They just wanted to sit around and shoot the bull for a couple of hours, and then they were on their way. A complete waste of time.

Q: Were you there when Rhee released the prisoners?

THOMAS: Oh, yes.

Q: How did that impact on the embassy? Because this was a major move.

THOMAS: All right. I was in my office the morning that happened.

Q: This was around the summer of '52.

THOMAS: In the summer of '52. I was in my office one morning, and it hadn't happened yet. The military attaché for Korea was a colonel named Anderson, a very fine man. I liked Anderson and I'd developed a good relationship with him. I'd obtained his permission to photograph his military biographic files for the embassy's biographic files, so we'd have a set down there. I'd come to know him when I'd go up to Taegu, because his offices were not in Pusan but in Taegu. He would come down to visit regularly. He had a light plane that could take him in and out, so he could get around. I had been out the night before and had talked to some people I knew and had been told that this was going to happen. I was weighing what letting these prisoners loose was going to do, what the significance of this was.

To understand the total background, right before this happened, which tipped off some of us that something was going on, Rhee created a new command (The Provost Marshal General Command) outside the regular command which was under the U.N. commander, an American general, which meant that every military unit in Korea, including the ROK Army's Military Police (ROK Army MP's guarded all prisoner of war camps), was under his command. So then Rhee decided to create a new command, outside of the U.N. command, which was a political command responsible only to him. He appointed a man,

a lieutenant general, Won Yong-dok, who was a physician by training, to be the commander of this national provost marshal general command, which was completely separate from the ROK (Republic of Korea) army. Suddenly, with a stroke of the pen, Rhee, on one day, announced he'd transferred all military police units in the ROK army to the new provost marshal general command.

A big fight occurred; you can't do that; we need the military police. They were fighting over this issue.

What he was doing was giving cover to his ROK Army MP officers, who'd be taking orders from General WON.

When this happened, some of my Korean friends who were involved in all this said, "This is a way of getting the military police out from under the U.S. command so that when they get their orders to let the prisoners go, they'll get them from General Won Yong-tok, who is only responsible to Rhee. Then, when it's all over, they'll transfer the military police back. But it gets this little dirty deed done, and everybody's home free."

I listened to all this and thought; this is a very interesting little maneuver that's going on. It was early in the morning, (ambassadors didn't come in until later) and in walked Anderson into my office. My office was on the same floor as the ambassador's, but down the hall. He said, "Have you heard anything about this letting prisoners loose?"

I said, "Yes, I was told that last night."

I told him my story, and he told me his -- the stories coincided. I said, "Let's see if the ambassador's in."

We called his secretary. "Yes, he just got in."

We went down to see him, and he said, "Have you gentlemen put anything out on this? Have you written a cable yet?"

I said, "I haven't had time, sir. I'm telling you now because Colonel Anderson came in. I was going to write a cable for you."

He said, "This is one of those things I would like to handle myself if you two gentlemen don't mind."

Anderson said, "No, we don't mind. You're the ambassador."

We went on our way. We figured he'd probably report it, by his own closely held channel.

Suddenly, the prisoners were loose, and Washington went wild. I ran into the ambassador that morning, and he winked at me and said, "Oh, the Communists aren't going to do a

damned thing. You watch." He knew what he was doing. In other words, we knew, but he sat on it. Brigg's analysis was right. Rhee's move got those prisoners free and it solved the problem. Briggs said that communists will threaten, but they're not going to block this peace agreement, and they didn't. But Washington was all upset.

Q: I might add, for the researcher, that we had North Korean prisoners of war. And there would been tremendous, excruciating negotiations going on at P'anmunjom over how to separate the ones who wanted to come back from the ones... And Rhee just opened up the gates, and almost all of them ended up staying in the south. It was a fait accompli, but it was felt at the time that it would blow the whole peace thing.

THOMAS: That's right. And, of course, there was a man named Kenneth Young out there, who was later an ambassador someplace else. He was deputy to the fellow, I think named Arthur Dean who was sent there as the negotiating ambassador for the U.N.

Q: The negotiating man, I think, at one time, was Turner Joy.

THOMAS: Oh, yes, he was a military type, but there was also a State-appointed officer. Anyway, Young was his deputy, and they were there to negotiate in terms of this. Young was so mad, he said to me, "You know, I've got a good mind to go out to JACK and see if they can do something about..." JACK was the "Joint Advisory Commission Korea". That was the CIA unit there. He said to me, "Do you know anything about JACK?"

I said, "I know some of their people, because they bring intelligence into the embassy. But most of their interest is in North Korea." They had a policy where their people served six months and depart. So, people rotating through every six months, what the hell. They were just buying information. They didn't know what they were buying.

He said, "I'd like to see them get rid of Won Yong-tok." Because Won Yong-tok had done this deed. "See if we can have them blow Won Yong-tok away."

I said, "That's crazy. Won Yong-tok is not a sadist. He did what he was ordered to do. The guy that did this was President Rhee. So quit blaming the action agents."

Q: Did you get any feel, as things developed, how Ellis Briggs felt about Rhee and the political situation?

THOMAS: First of all, he told me some war stories about his career, being sent off to China and his fight with the Rockefellers. He said to me, "You've been here a long time, relative to most people. You know all these..." Because I knew a lot of names. I mean, when you deal with biographic, you're meeting a lot of people. He said, "You know that we cannot, as a political section, do what was done under Lightner. But we can do some things. I think the first thing I'd like is for you personally to get to know this man Cho Pong-am."

I said, "Well, that's going to cost some money. I've never spent any entertainment allowance. You haven't given me any. I spend my own money. Do you know what a kisang party costs in this country?

Q: Kisang is equivalent to a geisha party.

THOMAS: That's right. He said, "No, but you go find out."

I asked an interpreter who worked for me, to find out what a kisang party in Seoul would cost.

He came back with the word, "Two or three hundred dollars," which was pretty big money. I went to Briggs and said, "Can we afford two or three hundred dollars?"

He said, "Yes, I'll get you two or three hundred dollars. You just set yourself up a kisang party; I want you to get to know this Cho Pong-am who ran against Rhee".

I was still living in Pusan at the time.

Q: This would be late '52ish?

THOMAS: Late '52ish. So Mr. Shin and I went to this kisang party at a small kisang house in Seoul. Present were Cho Pong-am and maybe two other people, friends of his that he brought along. We just had a good drinking evening. Cho Pong-am was a heavy drinker, and he could hold his liquor well. He had a great sense of humor, was bright, and had courage galore. We talked about his career; it was just a get-to-know-each-other evening.

I went back and told Briggs what I thought of the man, and wrote up some stuff for his biographic file, which is, I'm sure, in files now. I said, "Well, I'm going to try to do what we can to make sure he doesn't get into any trouble."

Every time something would go wrong, I would go to the head of the USIS, and I'd tell him the ambassador was interested. I'd say, "I want you to interview this man on Voice of America." Nowadays we don't have Voice of America there any longer. So I'd get Cho interviewed. Then they'd back off. Soon the then chief of police, Cho Chi-hwan, apologized for suspecting me of tipping Cho off that they planned to arrest him; he had learned that it had been one of his drivers - well I had also been guilty. This was years later, after Briggs left there. But I kept this up for many years, looking after him. I'd see Cho on occasion; he'd see me, but not too often. He'd keep me informed of what he was doing.

I wrote a response to a questionnaire from a Korean magazine named "MAL"(which means language) of which I can furnish a copy to you. This monthly political journal in Korea, two years ago, asked me if I would be willing to be interviewed. I said, "Yes, on

paper. I want to see the questions on paper and answer them on paper." It all had to do with my relationship with Cho Pong-am. I answered the questions in English. I had been reasonably fluent in Korean, but I've forgotten it all. I can't remember any Korean now. I remember Chinese now, but not Korean. Anyway, I shipped it out there; some pictures they wanted, and they published an article all about my, and some other people's involvement with Cho Pong-am. It took a while before FBIS got around to translating it. It was sent to me a year later. Of course, I read it. They made a few mistakes in what I'd said. They kept calling me an intelligence officer rather than a political officer. They wanted to make my relationship with Cho appear to be a clandestine one. (It sells magazines!) I wasn't so worried about that as I was worried about the fact that they indicated in the article that my analysis of U.S. policy was in error as to American interest in Korean unification. During that period (1958-59) I had indicated in my response to their questions that American policy interests were not focused on Korean unification. Since I was the closest person in the American government to Cho Pong-am and had known about his interest in the reunification of Korea. They quoted other Korean sources whose stories contradicted mine. According to this source, named in the article he and Cho had met with Political Counselor Phillip Habib at the Ambassador's residence and discussed the unification issue. I later sent them proof of the fact that Habib did not arrive in Korea until two years after Cho's execution.

Another thing, Briggs also told me, "You run the embassy's limited involvement in the Korean domestic political situation. Just keep me out of trouble. I'm going to keep the political section busy on Japan relations, North Korea's problems, and the international problems. But I'm going to keep all these other political officers out of the domestic scene, because it'll just get me in trouble with all those right wingers like Walter Robertson back in the Department."

I said, "Okay. I'm going to do everything I can to ameliorate what Rhee is doing here."

It came time to elect a chairman of the National Assembly. The chairman was third in line to take over the presidency in that country, after the vice president.

Lee Bum Suk, I always felt, was on CIA's payroll, but I can't prove that. He'd had this long-term connection with OSS, and he ran this bully-boy youth group (Northwest Youth Corps), he had been a general, and the first Minister of Defense in first Rhee government. I always had a suspicion that U.S. intelligence was behind him. After he'd helped save Rhee, because he'd been the hatchet man in the 1952 political crisis, he was running to be the chairman of the National Assembly. The assemblymen had to vote, and it looked like he was going to win it because he had Rhee's anointment and all that stuff.

There was another man there named Yi Ki-pung. He was Western educated, he had a Western-educated wife, and he was a Christian. He was a nice man, a decent man. He had been in the National Assembly, and he had been part of Rhee's entourage. But he was one of the moderates in Rhee's entourage. So I decided that he was a better choice for the

American government than this Lee Bum Suk, even though I was up against maybe other aspects of the American government.

The night before the election was to go off in the National Assembly (I by then had moved to Seoul and was living in the smallest house in Compound I; the DCM lived in that compound), I held a cocktail party, and Yi Ki-pung was the guest of honor. I invited all the power brokers from the National Assembly to that cocktail party that evening, and I flattered Yi Ki-pung. The ambassador dropped over for a few minutes, from his residence, to the party. The next day, Yi Ki-pung was elected chairman of the National Assembly.

Yes, we were involved. But it was low key, not in a way that you could get in trouble in Washington, and Rhee couldn't accuse us of going after him.

Q: So the whole time you were there in this '52 to '58 period, there was a looking over one's shoulder at Washington, with Walter Robertson and his support, which came from the right wing of the Republican Party.

I'm just looking at the time. I think we'd better quit at this point.

Q: Today is April 3, 1995. Fred, you mentioned that you talked to somebody I referred to you, about Korea, and that his questions brought up some things that you hadn't mentioned. We can meld this all together at some later date, but do you want to mention what you talked about?

THOMAS: Oh, yes. First of all, he got off on the war and what I might know about prisoners and who I knew in the way of people who might be able to tell him. Then he got to talking about people he'd already talked to who'd been there at the time, including a man named John Hart, who claimed he'd been chief of station there, over a 500-man CIA station. When he brought it up, I remembered John Hart. Hart had brought up a man named Haney, who had been his predecessor. And Hart had said to this guy that Haney had been more or less pushed out of there for being ineffective. I said, "Well, I can understand that."(Hart was a breath of understated competence after the colorful hyperbole prone Al Haney) That brought back an incident of importance in terms of the history at that period. I didn't know Haney until this event occurred, but I got to know him out of it because there was so much noise made.

The embassy got a lot of intelligence from the CIA and from the MI units and from U.S. Army CIC.

Q: Your talking about what period?

THOMAS: The summer of '52.

Q: So the CIA was a fairly new organization at that time.

THOMAS: The people they had there were on six-month rotations. This chief they talked about, Haney, whom I met later, was a big, affable Irishman who tended to be an exaggerator, and I never took him too seriously. He always bragged about how many agents he had. But I knew, from looking at reports, that he'd bought into what I call the professional intelligence network that had been there for years, and he was paying people who were either controlled by Rhee or controlled by the other side. There was a lot of that with intelligence, and you had to know it. But you still had to get along with those people, because if they had something you were interested in, you didn't want to make enemies of them.

It was mid-summer 1952 when we got a report in the embassy, from three different intelligence units, talking about a possible coup d'état, top secret. These reports all read about the same. You'd have thought they'd come out of the same printing mill. But they came from, supposedly, three different agencies, with different sources.

The majority of the political people there at the time were new, but Lightner wasn't new, and I'd been there and knew what the score was. But Lightner, who was DCM and chargé, wasn't sure of me, because I was new, as far as he was concerned.

This whole situation, I think, solidified my position with Lightner. This report had come in, and we'd all seen it. They used to bring all these things to my office, because I was the INR guy, as the biographic officer, and had the responsibility of liaison with the various intelligence units there; then it was distributed throughout the embassy. I got to know all these people who would come in with these reports. Generally, they weren't high-level people, they were liaison people. I never commented on this stuff, because it was better not to, even though you thought it was crap.

Lightner read this report. We hadn't discussed this. He read it and I read it, separately. I looked at this thing and I thought, "Jesus, this is baloney. This is a feed." But I didn't make any more noise about it than that, and Lightner didn't either.

Major General Herron had just taken over what was known as KCOMZ, the communications zone for the rear area in Korea; he, of course, was very interested in this report. He was an old friend of my Dad's. I didn't know him, but he'd heard about me through the Army grapevine, that I was out there and knew something about Korean politics.

He came in to call on Lightner, as a courtesy call to get to know the chargé; at the same time, he brought up that he had read this report and was worried about it. He knew that there was a man named Fred Thomas on Lightner's staff who had been in Korea and knew something about Korean politics. Would he mind if Fred Thomas wrote him a memo giving his views on this report?

Lightner sent for me, and in front of Lightner, because we'd never discussed it, the general said, "What do you think of it?"

I said, "I think it's a feed."

Lightner had the same opinion, which I didn't realize.

Then the general said, "Would you mind if I have young Fred here write me a letter, telling me why and detailing all this, so I can study it?"

Lightner said, "No. You go do that."

I wrote the letter and sent a copy to Lightner first. It went off, under my signature, to General Herron, explaining why this report was full of crap.

Remember, I talked, the last time we talked, about a man named Lee Bum Suk?

Q: Yes.

THOMAS: Lee Bum Suk was the at the center of this. In other words, he was one of the coup plotters. Remember the British guy who took Lee Bum Suk's job as Minister of Defense, named Shin Song-mo? They had the two of them in bed together. When you start plotting a coup d'état in a place like Korea, you don't get two enemies together plotting a coup. There's just no way. This was the fundamental flaw in the report.

This was all explained in detail, with a lot of stuff at the time that we knew and which I can't remember at this point. Anyway, I sent it off to General Herron.

Suddenly, the whole balloon burst, because the liaison guys from these three intelligence units started coming into my office and giving me a hard time because their bosses were madder than hell, because Herron had brought and showed this letter to their bosses, with my saying their stuff was full of crap. We had a little problem from then on with some of these people until they left. Of course, Haney was one of these people. I met him later at a social reception, and he jumped all over me about saying his report was full of it. It turned out it was just that way, nothing but feed. But it did worry the devil out of the military command there.

Q: Of course, it did.

THOMAS: That was one story, but another story had to do with the reporting going on in the press at the time in the States. It was a real education for me, being a young Foreign Service officer, because I didn't really understand how badly the American press at that time was biased; in the way the publisher wanted it to be biased.

There were two reporters there from TIME, a fellow named Jim Greenfield and a fellow named Dwight Martin. They came in to call on Lightner and said they were to write a full story on President Rhee for a cover issue, which was going to have Rhee's picture on the cover of TIME Magazine. Lightner called me in and said I could give these gentlemen access to Rhee's file. I looked at Lightner and said, "There's an awful lot of very classified stuff in that file."

He said, "It doesn't matter. You can give them access."

I said, "Yes, sir," and took them back to my office and gave them a desk over in a corner. The two of them sat at one desk across from each other; I handed out the dossiers on Rhee. They spent maybe a week there going through this stuff. Then they went off on their own and came back about a week later with a draft dispatch to go to TIME; they asked me to go over it for facts. I went over it and made a few corrections , and it went off.

When this article came out in TIME Magazine, it was 180 degrees out of phase from anything they had in that draft article. If Time-Life kept copies of drafts that were sent back and didn't destroy them, it might be worthwhile for a scholar to go in and look at their draft, because they had access to everything we had at the time, and it was a very good article as originally written.

Now the last story was a humorous story. Phil Manhard and I had become good friends. He was a sophisticated fellow among the people in the political section at the time. But they split everybody up, and we lived all over the place. I lived out next to the general in command of the port, on what had been a base that the embassy had owned called Hialeah Compound. We had two houses out there housing embassy people, and I lived in one of them. The way everybody lived, you had a bedroom and you shared a house with other people. I shared the house with the consul, Charlie Borell.

Q: I worked for Charlie. He was one of my first bosses, in Frankfurt.

THOMAS: Is that right? Oh, he was quite a character. There's a funny story about Borell I'll tell you on the side sometime. We got Charlie drunk one night, and I had a tape recorder going in the house.

Because of location, to go back home for lunch, because my place was pretty far out of town, was inconvenient, yet a lot of people did. It was a Saturday, and on Saturdays, we came informally to the embassy, usually in the morning. The political crisis of 1952 had just ended, and everything was still very touchy. We'd all worked long hours, and Lightner decided to have a party. He lived in the residence. He and the ambassador shared the residence up on the mountainside; it was a very nice place. That morning, he turned to me and said, "Oh, Fred, I'm having a little fun party at my place, starting this afternoon about two. Why don't you drop by?"

It was to be drinks and dancing and women. He was a bachelor. We were mostly bachelors at the time. So I said, "Sure."

In the meantime, though, I always had a standing invitation to have lunch with Manhard on Saturdays at his place, which was not very far from the embassy. He shared it with two or three other officers. One of them was a junior officer in the economics section, just arrived, fresh out of Yale. He was like a brand-new second lieutenant who was sort of naive but nice. Dull bright, extremely academic bright, you know the type. Manhard treated him like you would a shavetail. Manhard would call him, "Bache". Anyway, we were sitting there having a drink before lunch at Manhard's place that same Saturday, and I said, "I'll see you this afternoon up at Lightner's place."

He said, "What's going on at Lightner's?"

I told him, "A party".

He said, "That son of a bitch didn't invite me."

I said, "I'm sure he just forgot it, an oversight, Phil."

He said, "I'll fix him."

At this point, Bache walks in from off the street, coming home.

He said, "Bache, come here! Bache, Mr. Lightner is having a party this afternoon at his house. He's asked me to ask you to bring your cello and your girlfriend. (Bache had a girlfriend who played the piano, and he played the classical cello.) at five o'clock this evening, and play the cello for the guests at the residence."

I listened to this and I didn't say a word, I just grinned. Manhard said, "You watch."

So that afternoon, I was at the party. There was a good-looking lady there who looked something like one of the characters out of "Terry and the Pirates," the Dragon Lady, a beautiful Chinese-looking woman, young. She seemed to take a shine to me, and she sort of moved in on me fast when I got to the party. Well, I learned later that this was Lightner's girlfriend!

Anyway, about five that afternoon, in walked Bache with this little Korean girl; she sat down at the piano. The jazz music is out on the terrace, where everybody's dancing and drinking. But he's sitting there in the living room (it's June), by this grand piano, sawing away at the cello for an hour, nobody paying any attention. He got up and left an hour later with his girl.

On Monday morning, at our informal staff meeting after the formal one, in Lightner's office, Manhard walked in, looked at Lightner, and said, "Did you enjoy the cello music? You won't forget to invite me next time."

Q: Well, last time, we had you sort of leaving Korea, and then where did you go?

THOMAS: No, no, I wasn't leaving Korea. We'd just gotten the ambassador there. We'd gotten up to about 1953. By 1954, we had the whole thing going on with the Geneva Conference, if you remember.

Q: Ah, yes, this was really over Vietnam.

THOMAS: But for some reason, and it slips my memory now, they wanted people from Korea who had some experience in that situation to participate in Geneva.

Q: That's where we were talking to the Chinese, for the first time.

THOMAS: Oh, yes, and another funny thing in terms of Manhard at the time. Suddenly, because Manhard was a Marine Reserve officer and they wanted to use him for these talks with the Chinese at P'anmunjom, they called him back to active duty and put his uniform back on. I lived next door to the British MI6 for a while there, and the MI6 guy looked at me and said, "Well, this Manhard, he's more than meets the eye."

I said, "Well, may be, I don't know. But I like him; he's a lot of fun."

Anyway, Manhard, for that reason, got the reputation as being more than met the eye. But Manhard sort of enjoyed that, anyway.

Another problem was that when we had this new political chief, we had Manhard, who could learn anything. He was always on the streets; he made all types of contacts. But he hated to sit down in front of the typewriter. We also had another fellow there, named Walter Drew. Walter was an academic sort of fellow, who read the newspapers, never left the office, and turned out volumes of stuff to go back to the Department, which was a regurgitation of what was in the translation of the press. Which was sort of worthless; you could get that out of Washington. So I made a comment to Bushner, who was then chief of political... because we got to know each other socially, and we were dating two girls and showing up at things together. He said, "You know, that Manhard, you like him, but he doesn't write anything."

And I said, "He doesn't write anything, but he learns everything. And look at Drew, he writes everything, but it's worthless. The trick is to get Manhard to tell Drew what he's learning, and get Drew to write it up. And then you might, you know..."

So that's what happened. I can still remember being in Bushner's office when Drew came in with his first dispatch going out that he'd learned from Manhard, but his name only was

on the bottom. With this, Bushner called both of them in, and he said to Drew, "Did you learn this someplace?" (He knew where he learned it.)

Drew said, "I learned it from Manhard."

Bushner said, "I don't see Manhard's name on here anyplace."

He said, "Well, I wrote it."

Bushner said, "Well, that doesn't matter. You didn't learn it. I want you two to work as a team. And if it's going to be a team, I want both names down there."

From then on, that's the way it worked, and a lot more information got sent to the Department.

Q: The ambassador in '54...

THOMAS: It was still Briggs. A fellow named Lacy didn't get there until after I left. But I knew, from what I was reading when he was due to go there, that he wouldn't last long, because there would been all this rumor that he'd been one of the people that had changed governments in Manila and had been part of that whole intelligence operation there.

Rhee was very suspicious of our intelligence people. And from what we knew in the embassy, at some point along there, because of it all, he'd kicked this whole intelligence station out of Korea. What happened was, Rhee liked to go fishing, and these intelligence people controlled a lot of small islands off the coast, for smuggling and for intelligence purposes. Of course, they were considered sensitive bases; any boats that got too near got fired at. It turned out that Rhee was out there fishing off one of these places where the intelligence (I think it was the CIA) had one of their bases, down off Pusan someplace; he got too close to this island, and people fired on his fishing boat. There was hell to pay, when it was found out who it was. Suddenly, Rhee said, "Get them all out of here!" And so the whole station, I gather, left.

Rhee was always suspicious that we were out to get rid of him. So when this fellow Lacy later arrived, he didn't last long, because that's what Rhee thought we were out to do.

Q: Tell me about Briggs. As he settled into his job, how did he relate to Korea and the Koreans, Rhee and all?

THOMAS: I'm trying to think of the man's name he got in as chief of his political section, Arch Calhoun. There was a man he liked, who was very brilliant. He could dictate a dispatch or cable and not need to edit it. I didn't have that talent.

Anyway, the ambassador told him, "Stay out of Korean domestic politics. We'll only get ourselves in trouble with the Department. Let Fred handle it because he's been here for a

long time. And make sure that anybody who writes anything on domestic politics is cleared by Fred. We're just not going to mess with domestic politics, because there's not too much we can do. We don't particularly like Rhee, but we've got Walter Robertson to deal with back home."

He had them busying themselves with the P'anmunjom talks, what was going on there, what was going on with reference to Korean-Japanese relations, which were terrible and were going to remain terrible, and still to this day, aren't the best. This was due to the history of the relationship between the people of Korea and Japan and what happened there during the occupation. But that's what they busied themselves with. They didn't get involved. I was the one who was involved, what little involvement there was. You could just try to ameliorate the situation.

It was like that story I told you about Yi Ki-pung and how I gave a cocktail party for him and he became the speaker of the National Assembly. He was an attempt to ameliorate the fascist tendencies of the Rhee regime, rather than let Lee Bum Suk, who was a strong-arm type, get that job. But you couldn't really do much more than that.

In retrospect, Briggs was probably the most capable and courageous ambassador I served under in my career; he also was such a good writer that he could sell the most outrageous ideas as being logical.

Q: Did Briggs cotton to Korea and the Koreans at all, or was he more a European hand?

THOMAS: He was more a European hand. Most of the ambassadors we sent there were European hands. (In retrospect, this will always be the case. The politically appointed ambassadors with real clout with the White House serve in the European capitals. They look after the career types who work for them and there are few other places they can serve as important as Asia.) Briggs liked to have his true staff meeting at four or five in the afternoon, over martinis, by the fireplace at home, with a few people that he liked. That was the way the embassy ran. He wanted to cut the hell out of that embassy, but they wouldn't let him. So he just let most of the staff float. He always harked back to his experience in Czechoslovakia, where they kicked everybody out. They forced that embassy down to 15 people; he said it was the most efficient embassy he ever had.

Q: Well, then, okay, we're up in the mid-''50s.

THOMAS: In 1954, Rhee was due to make a presidential visit to this country. My two-year tour was just about up; I was put on a commercial flight going back with Rhee's advanced staff. I got to know them and talked to some of his Western advisors that I didn't know before. It had already been set for me to go into Korean-language school. I left there sometime in July; it's hazy now. Anyway, Rhee was to come about a week later. I went off to Korean-language school; I wasn't there from '54 through '56. That's when Lacy came in and took over from Briggs. Then Lacy got bumped out of there. I think, at

the time I got back there, he was not there, but I don't think the new ambassador had arrived yet, as I remember it.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Korean-language school. Where'd you take it?

THOMAS: Many people had been sent to Yale. FSI didn't really have a full course in those days. They were fiddling around, talking about it. So they decided, because of my military background, to send me to Monterey.

Q: Ah, yes, ALS. I'm an alumnus of it. I took a year's Russian there, back in '51.

THOMAS: Is that right? This was '54, and I can still remember, it was sort of fun. There was one other Foreign Service officer on the post, a guy taking Cantonese, named Ainsworth. I didn't get to know him because our overlap was just a month or so and then he was gone. I was in the Korean department.

The Koreans liked me. I knew how to get along with Koreans. I already knew the drill and had gotten along very well. The Korean teachers and everybody found me very interesting, and I got to know them. The colonel in command of the post put out a post order. It caused me to kid these guys, some of my West Point classmates there who were lieutenants and captains. There was one who was a lieutenant colonel; he had been pushed out before he graduated, for getting married.

Q: For getting married at West Point. You couldn't do that in those days.

THOMAS: In his first class year, he got kicked out of the Academy. So he enlisted in the Army, went through OCS, was commissioned, and was a second lieutenant with a Quartermaster unit in Japan when the Korean War broke out. He went AWOL and joined a regimental combat team in Korea, as an officer, but just joined them on his own, and took command of a platoon, ending up being highly decorated and battlefield promoted up to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Q: Good God.

THOMAS: So here he was, the highest-ranking member of his West Point class. It was a year before my class, I guess.

Q: Your class was what?

THOMAS: Mine was '48 or '49. It was a split class. I think his was maybe '47. Anyway, he was at the language school along with some of the guys that were in my class. I kidded them because they put out a post order giving me the personal rank of full bull.

Q: This was full colonel.

THOMAS: Yes, full colonel, on the post, for social purposes. They had to do this, because the post commander held special "attaché parties" to teach the attachés how to get along at diplomatic functions. As a means of limiting the size of these parties, only full colonels were invited unless an officer of lesser rank already had an assignment as an attaché to a diplomatic mission abroad. They gave me this rank since most attachés were full colonels; they wanted me to go to these parties.

Q: As an example.

THOMAS: I was the one State Department person there.

I spent a full year there and got the rudiments because Korean is a very difficult language.

Q: It's very situational, and it depends on the social rank and male-female. I spent two weeks studying the language while I was in Korea, and once I got a feel for what the problem was, I said, "Screw this."

THOMAS: Oh, it's terrible. They had people trying to commit suicide there, from the pressure. Guys who were honor graduates of the War College were flunking out of language school, because they weren't good at language. The smartest guy in my class, in Korean, was some hillbilly from West Virginia who hadn't finished high school, but he was a natural linguist. He's an interesting story, a Pygmalion story. The Korean teachers, many with advanced college degrees from our best universities, said that when he spoke English they tended to look down on him as being an uneducated hick, but when he spoke Korean, he became an educated Korean because of his spoken command of that language. It led later, after his assignment to Korea, to his marriage to an upper class Korean young woman from a wealthy family.

I guess there must have been 400 people studying Korean in my class, mostly ASA, NSA, and the intelligence people for the...

Teaching language goes through all types of permutations and combinations. At that point, they were teaching it by treating you like a child. They wouldn't tell you anything. You'd learn it like a child learns English. They'd pick up a pencil, and they'd say, "This is a pencil." They'd pick up a pen and say, "This is a pen," in the language. And you were to figure out, from hearing this over and over and over, what was the pen and what was the pencil and what "this is", just from hearing it and doping it out. Well, that's all right, maybe, for kids, but adults just get very frustrated with that approach. It was very frustrating for most of us. And they had all the rooms bugged, so that if a teacher started doing anything different, it was known down in the office and they'd get hell for it. So they had to stick to this routine drill. Then they had a damned military vocabulary you would have to learn; it was crazy because you barely knew how to speak the language.

Q: Take me to your 166th millimeter regiment, that type thing.

THOMAS: You couldn't say toilet yet, and here you were... The craziest damn method... A year of this was very frustrating.

I rented a small cottage in Carmel, which was very nice. I became the darling of what I call the divorcee set. As a single man, I was invited to a lot of parties. It was an interesting year. I got to know some of the arty types around Carmel, and went to the club. Every year the club had a function where each language department was to put up a booth to make money for charity. A major in the Asian Department there was a part-time student, part-time administrator, an official interpreter, and an excellent linguist. He also ran the club. The next morning after this function was over, I said to him, "I didn't see a Korean booth here last night".

He said, "Oh, that's a funny story. It tells the difference between the Koreans, the Chinese, and the Japanese. Yesterday morning, the Chinese arrived early in the morning and started hammering and sawing and putting everything together to build their booth to sell Chinese food. And by six in the evening, when the benefit opened, they were finished. About three in the afternoon, the Japanese arrived; everything precut, bang, bang, bang, it's up, and they're done. About six in the evening, the Korean Department head came in and said, `Where's our booth?' He expected somebody to build it for them."

Anyway, it was an interesting year to be there, with so much going on in Asia at the time, with our first getting involved with Southeast Asia. I felt that there were better ways to learn a language. The teachers were good, but they should have been left alone to teach language rather than the time spent teaching military vocabulary. Korean is such a complex language, but the vocabulary will come if you've got command of the structure and command of the fundamental verbs of the language. That became obvious later, especially when I was learning Chinese. I realized that if you can really handle Chinese fluently, the needed vocabulary is easy to add. The problem is getting the structure down and handling it fluently with ease. Korean is a much harder language to learn to speak than Chinese.

Q: After a year at the language school, where did you go?

THOMAS: I went back to the Department, and there were some arguments over whether I was going to go back to the political or economic section, because some people said, It might be better if he did some economic work for broadening, or some consular work." I didn't want to do consular work. Because I was young, there also was some worry among some of the senior guys that my experience in Korea, combined with my language training might upstage them; I had already made some enemies for these reasons.

Q: I'm sure you had.

THOMAS: Thank God I had an ambassador who appreciated me, but some of the people in between didn't. By the time it was straightened out and the arguments settled, nearly a

year had passed. I was glad to have that time to see my family because my parents were getting older. I left in the late summer of '56.

Q: By that time, peace was...

THOMAS: They were then in the middle of an aid program, big aid programs, and a lot of money being wasted. There were a lot of questions in people's minds about the corruption, tremendous corruption, in Korea. Sort of like you have in China today. An awful lot of stealing. Because Rhee was always balancing forces underneath him, it didn't matter whether you were corrupt. The issue was, if your group got too powerful, he'd put another group in. When you're playing that balancing act, you've got to put up with a lot of bad apples. And he had lots of them.

There's one other story that I think should be told because it has to do with that corruption problem. Just after Briggs arrived, this was the late summer of '52, Strong was the economic chief, the fellow who used to get drunk and tell everything to his mistress; shortly thereafter a man named Sydney Mellen, who was a very nice man, arrived to head the economic section. His wife was Italian, and he was a European diplomat, very sophisticated, very charming, but he really wasn't used to dealing with Asian subterfuge (although I felt, after Italy, he should have had some knack).

Anyway, he was at a staff meeting, where he told the brand new ambassador that the Koreans had managed a recent currency exchange, that is currency reform, beautifully, and it was a massive success.

What it amounted to was that on one day they suddenly announced that you had 24 hours to turn in all your currency and get new currency. You'd get one-for-one up to a certain level, then you'd get...

Q: The currency being the wan.

THOMAS: You'd get less as the amounts went up, so it was a way of contracting the money out there, which would indicate that the rich were going to get hit this way, especially the black marketeers.

So this was "beautifully run." Sydney announced the date the decision was made, the date of the decision, which I didn't know. I hadn't been following economics that much; I was a political officer. The decision had been made three months before, and he gave the exact date that he'd been told by Korean officials.

Q: We're talking about 195...

THOMAS: Two. Had been made several months before. And he gave the exact date that he'd been told by the finance ministry, then. Not at the time, because this was all done,

supposedly, on the q.t. by the Koreans. The exact date of this decision, that is the date it was made.

Mr. Shin, who worked with me, was the top translator/interpreter, the highest-paid Korean on the political section's payroll. I asked Mr. Shin, "Could you locate and a day-to-day listing of the price, on the black market, of gold, diamonds, and dollars for the past four months? If you could do that and get it translated into English for us, that would be great."

Because I had my suspicions, and I wanted date-by-date, from black marketeers. Mr. Shin got it all. The inflation rate on the wan to dollar on the wan to gold was going like this, see.

Q: You're demonstrating a very slow... just basically almost flat.

THOMAS: Flat, but going up slightly, the change in rate of exchange on these items. When you hit the day that this decision was made, that curve goes straight up. I said, "Mr. Shin, can you go to the graphics people in USIS and get this all put on charts for us?"

He did, in English. At the next staff meeting, a week later, I came in and I said to Sydney, "Sydney, I've got something I want to show you and the ambassador because I think you made a comment that the Koreans told you how honestly this currency exchange was carried out, and what a great job they did. Let me show you something." When we got to the conference room, I showed this chart to everybody. It told the whole story. These newcomers needed to understand how Korea worked.

Q: It endeared you, obviously, to Sydney.

THOMAS: Actually, we got along very well.

Q: You mentioned something, and I think it's a part of the thing that's very seldom mentioned. It's always a topic of interest. And let's talk about, in the ''50s, at your embassy, sex at the embassy. Because having served in Saigon, during the ''60s, I see what happened there. What was the situation?

THOMAS: All right. Sex at the embassy. First of all, there was a long period, and it was the period when I first arrived when there were no American women in our embassy. So you had "Rhee's offering", a group called the Nak Nong Club, that was made up of grass widows from the Korean War, younger women whose husbands...

Q: Koreans.

THOMAS: Koreans, who were more or less educated, who knew some English. And they were sicced on the embassy as basically an intelligence operation. So you had a lot of

these Korean women running around, and they were the ones, for instance, at Lightner's party.

Q: Nak Nong means what?

THOMAS: Nak Nong, I think it was the name of a river, the Nak Nong River. But I don't know where they got the name. Manhard and I used to kid about these Mata Hari's from the Nak Nong Club. Well, that was the situation. We had all male clerks in the registry and in the code room. You could never find anything.

Oh, a story that illustrates the Wild West atmosphere that prevailed in an embassy without women; there was a fellow named Doyle Gentry, who was a lot of fun, a file clerk in the code room. Doyle was a big, hulky man. We all carried pistols in those days. He got drunk one night, when he was living in this barracks-like place, which was of Japanese construction. The rats could be heard running across in the overhead between the roof and the ceiling. He was in his bed, drunker than the devil, trying to shoot the rats. He couldn't see them, so he'd shoot at the noise... This held until the women arrived.

At first, there were no wives, only female secretaries and clerks. There was one woman officer, who I started to date. Margaret Booth, Peg ended up marrying Manhard. She's a very nice woman. Peg was personnel officer. Then we had new secretaries in the ambassador's office and in the consulate. There must have been a dozen women who came in, which brightened the place up.

At the same time, there always were some nurses with the U.N. around. And some of the more aggressive fellows that were... I was 25 and I was interested in women, but I wasn't ever the type that would go out and introduce myself on my own, or go try to pick up some girl someplace that I didn't know. That just wasn't my style. I guess I'd been brought up sort of proper, and I just didn't do it that way.

Q: Had the Korean mistress permeated the system, did you think, or not at that time?

THOMAS: We had several people, like Strong, who had a mistress. Most of them, I think, were just one-night stands, that type thing, with most people there. But you've got to remember, the two top officers were bachelors--Lightner and Muccio; they had their Korean girlfriends.

There was another woman officer who arrived there on TDY from Tokyo. She was a reserve officer from the Department, who was very good looking. I dated her, but she later married Muccio. She was a sophisticated looking woman.

It was sort of wild and wooly after the first American women arrived. I can still remember some of the parties were a bit on the... I think there was a lot of... You know, women and men, there's a lot of interest in sex, and things went on. I dated Margaret, but my relationship with her was rather proper. She was a nice person, and I didn't want to get

married. I was the type of guy that believed if you got to fiddling with a woman, you had to... I was old fashioned in the old-fashioned way. Manhard started to date her; they fell in love and were married in Seoul.

I remember some of the girls were, well, rather proper. There was a Jewish girl there who worked as the ambassador's secretary, very bright, and she had a quick, sharp wit, but she could also be nasty at times. She lived in the house behind me, where Peg lived. I was over there all the time, visiting with Peg. One morning I was coming out of my place; I was generally cheerful, and in such a tone offered her a ride, in my jeep station wagon. She was waiting for an embassy car to pick her up, the car hadn't come yet. And so I said, "Do you want to ride with me?"

She said, "What are you so cheerful about?"

I said, "Well, it's a nice day."

She said, "You wouldn't be so goddamned cheerful if you had to sleep alone every night." She was a very rigid girl.

We lived back to back, these two houses. A retired lieutenant general from the British Army lived on one side of me; he headed UNKRA. He was a very nice guy. He liked us and we liked him. And then there was a brigadier general in the American Army who lived cater-cornered from us, who was the Pusan Port commander. He disliked State Department people with a passion; he didn't like having us there in the first place.

The interesting thing was that the entire compound on which we lived was embassy property. It had been in the embassy's hands as a base for storing stuff coming in at the port of Pusan to be shipped to Seoul, Hialeah Compound. With the war on, we'd turned it over to the military to use, but we'd kept control, in the sense that we still had title to it. On that base, we allowed the U.N. UNKRA to build a lot of brand-new housing for its employees who were to be part of their aid mission. Part of the deal was that, for letting them do this, they would let us have two of the houses to live in. We were given houses near the UNKRA-Club (mess hall), the prestige houses right next to the general. I lived in one of these houses.

General Lestayo, who was the port commander, disliked us all, but his colonel, his chief of staff, was friendly with all the girls in the embassy. He would report back to the girls in the embassy what was going on in Lestayo's office. Lestayo was always cussing the embassy people, that they were terrible people, etc. etc. All these young people living like senior officers, etc., etc. He was a character. He was a West Pointer but he'd only made brigadier general; I think he was frustrated and unhappy with his career.

In the summertime, he would have movies in his garden, and the volume was so loud that you couldn't hear yourself think in the neighborhood. He'd invite nobody to come to watch these movies. He'd just be there alone. None of us liked Lestayo. One summer

evening, a whole group of us were drinking at Peg's house. She had a little German-made cap pistol. When fired, wadding would come out of the barrel. It was powerful enough that the wadding could break a champagne glass. I was brought up around the military; I shot pistols and rifles, and I'd hunted. And so here I was, with this pistol that belonged to Peg; We'd had enough to drink, and I was shooting out champagne glasses on the table with this cap pistol. These glasses were cheap to buy at the commissary or the PX; they were Japanese. Anyway, everybody was laughing and having a good time; suddenly a siren went off for an air raid, and all the lights were turned off everywhere. We were waiting around; we went out on the porch of her house. I was firing this pistol in the air, and she said to me, "General Lestayo probably will be raising hell about this, Fred."

I said, "If that son of a bitch comes around here, I'll shoot his ass." It was just a cap pistol.

It turned out he was around the corner, listening to all this. He'd come over there, and he'd heard all this.

He went to the general in charge of the UNKRA (Sir Arthur Rucker, Lt Gen., Ret'd, B.A.). He badgered him because UNKRA owned the houses we lived in; that is, UNKRA was, in his view, our landlord and they should do something about these embassy people who were firing firearms in the compound. It was very dangerous.

Because I lived next door to the general who headed UNKRA, he asked me what all that noise was about. I told him exactly what had happened, that it was a cap pistol. He laughed, and said, "I just got a letter from General Lestayo complaining, wanting me to give you folks hell about all this. I'm going to go back to him and say that's not our business because, although we do own the house temporarily, you own it all as the embassy; therefore, he should deal with you folks."

Then we got feedback from the colonel in his office that Lestayo was madder than hell at this British general for not doing anything and forcing him to write a letter to the embassy.

The letter came to the embassy, complaining. Cassidy, the administrative officer, brought it up to me and said, "Would you answer this in the name of the embassy, for my signature. You know what happened."

So I wrote one of those very serious letters saying, "This is serious. We have investigated, and we feel that, if what you had to say here were true, it would be a very serious situation. However, from our investigation, it's very hard for us to believe that you, a professional military man, cannot tell the difference between a real firearm and a cap pistol."

The feedback from the colonel indicated that the General was livid.

Q: Well, let's go back. You came out of the Army Language School and you had a year in Washington. What were you doing in Washington?

THOMAS: I was assigned to a couple of courses at FSI and writing some reports that had to do with Korea. I took a lot of leave; I must have taken all the leave I had. Then there was serious discussion concerning over where in the embassy I'd be assigned when I went back because I'd made some enemies. But in the end, I went back to the political section.

Q: When was this?

THOMAS: This was the late summer, fall of '56.

Q: In the first place, was the embassy back in Seoul?

THOMAS: Yes. When I went back to Seoul the first time, I was living over in what was called Compound I, in one of the smaller houses over there. When I came back the next time, I shared a house with two other bachelors, on embassy row in Compound II.

Q: That had been an old Japanese...

THOMAS: Banking...

Q: Banking... I lived in Compound II for three years.

THOMAS: Most of the people did. When I first went up there, I think everybody lived in a big house that was sort of treated like a hotel, which had a big garden around it. You had a room in it until they could find a place for you. They had a club there on the premises, an embassy club, and a commissary, with a bar. Even then, the majority of the people in the embassy were single people. As a matter of fact, there are friends in the Foreign Service who say that I taught them how to be a political officer in the '52 to '54 period. Manhard knew how to do things; you didn't have to teach Manhard anything. But you had a lot of people coming in, for whom this was their first or second post; it was their first post in a place like Asia. Roy Haverkamp always says to me, "Well, you taught me how to be a political officer." Do you know Roy?

Q: No, I don't. Where is he?

THOMAS: He's retired here now, but he served in Japan and in Korea. I think he also served in Sweden. His last position before he retired was with Defense in one of these liaison posts with, I think, the Navy. I think for a while he was chargé or maybe number-two man in the Bahamas or one of those places in the Caribbean.

And then there was a fellow named George Barbis who was there at the time, and I sort of helped him learn something about Korea. Then there was O'Mahoney, who was an economic officer. They were all bachelors there with me.

Q: What was the political situation in '56?

THOMAS: Did I tell you the story about the military getting involved with political reporting, and Briggs wanting that straightened out? Within a few weeks of the end of the war, that is summer 1953, Eighth Army G-2 suddenly began to send long political analyses concerning the local scene to Washington. The views expressed were off the wall. Briggs was fit to be tied and so was the Department. He liked the CG Max Taylor but he didn't have too much respect for the military in general. He sent for me and said "Fred you come from a military family; do you think you could do anything to stop this foolishness?" I asked him to loan me his long black limo. He agreed; flags flying I arrived at the "Bunker" at 8th Army Hq. Breezed in, left my calling card and asked for an appointment to see the G-2, a full colonel. By the time I returned to my office in the Embassy the colonel had called and set an appointment for the next morning. The meeting was a real pony show. I was ushered into a large conference room full of mostly Lt. Colonels. The G-2 was a very affable man. In response to my question concerning how they came to the conclusions concerning the local political situation which they were forwarding to Washington, the answer was mind boggling! As the Colonel explained, each intelligence report no matter from which service had a "Grade for example varying from A-1 to F-6". A-1 meant the source was an A source or the finest, and the information being a 1 was solid, no question about it accuracy. These various agencies gave their own reports these grades before they distributed them. Many of these Lt. Colonels were trained in higher math. They used a computer to average these grades on all such reports and come up with an analysis which was therefore "objective". I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I convinced the colonel that he should allow some of his officers responsible for this reporting to join me on a regular basis at my home for dinner when I was entertaining Korean politicians. Within a short period, they were bringing their analyses to me for review before sending them to Washington. From then on we didn't have the same problem with the military. (In retrospect, on reading recent comments in the press about the failures of the intelligence community over the past twenty years and remembering the series of debriefings done by CIA and INR over my own career, it is my conclusion that the "academic" system done here in Washington of arriving at political assessments was and is doomed to failure. One must be there, have command of the language, diplomatic access to the government in question including all aspects of the local political spectrum and have the courage to tell it as it is, not as is wanted, either by powerful special interests here, or the Department which is reflecting the desires of the Establishment. My experiences in both Korea and Pakistan clearly indicate the foundation for my opinion.)

But the Rhee government was constantly shuffling people around, to keep Rhee in power. He was a great revolutionary, but a hell of a poor administrator of a government.

Q: As so often happens.

THOMAS: This resulted in our aid being stolen blind. Really, in big money. Corruption was rampant. Three hundred, four hundred million dollars, back in those days, was pretty big money. That's what we were putting up a year. I remember the figure $360 million, or something like that, a year, in terms of aid.

By then, a new ambassador had arrived, by the name of Dowling. I liked Dowling, but in the end, I didn't get along very well with Mrs. Dowling. I was brought up around the military, and I had a code of ethics, from my father, a cavalry officer, that went, "The horses, the men, and then yourself." You know how administrative officers are, money comes in, and it's supposed to be used, let's say, to upgrade the heating systems in the small houses for the clerks. Get rid of space heaters, which were very dangerous.

Q: You could be asphyxiated.

THOMAS: Asphyxiated, or they could start a fire.

Q: Carbon monoxide and the whole thing. Those were dangerous.

THOMAS: A lot of people were living with space heaters in these little houses in Compound II. As I remember it, there were several issues. First of all, I ended up being elected president of the embassy club, by all the single people. Now you had just enough married people there that they wanted special privileges for themselves; I was the bulwark against being that black and white. But, at that point, in terms of problems, there was money that came in to put steam heat or boilers in, for these smaller houses that all the secretaries lived in, in one section of that compound, Compound II. They were little, teeny houses. It was spent instead to put in a greenhouse or something like that, or a solarium, for Madam Ambassador. I got wind of this, and I started raising hell, "This is wrong." Well, she got wind of my raising hell about it all because I went to the administrative officer and said, "This is wrong. This should not be." The word got back; it didn't make me too popular with her. The ambassador had not been involved in all this. She'd been the one who pressured or pushed for this; the administrative officer, instead of telling her this money was for something else, just did it. It also didn't make me very popular with the administrative officer.

But you had that type situation; you had a lot of corruption. You had the U.N. using our club, and the Turks, including the Turkish ambassador, who were selling stuff out of the club to beat hell. I went to our ambassador, Dowling, about it, and Dowling said, "Well, cut him off." So I cut him off. He went to the ambassador about not being allowed to shop at our club, and the ambassador said, "The president of the club cut you off for reasons, I understand."

He said, "Yes."

He said, "I can't change that. He's in charge of the club. I can't do anything about that."

And that ended it.

But you had a lot of that going on.

I remember one of the first things that happened. It was not the same as under Briggs any longer, because I didn't have that type protection. But I had a lot more knowledge and I had the language. I liked to travel, anyway. In those days, traveling around Korea took weeks. And I had my own four-wheel-drive station wagon Jeep.

We had a new economic officer and a new security officer, who shared the house with me. We were all bachelors.

An economic officer who shared the house with me said, "Look, I'd like to go on a trip around this country. Will you take me on one of your trips? I want to do some economic stuff."

He accompanied me on the next trip. After the trip, we wrote a dispatch. I said "Look, don't try to put this in a cable. You'll never get it out of the embassy. Just write a dispatch on everything we've learned. They won't bother to read it, you know, all the details. It'll get sent. Then we'll write a letter to somebody in the Department, telling them to get hold of that dispatch."

This dispatch told about how all this money, our AID money, was being siphoned off by Rhee's party, the Liberal Party. It involved fertilizer sales. The fertilizer was to be sold at a price based on the official rate of exchange. This pricing was rationalized on the basis that it would help the farmer. The official rate of exchange was less than half of the black market rate. For example, say a bag of fertilizer at the official rate of exchange was to sell for 200 won; it actually was sold to the farmer for lets say 440 won. USAID was reimbursed the 200 and the remaining 240 was siphoned off to the Liberal Party. This corruption involved tremendous amounts of money, in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

It turned out that the AID director was back in Washington at the time this thing hit the fan, and Congress got a copy of it. USAID Washington sent cables to the embassy, asking the embassy to disavow this dispatch, to say it wasn't true. Of course, the ambassador took one look at it, as did Ed Cronk, the economic chief, who was at a recent cocktail party, said, "Oh, we didn't dare do that. We knew damn well it was the truth. But it would have never gotten out of there if it hadn't gotten out of there that way."

Q: Why would that have been? I'm trying to get down how things worked. You've got massive corruption.

THOMAS: You have these people who always want things to look like they're going well. I was in Vietnam when the whole thing fell apart; that's another story that we'll get into later. But I've come to the conclusion that, when you get up there in the stratosphere

as a senior in this place, it's a mutual back scratching thing. People sit on each other's boards; they don't want to create problems for each other. You don't want to tell Washington too much that makes anybody else look bad. ...what went on and what came out of the dispatches from our embassy.

Q: While we're on the corruption thing, you were there, this second tour, from '56 to when?

THOMAS: Fifty-eight.

Q: To '58.

THOMAS: Oh, there's a story out of that whole thing I've got to tell, because it becomes important by the time '58 comes around. It happened before then, and this is very important as the lead-up.

In the '53-'54 period, my father (Who by then was retired as a colonel in Pennsylvania, his health having come back to a degree) became very involved in the Kiwanis Club of Pennsylvania. After being president of his local town Kiwanis, he was elected as a lieutenant governor of the state district. Out of being involved with the Kiwanis, he became involved in local politics in Pennsylvania. He was a good Republican, who met various Republicans, including a new, reform mayor (because a lot of Democratic politics in Pennsylvania was very corrupt) in Philadelphia named Dilworth. He wasn't mayor at that time, but later, became mayor.

My father also developed an interest in Korea, because I was there. I had access to the APO system where you could mail big packages for practically nothing.

Q: I might just mention, APO means Army Post Office.

THOMAS: He could mail all this stuff; he started a collection of used clothing for Korean children and adults throughout the Kiwanis Clubs in one district of Pennsylvania. These packages started to arrive in mass. There was a little warehouse behind my house on Compound I that was maybe as big as three of these rooms stretched out put together, stacked from floor to ceiling with these packages. I had a hell of time keeping up with this stuff. I also knew that if I wasn't careful, it would be stolen and sold, and it wouldn't get to poor people. I was trying my best to get it out. I remember making trips out to the provinces, and going to schools and giving children's clothing away to kids, etc.

In 1952, during my first period there, I had lived in Pusan with a guy who was the labor attaché. He quit after only a few months, because he didn't like it. But during his few months there, he started inviting labor leaders to our place. We had to entertain together because we lived in the same house. One labor leader came, whose name was Kim Tu-han, and it turned out Kim Tu-han was not only a labor leader, but he was king of the thieves' market. He'd been king of the thieves' market under the Japanese. He and his

bodyguard came and got drunk; I remember fishing their .38 snubnoses out of the toilet because they fell out of their holsters when they were throwing up in the toilet. Anyway, I got to know him out of this.

By '54, I had all this clothing coming in, and I was giving it out. Part of this stuff that came in was fur coats. To whom do you give a fur coat? I went to Kim Tu-han, who was then in the National Assembly, elected by the prostitutes of Korea. I asked him, "Would you hold an auction for these fur coats down in the prostitution section, and bring me the money?" He did and he brought me the money.

Then I wrote a letter to all the missionaries, telling them how I did this and where the money came from. Were they willing to take their share? Because a lot of these women were constantly giving me hell. I remember, later, Mrs. Dowling was trying to run things, in terms of help to the needy, and the missionaries were always against having gambling or drinking, all these problems. Anyway, they took the money; nobody turned me down.

I tell this because, later, in '58, my father's involvement in politics in Pennsylvania all comes into an important story. But we'll drop it for that. Anyway, that was the flashback.

Q: You were talking about '56 to '58, when you were there on this other tour.

THOMAS: You asked me what the real political problems were. The real political problems then were really Rhee and trying to make that government effective, in terms of all this aid money we were dumping in there. It wasn't going any place because of Rhee. Yet, here in the Department, you had Walter Robertson and that whole bunch who looked on Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek as second Jesus Christs. Therefore, what could you do? You were really hamstrung. You had to pretend all was going well, to keep the money coming. People were pretending that, and that's why they didn't like that dispatch that got back there. And that's why it wouldn't have gone if it hadn't been in dispatch form. But it got out, due to the way it was handled.

Q: I might, just for the record, mention there were telegrams, which were more or less succinct and usually got the okay of the ambassador and the deputy chief. But the dispatch was where you could sit down and where you could write. It was like an essay, which went by pouch. It was air-pouched, but it took a little while. These were where you did your think pieces in those days. Now, everything is by telegram. Often, very busy people wouldn't read a dispatch.

THOMAS: No, and you had to have an abstract in the front of it. When it reached Washington, maybe some junior clerk might read it. But you did this as a means of getting around the system of approvals, which some of the junior officers learned; I learned early in the game, out of that biographic story I told you.

Q: You used it, and then you wrote a private letter saying, "Read this."

THOMAS: That's, in essence, what was done. I don't know, maybe they read dispatches from then on, emanating from many of those junior officers there. We got very frustrated, of course. You couldn't get things out.

Q: This was because, at the top, they wanted to look good.

THOMAS: Wristonization had occurred at this time, and we had a lot of new people.

Q: You might explain what Wristonization means.

THOMAS: Well, a fellow named Henry Wriston, I think...

Q: President of Brown University.

THOMAS: He was brought in to look over the State Department and decide what was wrong. At this point, he decided that you had to make the State Department and the Foreign Service all one service. We had to get rid of this idea that you had professional foreign-affairs officers in State who never went abroad, but sat in the Department. And you had to upgrade the positions, in terms of importance of what was then the staff corps because they had to have more status and titles, like a diplomat. There was a whole change of attitude because of Wristonization.

Many new FSO's were brought in from the Department at relatively senior ranks. A man would be, say, a GS-14 or -15 in the Department. He'd come in at what was then a Class 3 officer, Class 2 officer, something on that order. They'd come out for a first tour at a foreign post, and they didn't really know anything about being a diplomat. They understood how to write cables from the Department, and how to go through the bureaucracy back here, but not how an embassy worked or how you got things done out there or how you went about entertaining people.

A new political chief whose name was William Jones was one of them. He'd been on the Korea Desk back here, and he ended up being chief of the political section. Bill Jones and his wife, Betty, were very nice people, but they really didn't understand that Korea, or foreign posts, are not like Washington. His whole approach was that if he could just be the best buddy with the Desk chief for the United States in the Korean Foreign Ministry, he had it made. His buddy Kim Tong-cho would tell him anything he needed to know, and that was all that was necessary. Kim Tong-cho was just another small, petty bureaucrat, who wasn't part of the power structure of Korea and really didn't know what was going on in Korea. And if you understood the Korean structure, and understood anything about Korea, you didn't bother your time with bureaucrats in the foreign ministry. But you couldn't tell Jones this. And so he went his own way, doing this. Of course, it kept him on top of all the foreign-affairs matters that the foreign ministry wanted us to believe. I kept telling Bill and the ambassador (and the ambassador took me more seriously than Bill did) that the foreign affairs of Korea are not run by the foreign

ministry or by their ambassadors. They are run by the DCMs in all their embassies abroad; the orders come directly from Kyungmudae (the Korean White House).

Q: Who was he?

THOMAS: Kyungmudae was the White House. In other words, the president sends...

Q: The Blue House.

THOMAS: The Korean name for it was the Kyungmudae. This Blue House came later.

Q: That came later, but at that time, it was still considered the White House.

THOMAS: The Kyungmudae was just the name of the area in the Seoul where the President's residence is located.

Anyway, the ambassador started to realize that maybe what I was saying was true, but you couldn't tell Bill Jones anything. I just went my own way, reporting what I'd learned. At this point, it was a frustrating situation. I had been told when I was in the Department that Rhee was an old man and that I should busy myself trying to find out what the plans were if he kicked off in office because there would be a scramble for power, and how would that be handled. The intelligence people had been given this function, but the embassy had to have somebody looking at it, too. The intelligence people were rotated frequently and usually didn't speak Korean. They had agents who spoke the language, but agents are different from having American officials handling a problem.

I remember asking one influential Korean the question, "If Rhee dies, have you guys got any plans?"

He said, "I don't know, but I'll go find out." He came back and he told me, "They don't have any plans."

I pointed out, "The American Embassy feels you should, because if anything happened, what would..."

As this all went around and came around, he kept reporting back what he was learning, and I would put it into cables back to the Department. So that kept me pretty busy, doing all this and trying to keep track of Rhee.

In the meantime, I got involved in giving lectures at some of the universities on anything they asked me. I didn't know what I was talking about, but I'd go look it up and ... lecture on something to someone's kids. I got to know some of these college kids; I could feel, from talking to them, because I was speaking Korean at the time, that they wanted to learn some English; I had a group of people coming to my house to learn English...

And my girlfriend at the time was helping me.

Q: Was she Korean?

THOMAS: No, she was American, Catherine M. Frank, a vice consul. We ended up being married in San Francisco in October 1958 as she was en-route from Seoul to the Department. She was a woman Foreign Service officer and had entered in the class of '56. She'd been one of two women officers in a class of 60 appointed to the Foreign Service. She was to be my assistant in the political section, when an older woman, named Maggie Barrett, who'd done this type work, arrived on the scene and became my assistant. I got to read Kay's personnel file; she had a doctorate in political science. Maggie was a lawyer and a CPA and had been a biographic officer in Mexico City for years; she ended up being my assistant in Korea. By that time, I'd come to the conclusion, the only way to go at politics in an Asian country was the biographic approach. Looking at a political party was crazy. You look at people and the interconnections between people. Maggie turned out to be a gemstone.

Anyway, Kay Frank started teaching these students and talking to them. I felt that Rhee was unpopular. I concluded that sooner or later there was going to be a problem with the students. I kept bringing this up, but nobody would listen to me. You didn't dare put anything on paper, for fear you'd get yourself... Robertson, at that point, had already gotten rid of some young officers in Taiwan who were talking about what was wrong with Chiang Kai-shek. It was not the thing to do.

In the meantime, I kept looking around, saying if there is a problem and the Rhee government is in trouble, how are we, as a country, going to be affected by this? And how can we ameliorate our problem?

My first impression was that in most Asian governments, when you have this situation, whoever they're getting rid of tends to get bumped off. How do you keep that from happening because that would be a big embarrassment to us and create a lot of problems back here for the new people who were taking over there.

There were always worries of a military coup. I kept very close track of the military. Haverkamp, at an earlier period, had worked with me; he got to know the chief of staff of the army, CHUNG Il Kwan, in a personal way; he went drinking with him and some other generals. I'd gotten to know some generals. I visited and made speeches at various Korean units along the front; out of this, I kept getting to know as many military people as I could.

I did this on my own because if you talked of a coup or talked of an overthrow of the Rhee government, you were in trouble in Washington. I was thinking this, but I didn't know. Nobody could predict how this would turn out, but I knew there was great dissatisfaction with the corruption in Korea, and it was growing. It would be either the military or, as is the tradition in Asia, the students.

Q: Yes, particularly in the spring.

THOMAS: Out of all this, I came to the conclusion that what we needed was an understudy for Rhee, who was close to Rhee, but was also close to the opposition; someone who was fundamentally an honest man. After researching various personalities, I came to the conclusion there was one person who fitted that bill. I'd gotten to know him back in '52 and '53. I'd been a house guest of his when he first moved back into his own home in Seoul, back in '53. I stayed at his house because there was no room in the embassy at the time due to the wedding of Manhard and his wife. I wanted to come to Seoul on business, and the ambassador said, "Well, there's no room here."

I said, "I'll find a place to stay." And I stayed with my friend, Mr. Huh who was an older man. At that time, he must have been then in his ‘50s, but to me, a man in my ‘20s, that seemed pretty old. Mr. Huh was younger than Rhee, but had been one of Rhee's...

Q: What was his full name?

THOMAS: Huh Chong. Mr. Huh had studied in this country at Columbia University. His English was not too good, but he'd get along with a little bit in English. I dealt with him in Korean at this time because my Korean, by then, was better than his English.

I liked him, and I liked his wife. He'd been one of those honest people, who'd been the first minister of transportation. Yes, he siphoned money off like everybody did, but it was to pay his employees enough to live on. It wasn't to make himself rich. He went to work on a bicycle, while the others had cars and stole money and had Swiss accounts.

You could look in the files and find out what Mr. Huh was. Mr. Huh had been in this country back when Rhee was in Washington lobbying for Korea. Mr. Huh had been one of the people who donated money to Rhee, just from what little he made working his way through college. He'd been a Rhee follower. He'd come from a better family down in Kyongsan Nam Do. Kyongsan Nam Do was the birthplace of the Democratic Party, the opposition party. He was one of the five founding members of the Minjudong (Democratic Party), which was the conservative opposition political party to Rhee's Liberal Party. But he still had been fired by Rhee because he didn't really want to go along with some of the corruption, early, even before the Korean War. They hadn't gotten back together. There was still this Confucian loyalty, but at the same time, he was a member of the opposition.

The city of Seoul was in such bad shape, and there was much pressure from the Americans to get something done about it.

Q: We're talking what, about '56?

THOMAS: About '57 maybe '58, I'm guessing now, in that vicinity. Huh was reappointed by Rhee as mayor of Seoul.

In the meantime, in that period, there was a Korean student going to school in Philadelphia who was mugged and murdered on the streets of Philadelphia. He was from a better Korean family. It caused quite an uproar in Korea. It wasn't nice.

It struck me, because my father knew the mayor of Philadelphia at the time, that maybe we could do something about that, in terms of making up for it, and at the same time, subtly do something that would set Mr. Huh up, in terms of possibly being the guy who would take over if anything happened to the Rhee government.

I remember dictating to Maggie Barrett. She used to go on all my trips with me. The first trip, she begged me to take her. She said, "If you let me go on one trip, you'll never go without me." I used to get back from one of these two- or three-week trips, and there would be a stack of papers I'd have to go through, and I'd have to write a dispatch on everything I'd learned. She took shorthand, and every time we'd stop, she'd stay in the car, then she'd stop me right after I came out from talking to somebody and had me tell her what happened; she'd take it all down. When we came back from the first trip, within two or three days, she had the notes organized into a dispatch. Beautifully organized; she wrote well. She said, "Here's your dispatch. You won't go again without me." I didn't have to take any time; it was all there, everything I'd learned.

I wanted to get Maggie promoted, because she was due for it. She was overage. She'd lied about her age and made herself younger than she really was, or she would have been retired by then. This was going to be her last post. I said to Maggie, "From now on, all these dispatches we send back, biographic studies, don't put my name on them, you just put your name. But I'll dictate the comments section. You don't know these people. I know them. But you get it all together, all the facts, from going through all the files. And then I'll dictate my comments."

She did one on Huh Chong. I was to write the comments, but my name didn't go on the report, because I wanted to get her promoted. The first sentence I dictated in the comments said "If the Rhee government were to fall, the chances were that Mr. Huh would be the man to take power." Then I went on to explain why I thought this might be so, in terms of his close relationship to Rhee and the chances of his making sure that nothing happened to Rhee, etc., if that were the case. That was sent to Washington, but, like any document, it just went into the files; it also went into our files at the embassy. That ended that, for the time being.

I kept writing stuff, but it was all the usual crap. You couldn't go into anything of any importance, because the place was getting worse and worse all the time.

I remember being called one time and dictating a memo that they told me about later... I'm trying to think of this man, and maybe you can think of his name. (It was Kim Chong-p'il)

He was the intelligence chief after Gen. Park Chung Hee took power. He had been the real organizer of the coup for Park Chung Hee at that time. This was after I left there. But somebody came back and mentioned that when they looked at my files in the political section after I had gone, there was a memo I'd written saying that this man, Kim Chong-p'il, had called me on the phone and asked to meet me. I didn't know who he was. He asked to meet me at the U.N. Cemetery on a Sunday afternoon.

Q: The U.N. Cemetery...

THOMAS: Across the river from Seoul.

Q: Across the Han.

THOMAS: I remember going and standing around there, waiting for this man to approach me because it was to be a blind thing. He never showed. He'd given me his name, and so it was all in the files that I'd gone to meet him. It turned out, that this guy was the guy that later ran the coup that put Park Chung Hee in power. It came up at that time, because they looked up his name and here was this memo I'd written.

Anyway, just before I left Korea in '58... and by then I was convinced we were going to have a shake-up in the Korean government and that Rhee was going to go, one way or the other. Whether it would be the military or the students, I couldn't say, but it was just a matter of time.

I went to see Mr. Huh and told him this. I told him that if anything went wrong, I felt that he was probably the best person to handle the interim situation. Furthermore I was going back to the United States and was going to try to get him invited to do a tour of the United States, on which I would try to accompany him. This would be a way of getting him known and also sending a signal to President Rhee. He said, "All right, if you can do that."

I came back to the States and I talked to my Dad about the fact that it was very sad about the killing of this Korean boy; that it had created terrible feelings in Korea. He knew Mayor Dilworth, and it would be sort of appropriate, on the anniversary, whatever it was, maybe the first anniversary, or the second, I forget, of this kid's being killed, that he invite the mayor of Seoul to be the guest of the mayor of Philadelphia, to commemorate the boy's death and to make an apology on the part of Philadelphia for this. It would be helpful to American-Korean relations. This idea was presented to Dilworth who thought it was a good idea. All it cost Philadelphia was the price of three airplane tickets because he could get free hotel space from the hotel owners. I then suggested that maybe if he could broker this to the cities of New York, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco because the costs to these cities would be small because Mr. Huh and his party could stop on their way back. He'd get a chance to visit these cities and each mayor would welcome him, it would be worthwhile. Fortunately, everybody agreed.

In the meantime, I came back to the Department; I'm preaching at the working level, and I'm waiting to go into Chinese-language school. It was all set up for me to study Chinese because I couldn't stay in Korea all the rest of my life. I wanted to take leave; language school was going to start two months or a month later.

Anyway, I'm preaching this stuff about Korea. I remember David Bane. Do you know David Bane?

Q: It doesn't ring a bell.

THOMAS: I remember David Bane was director of NEA. He had been in and out of the Department, I think with some of the oil companies, and he was a rather sophisticated guy. He ended up later in Pakistan as consul general in Lahore. But at that time David was head of NEA. I remember telling David that Rhee was in trouble; his response was you better keep your mouth shut or you'll get yourself fired if it gets to Mr. Robertson that the Rhee government's not long for this world. I said, "You watch, you watch."

In the meantime, Mr. Huh was invited to Philadelphia; I took leave, and traveled around with him. We went to Philadelphia, New York, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco; it took about ten days or a bit more for this tour. In New York we called on General MacArthur at his apartment. The newspaper reported the story about this call on MacArthur and how this visit by Mayor Huh of Seoul was in commemoration of the student's being killed in Philadelphia. It was also reported that Mr. Thomas from the State Department was accompanying the mayor, etc.

When the word reached President Rhee, you can guess what happened to Mr. Huh when he returned to Seoul. He was fired, right there on the spot. He was out of a job. In the interim, Rhee started to make trouble for Ambassador Dowling back here. He was called back for consultation. Kay, my wife was assigned to INR on the Korean desk. I told her about those "bio reports of long ago, 1952, which told about Rhee's use of political connections on the extreme right in Congress. They were top secret. She located them; put them in her purse, took them to the Korea desk in the department and gave them to Dowling. They were the ammunition he needed to protect himself. She was later reprimanded by her boss in INR; he claimed that by doing it informally the INR desk didn't get credit. Those reports, if handled formally, would never have gotten to Dowling. They were too hot and too politically dangerous.

Over a year later after HUH's trip here, the student situation starts to boil up. (I was in language school at the time.) Rhee was worried. Yi Ki-pung is the guy whom I helped elect Chairman of the National Assembly. His son, who had been adopted by Rhee to give Rhee an heir, ended up shooting the whole family, committing a family suicide. The Vice President, who was Chang Myon, had resigned; so you had no vice president. The third man in line, according to the constitution, was the speaker of the National Assembly. He was dead, killed by his own son; then the son took his own life.

Q: Why did he do that? Was it a family thing?

THOMAS: It had to do with loss of face, in terms of Rhee. Rhee was losing power. It was obvious that this thing was going to blow up in Rhee's face. Somebody had to take the blame. They thought, by killing themselves, it'd take the blame from Rhee. Okay? Well, it didn't accomplish that, but that was the object. As a matter of fact, some of the relatives of Yi Ki-pung, who are alive today, accused me of having been responsible for his death, having had him made speaker of the Assembly, because he really wasn't meant for that job. It was too rough a place for him.

Anyway, the Korean constitution stated that, if you have no speaker of the National Assembly, the next person in line is the foreign minister. Suddenly, Rhee appointed Mr. Huh Chong foreign minister. The Rhee government fell. Mr. Huh took power as acting president.

Q: Falls because of the student revolt.

THOMAS: The police refused to fire on their own children; besides the people were fed up at this point.

The day Mr. Huh took power as acting president, he called me on the telephone, and asked if he could go to the ambassador and ask that I be brought out there. I said, "Let me do that from this end." We had a new ambassador, named McConaughy, at the time.

Q: He was a creature of the right.

THOMAS: Oh, very.

Q: In the United States. Very much a strong supporter of Chiang Kai-shek. A Walter Robertson favorite, I'd say.

THOMAS: That's right. Anyway, he won the argument; I wasn't needed.

Mr. Huh took power at this point. He made sure Rhee wasn't killed. Rhee was flown out of the country and sent to Honolulu. I tried to talk the American government at that point into backing him, rather than Chang Myon, because I said, "Chang Myon is a weakling. This man is a strong man, if you'll back him. He's not an ambitious man, but if you'll back him, you've got somebody... He won't do what you tell him. He'll do what he thinks is right for Korea. It's very dangerous putting somebody in there who'd do what you tell him." But they wanted somebody to do what he was told. Chang Myon was put in power and did what he was told, but in the end, people got so fed up with him that the military...

After Chang Myon was elected president, I would go to the Korean Desk to read the incoming cables; I kept telling people, "There's going to be a military coup." This was obvious to me because certain senior military officers were being transferred and where

they were being transferred. But nobody listened. At this point, I was shipped out to Taichung and that was it.

That was my experience in Korea. There's probably a lot of stuff left out because this is a broad...

Q: If you think of things, I'm going to give you this, in transcript, and you can insert it anywhere you want.

(In retrospect, one can now understand the makings of the self-inflicted political problems we created in American-Korean relations for the next thirty years. At its foundation was the extreme right wing dogma of the self righteous Republican administration of the 1950's. Secretary Dulles and Walter Robertson were responsible for years to come, Central America, the Middle East, Iran, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and the failure to understand what was happening in the Soviet Union all, in time, were products of this failure to look for and try to understand the "truth". Dogma has little time for the truth. The CIA in Korea is a good example; its personnel were there in many guises but mostly under military cover. The U.S. Army in the early years was the more bureaucratically powerful in intelligence matters. The Korean Army's Intelligence Detachments worked closely with U.S. Command's G-2. ROK CIC under Snake Kim was a personal political intelligence arm of Rhee as was Gen. Won Yong-tok's Provost Marshal Command. CIA was new and inexperienced, in the Asian sense, and had a new group of players there. In the period from 1956-58 they were deeply involved in establishing the Korean CIA. In hindsight, they wanted an organization of their own making with which they could have a liaison. Rhee's two organizations did not fill the bill. The Agency was becoming bureaucratic like the State Department. After the East Asia hands in State were crucified, career European hands were made ambassadors to East Asian countries. The book "A Pretty Good Club", based on a Harvard doctoral dissertation by Martin Weil, clearly outlines how this happened. It was the legacy of the old career diplomats from Europe in league with the Japan hands in the Department. The last of these were the Dulles brothers who became their instruments. One can see the power of old and inherited wealth at work in the failed policies that held sway for the past forty years. To allow such policies to remain viable requires a system that is favorable to their long term existence. Such a system requires that the "organization man" be king; otherwise, such policies could and would not be viable. True experts on a society and a country would and could not go along with such policies. Thus, in both the Foreign Service and the CIA a culture which favored the "Organization Man" over the man of substance took over. The China hands had to go. A George Kennan is not needed.

The CIA policies in Korea are a good example. In creating the ROK CIA with which they could have a liaison, they created a situation where knowledge of Korea and its language were not only not needed but a hindrance. Only an "organization man" would and could fit the required mold. Through this mirror image, called the KCIA, a series of questionable generals usurped power. For the U.S. in Korea, it is now coming home to roost. Dogma is the weapon of wealthy special interests, who then and now are connected

to wealthy interests in places such as Haiti, Guatemala, etc.. Note the CIA's record in those two countries. Can an organization with roots as described in a recent book "The Secret War Against The Jews" ever become truly effective, or is it a prisoner of its own inherited values. Is it possible for the Foreign Service, with its questionable inheritance, to become truly expert on the foreign policy problems we face? Or, will it continue to be a bureaucracy designed to carry on in the traditions formed and instilled prior to, during and subsequent to WWII? It would appear that "Dogma" is alive and well in our new congress. Note the latest questionable policy adjustments concerning Cuba in order to please Senator Helms and the extreme right in this country. (Early March 1996).)

Q: *You took Chinese for how long?*

THOMAS: Nearly three years. The first year, off and on, because of being involved with Korean affairs. Then two full years at Taichung, where I ended up being acting director of the language school.

I found much that was wrong with how the system allowed linguistic scientists to select which candidates would study Oriental languages. In earlier times, officers who had proven themselves as competent in relating to the peoples of East Asia, and who would be more effective with the language as a tool, were seen as eligible for this major investment in time and money. To select inexperienced officers on the basis of language aptitude alone can create competent interpreters, but excellent interpreters can be hired at much lower salaries. Many of these people learned easily, but found East Asia not to their liking, and spent their free time at the local American military officers clubs. The investment was a waste of money. (This changed approach to the selection of language officers fitted in well with the demise of "men of substance" and the substitution of "the organization man".)

Q: Oh, absolutely.

THOMAS: But if you want effective political and economic officers, they'd better know the language.

To keep that from happening, you must not let them decide who is given language training only based on language aptitude tests. We've got to say to them, "Here we've got an officer we know is damn good at developing productive relationships with the Chinese people (Gwanshi); he's done such a good job, we want you to teach him Chinese. Now it might take him six months longer than it takes somebody else to learn the same amount of language. We don't care. You train him." But that's what's needed in terms of developing effective diplomats.

I saw this phenomenon during my period at Taichung. In the end, however, I ended up getting a 4 in reading, and a 3+ in spoken, which is pretty good.

Q: Oh, it's very good. Just for the record, 5 is a native speaker. It's a two thing: 1 through 5 (5 being the highest) for reading; and 1 through 5 for speaking.

THOMAS: You've got to be a college graduate in that country, native speaker, to get a 5.

Q: And the normal person going to this is lucky to get a 3.3.

THOMAS: That's right. I remember, because I was running this school for six months at the same time as I was a student. The teachers all liked me. Because I was the acting headmaster or whatever you want to call it, principal or director, FSI here worried that there might be favoritism. They brought in Don Sergle to replace me, who'd by then graduated from there and was head of USIS in Taichung. He took over the school from me just at the time I was to graduate. He was then acting director the week of my graduation. He had to sit in, actually sit in, while I took my oral, and sit in while I took my written which had been sent to him from FSI in Washington. He sealed both the written and the tape of my oral and sent them to Washington to be graded. This was done because I'd been acting director of the school, and there was a possible conflict of interest.

But a scandal occurred due to me, after I left there, that I felt very badly about. I want to get it on record now because I want this issue to be addressed.

I had always taken the attitude that when you're dealing with people who have less than you do, you try to be helpful to them. When I left there, I sold things that I didn't want or need any longer (like I'd had some carpets made for my house locally, inexpensive stuff), to some of the teachers at a discount price. They were low-paid people. I sold them my bicycle at a discount price. I tried to be decent to these people who'd busted their ass teaching me. I'd come to know, and encouraged the other students to get to know them in a very social and personal way.

They got a new guy in, a few weeks after I left there, who was to be the new director, who spoke Chinese, but he was from a missionary background.

In the meantime, the head teacher of the school had saved up a fair amount of money in dollars and given it to me. He liked hi-fi's; he asked me to buy him a hi-fi when I got back and send it through APO. Well, this was against the rules. There's no doubt about that. But every one of us broke rules that way. You couldn't be in the Foreign Service and not. We're constantly giving whiskey away to people.

There was a fellow, with the initials L.N. who was with the USIS, there in language school LN and his wife had befriended us and thrown a big party for us as we were leaving.

Q: Were you married by this time?

THOMAS: Oh, yes, my wife was there. We had to pay money to get her trained in Chinese, because the government wouldn't do it at that time. We spent a fair amount of money giving her language lessons; she learned Chinese along with me. She's a better linguist, but, of course, she didn't cover the amount that I had.

Anyway, as I remember it now, I asked LN, "Would you mind being the recipient of this hi-fi gear for Mr. Lin? He's given me the money, and I'm going to pick it up at the PX up in Tokyo and put it in the APO for you, and when it gets here, just give it to him." Which is what happened.

However, it turned out LN was not a good linguist, and he didn't bust his ass like I did. He was a social animal. He and his wife liked to party. That's why we had good times with them; they were always having parties. He was flunking out of the school. He thought he'd pull a blackmail on Lin, the head instructor --"I've got this stuff, etc. etc."

Then this whole thing came out, that I'd sent this stuff; therefore, Thomas got these high grades. There was no way I got a high grade... it all originated and was graded back here. So nobody in Washington or at the school, who knew the facts, believed that.

This new missionary type said, "Well, from now on, there'll be no fraternization between the students and the teachers." Couldn't even go to a party.

Q: The kiss of death.

THOMAS: Kiss of death. The whole place was terrible. I heard all about it via the letters people were writing me. They fired the senior instructor. He got booted because of all this. LN, in the end, because he'd played this hardnose thing, graduated, but I don't think he was ever very good at Chinese. But they never dared show their faces to me again, those two. Yet we'd been close friends there. They're here in Washington. A very sad ending!

Q: You graduated what year?

THOMAS: I graduated in '62. First of all, I was due to go to Hong Kong, in the economic section. There was somebody in Hong Kong that had been in Korea that didn't like me. I don't know who, but I made my enemies.

First of all, there was the commissary issue in Korea. The married couples all wanted a limit so that no servants were to be allowed in the commissary to buy for the single people. The fresh vegetables and other items in short supply came in at ten o'clock in the morning and were put on the shelves, and they were gone in a matter of a couple of hours. Our servants were over there to get them for us, along with the wives. The wives didn't like standing in line with our servants. They should get VIP treatment. If that happened, single people wouldn't get any of the fresh vegetables. Since single people were the majority in the embassy, they could outvote everybody. That's why I was president of the

Embassy Club. The ambassador put out an order that the servants couldn't shop at the commissary any longer. I said, "All right, I can't buck the ambassador." But I quietly went to this Korean manager, since I was his boss as president of the club, and I said, "Look, I want the stuff split. I want two-thirds of it not put on the shelves until six in the evening, the fresh stuff. One-third at ten in the morning because about one-third of the embassy is married. Two-thirds are single. That's the way it's to be split everything that comes in. If it runs out in the morning, you haven't got any more." That's what he did. Of course, that made me unpopular as hell over there with some of the married couples. But that's the way it worked.

Then the married people got together and tried to run somebody against me to become president. It didn't work. They got something through that I couldn't succeed myself; we got another single person in there as president.

This type thing went on.

I was back in the Department, and informal word comes back to me that somebody didn't want me in Hong Kong. You know how that works in the damn system. It can cause all types of problems.

Then there was talk of sending me to Taipei. A similar thing happened in Taipei; somebody didn't want me there. (I didn't fit as an "Organization Man" and substance types can be a problem for the system.)

Then they decided to open up a new China affairs post for a Chinese-affairs officer in Karachi, Pakistan. Pakistan Internal Airlines had gone into China. They had a Chinese-affairs officer in Delhi. The guy who had been chief of the political section in Hong Kong, Jake, had that job. He'd been transferred to Delhi. That was a pretty senior job in the Chinese-affairs reporting business, because of India. I was given the Chinese-affairs post for two countries: Pakistan and Afghanistan. I was assigned to the political section in Pakistan.

Q: You were in Pakistan from when to when?

THOMAS: Sixty-three to '65. That was a very interesting period; I had real problems there. That was a period when China and Pakistan became very close. My biggest fights were with the chief of the political section and with the ambassador.

Q: Who was the ambassador and chief of the political section?

THOMAS: McConaughy.

Q: McConaughy again.

THOMAS: Yes.

Q: Again somebody who was...

THOMAS: Anti-Communist.

Q: Really a very, very strong anti-Communist, to the point where it probably had some effect on his...

THOMAS: His judgement. A fellow that did his writing for him, Dick Sneider, who was later ambassador to Korea... Did you know Dick Sneider?

Q: Yes, he was my ambassador in Korea.

THOMAS: Is that right? Well, Sneider was my political chief. I didn't get along very well with Sneider because Sneider was doing just exactly what he was told by McConaughy. I was an effective political officer; I got to know a lot of people in Pakistan, fast. Sneider was not very good socially at handling himself. He was sort of abrupt, and people didn't take to this.

Q: Yes, he was a tough cookie.

THOMAS: He was chief of the political section; yet he hadn't made many friends in the diplomatic corps there. He was sort of negative; he tended to lord it over people. You know how you make calls when you first get to a post? He put out a memo that none of us were to call on anybody, in any of the other embassies, senior in rank to us. I was a senior second secretary, but most foreign embassies in Pakistan didn't even have second secretaries.

Q: No, they had just one person, and that was...

THOMAS: A first secretary, or maybe a chargé, or maybe a minister.

Q: Maybe quite a junior officer.

THOMAS: That's right. The word was out in the diplomatic community that there was a China linguist assigned to do the Chinese-affairs reporting job in the American Embassy. Yet I was told I couldn't call on anybody. Well, I soon said, "I'll cure that." I just started telling any junior officer I could, from any other embassy, that this was a problem for me because I was hamstrung by my own political chief, who wouldn't let me meet anybody; that I'd like to get to know anybody else who knew anything about China or Chinese. It turned out the Canadian minister there, who was the deputy chief of the Canadian mission, was a China linguist; I think married to a Chinese. The French Embassy had the same situation as did the Australian Embassy. All these guys, who were number two in their embassies, came around and called on me. You can imagine Sneider's reaction.

We formed a China club, with me as the president. They asked if they could bring their dispatches and talk to me when they were writing about China, and we'd trade information. Out of this, I got to know as many... Karachi became a small Hong Kong. I talked to anybody coming though on PIA going to China. At the same time, I got to know the Pakistani people.

Not many diplomats hunt. Here you're in a military society in a place like Pakistan. I'd read Thayer. Remember Charlie Thayer's books, "Bears in the Caviar", and all? He'd been posted out in that part of the world; he got along because he could ride and hunt and that type thing. Word got to the agricultural attaché in our embassy, Dr. Varney, a very nice man as was his wife, that I hunted. He'd been dean of an agricultural college in West Virginia and owned a big farm up in Vermont, I think, on Lake Champlain, a big dairy farm. He was a hunter; he invited me to accompany him on a hunt, with a man named Pir Pagaro. Have you ever been to Pakistan?

Q: No, I never have.

THOMAS: Pir Pagaro is an hereditary pir. The book "The Saints of the Sindh" (I forget the author.) tells about his father. His father was the pir of the tribe called the Hurs, a bandit group that live in Rajasthan and in the Sindh deserts. There might be a million or two of them. Back in the days of the British raj, at the beginning of World War II, Pir Pagaro, the old pir, was not happy with the British, and with a war coming on, he wanted to get out from under them; he was going to run a small revolt.

The story was told that the British political officer there went out to his palace at Larkana and said, "I understand you're an absolute ruler."

The pir called some peasant forward and told him to kneel down. He knelt down, and the pir cut his head off, right there in front of the British political officer, saying to himself, "He'll see what I am here."

In the end, the British went to war against him, bombed his palace, and, I think, hanged him. They took his two sons, the eldest being the hereditary pir, and sent them off to England to be students, to learn English and the British ways.

In '47 or '48, after partition, the Paks were having a hell of a time keeping peace in the Sindh, and they needed that pir back. They went to the British and said, "Help, we've got to have that Pir back here, to get control." So the Pir was sent back, as a young person, to take command. He was the secular and the religious leader of this tribe. Historically, the Hurs had been Bedouin people who'd come out of Saudi Arabia nine generations earlier; they lived on camelback and on horseback, in the desert. The new Pir, having gone, I think, to Oxford, and his brother to Cambridge, were returned to this tribal people.

Dr. Varney, the agricultural attaché, invited me to go along with him on a hunt with this guy, Pir Pagaro. I didn't know anything about him; he had a big, full beard. At that time, I

just had a moustache; I didn't have this goatee. It was my first hunt in Pakistan, a five-day hunt. I took leave and we went up into the mountains. It was a very impressive experience for a westerner. You ride up in these mountains on camelback; you climb over a rise, and there, down below you, were all these massive tents that are as tall as a two story house. On entering the tents, there are Persian rugs on the ground, a big double bed and other furnishings. This is gentlemen's hunting.

We're hunting for Ibex, which is a high mountain goat.

I had borrowed a rifle. My own rifles hadn't arrived yet. I was brand new there; I hadn't been there but about a couple of weeks. Someone at the Embassy, who really wasn't a hunter but had lived in Germany, had bought an F. N. Browning with double triggers, but with open sites. The rifle came with telescopic sights, but he'd lost the telescope; all it had was open sites. It was a very finely built, hand-finished rifle. He loaned it to me to go on this hunt.

We arrived at the site for the hunt in the mountains; The Pakistani members of the hunting party started shooting these automatic weapons at running Ibex. I wasn't about to do that. I just stood and watched the action. It was like a machine gun war. At last, after all these young, little ibex, none of whom were hit, were gone, I looked down, way down in this valley, and there was this big old male, standing there, looking up at us on the mountaintop. I got down on my belly and aimed the rifle. The Ibex is so far away that the bead on the front site just about covered the animal. I was hunting with a 110-grain bullet, which is a very lightweight bullet. It's a 30.06 rifle. I'm firing downhill. A 110-grain, because of the lightweight bullet, has a pretty straight trajectory. This is probably about a 500 yards shot, which is pretty far. With a double trigger, all you had to do is touch it. Lying on the ground I fired. I thought "If I hit it, I've got it made. If I don't, what the hell." The shot resounded and the animal fell.

This occurred during my first two or three weeks in Pakistan. The pir's bodyguard was a Pathan, who stood seven feet two inches tall and wore a turban. If you know the Pathans, they come out of the northwest territory. Their code of ethics is that you judge a man by how well he shoots a rifle because they all carry rifles all the time, up there in Peshawar. As I went to get up, the pir took my rifle from me, and this Pathan, instead of helping me up, just picked me up and threw me in the air and as he caught me in his arms, he screamed, "Sahib, what a shot!" in this booming voice... I was my present size. From then on, I had it made with that hunting crowd. It was, frankly, a lucky shot.

It turned out that the pir's biggest enemy in the Sindh was a man named Bhutto. Bhutto was a Sindhi. Bhutto was the foreign minister. Bhutto was a hedonist who screwed the wives of all his deputies. He was a lech. He was in the eyes of normal Muslims an immoral man. Anyway, Bhutto was Pir Pagaro's big enemy.

We went back to Pir Pagaro's palace after that hunt. We got back late afternoon and he invited us to have dinner. Everybody treated this guy like a king.

First of all, when we got into his Land Rover, I noticed that he always drove, which he didn't do in the city. I always rode next to him. He decided who sat where. I felt very badly, because this much older man, Dr. Varney, would have to sit in the back. But the pir always insisted I sit up front with him. That was the more comfortable seat. (I learned later why the Pir drove his own Land Rover when on the hunt where he was surrounded by his own people, the Hurs. It seems that they resent anyone but a westerner sitting on the same level as the Pir. It seems earlier several drivers were killed because of this issue. Thus he always drove himself and no one but a foreigner was asked to sit with him. Even when on the hunt he, Dr. Varney and I were the only ones sitting on chairs in his tent. Even Pak Cabinet ministers sat on the floor when in his presence if we were among the Hurs.) You did what the pir wanted. I apologized to Varney, and he said, "Don't worry about it. I don't care. I just love this hunting. To go hunting with this guy is great."

When we arrived at his home, there was a big dining room. The table must have been 30-feet long; it was a big sheet of glass, about an inch and a half thick, that went the whole length of the room. The Pir was seated at the head of the table, and I was seated at the pir's right, Varney at his left. There was nobody else seated until you reached the other end. Down there were a bunch of guys in turbans, bandoleers with bullets, and rifles, the big bodyguard and some of his henchmen, maybe half a dozen of them. The Pir was still very formal with me; I didn't know what to do, but I didn't like this situation because the pir was not that old; he looked about my age. I looked at the Pir, and I said, "You know, Pir, if I had to eat every dinner with those guys at the other end of the table, I'd want a glass-topped table, too." He just burst out laughing. He told this joke to these guys in Sindhi. They laughed, too. I don't know if they really thought it was funny, but he nearly fell out of his chair because of this crack. He thought it was very funny. That broke the ice, and he said, "Well, you know, my name is..." I forget what, but I always called him pir sahib, anyway.

I said, "My name's Fred."

He said, "Fred, I'd like you to advise me on politics. I'm never going into politics as a candidate, but I want to be a power in the Sindh. I want to be a power in this country, in the National Assembly."

So I said, "Well, sure."

At the same time, there was a Foreign Service officer in the embassy named Don Gelber. Do you know Gelber?

Q: No, I don't.

THOMAS: He was a bright young man, had a hell of a good sense of humor, and a nice wife, who was from a Turkish Jewish community in Turkey. I never could understand the Department's assigning Jews to political sections in Muslim countries, especially ones

like Pakistan. Here you had the chief of the political section was a Jew, and you had Gelber. I'm being given hell most of the time by my boss, but Gelber spent all his time working on a Master's Degree thesis. He hardly turned in anything because, first of all, he had no contacts in the community, his being Jewish. He was bright; he could write musicals. He was a very talented guy and funny, and he'd write very funny stuff. But he didn't know how to get along with the local people. He wasn't around them; he just went home to his wife.

After this first trip with Pir Pagaro, I wrote up everything I learned, in a memcon about politics there, and the fact that the Pir wanted me to go with him. I got an agreement out of the political chief that I'd go hunting with the Pir whenever I wanted to, with no leave taken. I didn't have to take leave, because local politics wasn't my job.

I told the Pir I was interested in Chinese matters, and if he could obtain some information concerning China for me, I'd appreciate it. I'd be willing to give him advice on current politics in Pakistan, if I could be of help.

Every Sunday morning, if we weren't out hunting, he'd either be at my house or I'd be at his house, having coffee and talking local politics.

Then another thing happened. It turned out that he's like a lot of South Asians; they believe in soothsayers or fortune tellers. There was an Indian who was his fortune teller. Early in the game, the Pir asked me my date of birth, the exact day and the year. It turned out I was born on the same day of the year he was, only a year earlier. This soothsayer told him that a diplomat was going to come to Pakistan, who was born on the same day of the year, who was going to make

all the difference in his career, politically, and that he should use this man for advice. This put me in a rather special situation with Pir Pagaro.

I'm expected to understand local politics. First of all, I don't know anything about local politics. Before I can advise the Pir, he and some of his people have to tutor me on the local situation. They've got to tell me all the background. I'm learning all this background and dictating it in memcoms, but it's not my job to get it to Washington.

This resulted in a funny story because many months later, a cable from Washington about Gelber's reporting, stating, "This reporting is excellent, but there are no backup memcons. Where are the memcons for all these cables?" All this stuff is going in by cable. We want to see... Well, they'd gotten word, through the grapevine, and I don't know who, because I didn't care, but somebody'd let them know. I think it was another guy who had gone home early and told them that all this stuff was coming from me. Then Sneider (Sneider was part of the problem) was forced, along with Gelber, to package up all my memcons and send them back to the Department, because it became very obvious that I was the guy furnishing all this information. The Pir had his spies everywhere.

In the meantime, I got to know a man named Jimmy Fancy who was an Ismaili. He was one of the leaders of the Fancy Clan all of whom were Ismailis. The Ismailis were headed by that fellow they weigh in gold, the Aga Khan. He was one of the Aga Khan's followers.

I can still remember telling Fancy, one night during dinner, about one of my hunting trips with Pir Pagaro, when, out in the middle of the desert, my boiled drinking water had been lost. The reason it had been lost was the people who were transporting it thought it was my liquor, and they didn't want me to have liquor. But the Pir had told me, "You bring your liquor. I can't drink it, because it's against the Muslim code. But most of these people will, on the hunt, and you have it..." The person who had left my water behind thought that it was liquor; it was really water. The liquor got there, but the water didn't. I complained to the Pir. He sent around a case of Evian water, how civilized! out there in the middle of the damned desert. I thought this was pretty plush.

I told this story to Jimmy Fancy. Later, when the Aga Khan arrived for one of his visits, I got a call from Jimmy Fancy, "Hey, would you get in touch with the Pir and obtain some Evian water for the Aga Khan?" The Pir responded by sending me several cases which I sent on to Jimmy Fancy.

It turned out that Jimmy Fancy, who ran this big industrial complex, one of the biggest in Pakistan, said to me, "Look, I can't afford, in a country like this, to go without having spies everywhere. I have my own intelligence system. I'm sure that I know more about what goes on here than most of your embassy. Fred, I'm willing to keep you informed, if you'd like." He came to like me. I received all this domestic political information from either Jimmy Fancy, or Pir Pagaro, while, at the same time, giving Pir Pagaro advice.

In the meantime, there was somebody who was working in the foreign ministry, who was close to the Pir, and who was telling the Pir stuff out of school. The Pir was willing to tell me who the man was, but I really didn't want to know because I knew that this information would go over like a lead balloon in our embassy. They might try to hurt this guy. If I didn't know, I could protect the source and still get away with what I was trying to accomplish. It became very obvious to me that Bhutto was in bed with the Chinese Communists. Kennedy was the president when we first arrived in Pakistan; I felt he was a breath of fresh air - after years of knee jerk anti-communism under the Republicans. Maybe, I could sell the idea to the Kennedy administration of using Pakistan as a bridge to China. It was my analysis that Pakistan based on the realities of geography and the size of India, had to have a close relationship with China. There is no way around it. Since India was Pakistan's biggest enemy, there was no way Pakistan was not going to make friends with China. We ought to use this situation rather than trying to fight it, in spite of the fact that Pakistan was in CENTO and SEATO. At that time there was a big argument going on among China specialists over whether the Sino Soviet split was for real. I believed it was for real and that we should look to using Pakistan as a bridge to establishing relations with China. But here you've got McConaughy, whose views

reflected those of the extreme right in Congress... And Bowles is down in...Delhi pushing the India card.

Q: Chester Bowles.

THOMAS: Chester Bowles is down in...

Q: New Delhi, as our ambassador.

THOMAS: I had to go to Delhi fairly regularly, because I was ordered there by the Department, to confer with Jake, who was the Chinese-affairs officer for India. I have to give you this flashback because it tied in with my relationship with the embassy in Delhi. Prior to leaving Washington for Pakistan, I went to the Department's travel office to make arrangements. I told the woman there that we had just had a new baby girl (Veronica), our second child. The baby was about six months old, and we wanted to go by ship. Because of this situation, I was not interested in going first class in a third-class stateroom in the hole. I'd rather fly.

Q: They would call something first class, but it would be down in the bowels of the ship.

THOMAS: That's right. So I said, "If you can't give me true first-class accommodations, I want to fly. If you can give me first-class accommodations going to Naples," (then I'd fly out of Rome on to Pakistan.)

She said, "You're going to have to wait, because it's lowest first-class available."

A week or so before we were to go, she called me in and said, "I've got you a cabin on the sun deck, with a big picture window." And she showed me pictures.

I said, "That's fine."

We boarded The Constitution with some of my friends in New York. We went to our first dinner, in the first-class dining room. It was just for couples; they had baby sitters for the young babies. We were seated at a table with another couple. It turned out he was going out to be counselor for administration in Delhi. His name was Bob Francis. He was a big, heavy fellow, but had a good sense of humor. It turned out he was a hunter, and we got along fine. But, of course, he was down in the hole. He introduced me to some ambassador who was going to eastern Europe, who was down in the hole also. We got to be friends on that trip, for the two weeks we were on it. He said, "You get down to Delhi, you've got to come and see us and stay with us."

Every time I went to Delhi, I'd stay with him and his wife at their place. Counselors for Administration live pretty well. He and his wife had become the Bowles's closest personal friends in the embassy. Mrs. Bowles was always dropping over for coffee. Jake, the Chinese Affairs Officer there, was due to leave; Jake's tour was up.

Do you know Paul Kreisberg?

Q: Yes.

THOMAS: Paul Kreisberg, I heard later, had wanted that job, and Bowles didn't want him. I don't know what the reason was, but Bowles said no. Here we had another China specialist, because Kreisberg was a Chinese linguist, being sent to Pakistan as deputy chief of the political section, to replace the guy who was caught in Iran, who was chargé.

Q: Bruce Laingen?

THOMAS: Bruce had been deputy chief, and the buffer between me and Sneider. Bruce understood I was trying to get the truth out. He was a sensitive and honest person and was so different from Sneider. Sneider was always raising hell with me about something. In my opinion, it was an aggressive posture taken in order to discourage my trying to get something out concerning China that they didn't want to approve.

Q: McConaughy was a China hand, too, wasn't he?

THOMAS: Yes, he was a China hand, but he didn't speak Chinese. But he was a China hand. He'd been in China a good deal of the time. He spoke a little Chinese, but not enough to count.

Anyway, while in Delhi, Bowles's wife, whom I came to know through the Francis's, suggested to me that maybe I'd like to come to Delhi as China-affairs officer, to take Jake's place. I quietly told Bob Francis, "I don't want to create problems for you or for myself, but put the scotch on the idea. Bowles likes people who do just what they're told, and I'm having enough trouble with McConaughy. Bowles is bigger than McConaughy, in a way. I don't want to come here. I'll just stay where I am."

Anyway, while in Delhi, I'd talk about what was wrong in Pakistan, and the fact that Bhutto and the Chinese were getting closer. Delhi was getting intelligence about the situation in Pakistan. Aside from the intelligence, I was picking this up on my own. The intelligence reports coming in from the intelligence agencies were full of it. But it was all being pooh-poohed by Sneider and the ambassador. This stuff, that was in raw intelligence form, would come in but you couldn't write about it because they didn't want to give it any significance. At times, it appeared that the Department was playing the same game. This was crap.

In the meantime, I started taking pictures or having pictures taken for me of Chinese tanks coming in the back door in Karachi. Tanks and arms. I tried to get this out, but the ambassador wouldn't let me do anything with it. My cables, were changed and I'd just say, "Take my name off. I don't want my name on this stuff. A war is coming here, and it's being whipped up by the Chinese. Bhutto is involved with it." When you're in that

situation and nobody wants to send anything to Washington, you've got to be very careful about how you handle anything you learn, because they're liable to just try to screw it up.

It was at this point, after Bhutto had been to Africa and made a lot of statements that had created real problems for the United States, that the stuff hit the fan. Bhutto claimed that we were creating problems in Africa; he was helping the Chinese in their efforts at subversion there.

The Sindh Club was across the street from the embassy in Karachi. It was the club for the local gentry. Kreisberg, myself and a fellow named Dick Nyrop... (Nyrop was a gusty guy; I'll tell you a story about Nyrop and his courage.) The three of us were at the club when, in front of a bunch of Pakistani foreign ministry types, we called Bhutto some names. I forget what they were, but they weren't very pleasant names, and he's the foreign minister. Because of his lies and crap about the United States, none of us were very happy, and we were saying so.

Suddenly, a memo arrives at the embassy from the foreign ministry, declaring all three of us persona non grata and wanting us out of there in two weeks.

I remember McConaughy calling us all in; all three of us in a row like a bunch of lieutenants, as if saluting him, standing at attention in front of his desk. He read this letter to us and said, "Gentlemen, is there any truth to this?"

And we all piped up, "No, sir!", in unison. But we knew damn well it was true.

Within less than a week... By then, it was well known that I was Pir Pagaro's American hunting buddy. It was going on Christmas time. There was to be a new National Assembly election. It was a parliamentary system there. Bhutto had been going around bad-mouthing the United States, and yet Pakistan was very dependent on the United States for a lot of aid, its military aid, etc.

Suddenly, despite the fact we'd received a memo from the foreign ministry declaring me persona non grata, I received a telephone call from a friend of mine who was at Bhutto's estate inviting me, in the name of Mr. Bhutto, to come as soon as I can get there, for a prolonged hunt with the foreign minister on his estate at Larkana.

I went to see Sneider to tell him that I've received this invitation from Bhutto. I said, "You know, it's very interesting, Dick; I'm being invited to go hunting with the foreign minister at his estate, while at the same time, they've declared me persona non grata."

He looked at me and he said, "You telling me the truth? You're always coming up with these goddamn lies."

He'd cussed me out, called me a son of a bitch one time. I told him, "You do that again, and I'll break your jaw." I could get physical with enough provocation. Sneider just turned

me off. Here all this stuff was going in, all this work I was doing, and I wasn't getting any credit with the Department. (In retrospect, I question whether the Department was interested in the truth. I remember, when I reported in after returning from Karachi, how curt Carol Laise was to me when I called on her. It's my opinion now, that the powers that be there had their own agenda and the truth created problems for them.)

Sneider sent me in to the ambassador, and the ambassador said, "He's never invited me to go hunting. You're damn right, you go. Get there anyway you can, but you get there. I want to know what's going on."

Bhutto is the enemy of my good friend Pir Pagaro, so I wanted to check in with the Pir before I did anything. I call the Pir and ask to see him.

We got together and the Pir said, "I know about that invitation. I've got spies there. Don't worry, you'll not be seeing Bhutto right away. Bhutto's not there; he's off doing something. When you first get there, your host is going to be a man named Hukro. And Hukro is a dangerous person. He looks like a benign old man -- white hair, white beard -- but he has killed half a dozen men with his own hands. He's a dangerous guy. But his job is to entertain you until the foreign minister gets back. There'll be people in the room that belong to me, that are my people. So don't worry. Just go and have a good time. You'll learn something about what that place is like."

I called the airport (it's the Christmas season maybe mid-December) to charter a private plane. Everybody there at the airport was drunk. You could tell they were having a party. I couldn't get a private plane; the train was always booked, but, with enough bribe money, I bought my way onto the sleeper. I arrived at Larkana. The man who'd called me was there, a lieutenant in the Pak Air Force. The first day we went out hunting, I was worried. Frankly, I was scared. I was scared because here was this guy Bhutto (all the stories I'd heard about him) and then this guy Hukro. Bhutto wasn't there, but his wife was there. I was staying in the residence, in Bhutto's own home, in a guest bedroom. Pictures of Zhou En-lai and Mao Zedong were on the grand piano and thick Chinese carpets on the floor. Mrs. was very nice, as was their daughter who's now the prime minister.

Q: Benazir.

THOMAS: Benazir was then a little girl.

I'd hunted all over the Sindh, south of there. But this was up closer to Lahore, northern Sindh. We were hunting partridge that day, along with pigeons. I never shot pigeons, because I would never shoot anything I wouldn't eat. I didn't like squab, so I didn't shoot pigeons. But, I was shooting more cobras than I was shooting anything else. Blowing their heads off. They'd come up here, and they'd come up there, and boom, boom. Well, this was worrisome; how did so many cobras end up out here? It had never happened before. We shot some partridge that day, and I think I shot a few ring-necked pheasants. It

was to be the first day of the hunt. We went back and rested that evening; the next day was a better day.

The evening of the second day there was to be a party in our honor, which Hukro was to throw at one of the local restaurants. We were back from the hunt about four in the afternoon; my young host, who was about my age, was there, this lieutenant in the Pakistani air corps, a pilot. He said, "Look, these bastards are out to get you drunk tonight. You've got to watch. I've got a pound of butter here, and you and I are going to split the pound, and we're going to eat it with this loaf of bread. You grease everything." So that's what we did.

We went to the party; it was a girlie party with Sindhi dancing girls. There was a game they played while the girls danced. Your host or another guest standing behind you would hold money on your cheeks, and the girls would come by and dance in front of you, in low-cut dresses, and lean over you, and take the money away. It was belly-dancing, pretty sensuous. I called them the barefoot, dirty finger-nailed, pretty healthy looking "Sindhi Sexpots". They were prostitutes. ... and we'd all been drinking pretty heavily, with toasts and all this stuff. Going on the end of the evening, I looked down on my cheeks, and here's a lot of money on both cheeks. Somebody standing behind me with a nice chunk of money, Pak money. The most beautiful, gorgeous, voluptuous of these dancing girls was there in front of me, dancing. Instead of just taking the money, she had these two long ruby painted fingernails on each forefinger; as she took the money, she stabbed me in both cheeks with those fingernails. I had a big gash in both of my cheeks, like saber cuts; I bled like a stuck pig. My host made the comment, "I don't know about your country, Mr. Thomas, but when a woman does that in our country, there is only one cure." In other words, take her home to bed. I wasn't about to take that girl home to bed. I could see myself coming down with God knows what... So that didn't work, but...

Christmas was coming on, and I wanted to be with my family. I could see Bhutto wanted me there for two weeks, which would have been right through Christmas. Hunting wasn't that important to me, and I'd done what the ambassador told me, which was to go up there and find out what they were up to.

Talking to enough people up there, and listening to the drunken talk that was going on around me that night (although I wasn't sober, I was not as drunk as some of the other people I was listening to), I came to the conclusion that the foreign minister wanted to take me around personally, hunting, throughout the whole election district he was campaigning in, to show me off as his American connection, so that he had no worry about people thinking that the Americans were so anti-him because he'd made all these anti-American statements to get himself in with the Chinese. That was what he was using me for; that was the reason.

I suddenly announced that I had to leave because I had to get back to my family for the Christmas holidays. I thanked them for their... They got me a reservation back to Karachi.

On arrival at Karachi, it must have been six in the morning, the ambassador's car was waiting for me at the train station, with orders to take me directly to the residence. The ambassador was shaving when I arrived. The ambassador turned around and looked at me with these scars on my face; he said, "What the hell happened to you?" I told him the story of the dancing girl.

Then he asked, "What did your wife say?"

I said, "I haven't seen her yet."

He said, "I want to know what she says."

Anyway, I told him what I thought this was all about with Bhutto. That evening on arriving at a reception with my wife the ambassador spotted me coming in the door and signaled for me to join him. His first question was "What did your wife say?" "She said 'Are your Tetanus shots up to date?'" He roared, and noted that my wife was a pretty cool lady.

In the meantime, Pir Pagaro had someone in the foreign ministry who knew what was going on, and the Pir was passing that information to me. The Pir even offered to let me talk to this source, but I said I didn't want to. This person had seen a memo that discussed a letter of agreement between Pakistan and China, a secret letter of agreement that had to do with preparations for this war against India, in which China agreed to do certain things, and the Paks were working with the Chinese in terms of this.

I put this in a memo to the ambassador, that I'd heard this through one of my sources, but I couldn't tell him exactly where it came from except out of the foreign ministry.

I sent this, of course, through Sneider; Sneider was livid. That was the morning I threatened to knock his block off when he called me a son of a bitch because of this information. "You haven't got any proof. All you've got there are words in a memo , You sob!" Etc., etc.

"I've shown you pictures of tanks coming in here. I've shown you this; I've shown you that."

In the meantime, Jimmy Fancy came to me with the same facts, that there was a war coming; that China and Pakistan were planning to provoke it with India.

My tour was about over, coming close to an end. Fancy said to me, "Your leaving just at this time, it's terrible. You're the Chinese-affairs officer."

What happened concerned my daughter. The Department wanted me to stay longer. My daughter had been bitten by something; she started having convulsions.

The administrative officer there was of Filipino background, an ex-chief petty officer out of the Navy. He was typical of those who kiss ass above but would screw the secretaries and everybody that was junior. For example, he'd pay the officers' per diem to go up Islamabad on TDY. The embassy was getting ready to move, we were building a new embassy up north. Because of this, the staff had to go up there at times. The secretaries had to go there, but they weren't given per diem, yet the officers were. The secretaries needed it more than the officers.

The embassy doctor recommended that my daughter be taken to Frankfurt to be checked out in the hospital there because the local hospital was terrible...

But the son of a bitch refused to sign the orders.

When I heard this, I went in on a Saturday afternoon. He was in his office. He didn't know how to use the staff; he was always at his own typewriter, doing things. I said, "If you don't sign those orders, I'll spend the rest of my career getting your career." It was my daughter whose health was at stake in this situation.

He was livid. People usually didn't speak to him that way, because the administrative officer could create problems for you.

Well, he signed the orders, and my wife and daughter went off to Germany. But they still didn't cure her, and these convulsions would come and go. They had her on sedatives, some purple-colored stuff that would dope her out.

I wanted to get the hell out of there. My two years were up. The situation was dangerous, the embassy was blind, deaf and dumb, the family was too important to risk under such conditions . Even though the Department wanted me to stay on, I wasn't about to. There's a war coming, and nobody wanted to believe me.

Now here's the damnedest thing about this, in terms of the realities of what was happening in that embassy. Jimmy Fancy said, "Look, you're leaving within days on a ship." I was taking the Lloyd Trestino Lines out of Karachi. He said, "I want to throw a luncheon in your honor, I want you to bring several officers from your embassy to that luncheon, so I can get to know some of them. In order to keep your ambassador informed, somebody's got to take your place as my contact with the embassy. If we have a war with India, this could be terrible for everybody here, and ruin my business." He had a big industrial complex.

I said, "All right. Sure."

There were some CIA people in the building; there were the other political officers. I invited several from each group to go to that luncheon. Not one of those people wanted to go. I ended up at that luncheon alone. Not one of them would leave the embassy. They all used the excuse that they didn't want to be out of there. They wanted to be there because

the ambassador might need them. Christ, they weren't learning anything sitting in that embassy. The whole issue was: they knew where their bread was buttered. Being involved with the truth could be dangerous for one's career.

Now, a flashback, this one concerns a rather gusty guy named Nyrop... After I first arrived in Karachi, everyone was complaining about the commissary. The prices in the commissary were horrendous. Everybody in USAID (we had a big USAID mission there), clerks in the embassy , officers and wives complained about the terrible prices in the commissary.

Motor pool cars took us to the office in the morning and home at night. You never knew who was going to be in your car. It would be the head of the USIA one minute and a clerk the next time. I had a personal car, but most of the time, I left it home with my wife and rode in an embassy car, because she needed transportation for the kids to go to school.

I was in the car with the head of USIS, the deputy chief of the political section, and someone else, I think somebody from the CIA, and they were all complaining about prices in the commissary. I was brand new and listened but I decided to find out why the prices were so high.

I started making contacts within the American official community and asking questions. I soon located somebody in USAID who knew something. He said "If I give you a memo that I've gotten my hands on, that I'm not supposed to have, will you not let anybody know where you got it?"

I said, "You're damn right. Nobody'll know. I'll just say I got this memo."

This memo had been written for the ambassador by the administrative counselor concerning the commissary problem, the reason why prices had to be so high, and the fact that this was causing economic hardship for the whole staff. This had to be kept quiet because it was necessary to cover up the mistake made by the previous ambassador.

This memo pointed out that the previous ambassador to McConaughy, [William Manning Rountree]... a career type, who was, I gather, somewhat arrogant, had given away to the Pak Government the big warehouse and building which housed the commissary. The money to build these buildings on land owned by the United States government was the capital of the embassy community and not U.S. Government money. Without it the community had no real property against which it could borrow at reasonable rates for ordinary operating expenses. This capital represented the three or four or five hundred dollars each family put up on arrival, and you got it back when you left. It turned out that this ambassador had given away that building to the Pak government. So the capital for the embassy club was no longer there to borrow against. Therefore, we had to borrow at high interest rates. At the same time, the manager was buying all his stuff from one outfit in Texas, single source. There was some corruption, obviously, over that. But nobody wanted to talk about that aspect, because that's part of the... It appears the administrative

officers were tied in with that some way, but I couldn't prove that. But I did have a copy of this memo, with all the details.

I thermofaxed copies of this memo, enough for every officer attending the weekly staff meeting. All embassy officers were present. Before the meeting, I put one a copy at every place around the table and on every chair in the room.

The administrative counselor arrived saw the document; jumped up and said, " Who put this out?"

I raised my hand. He was livid. By then, a lot of people had read it. I said, "Obviously, something's got to be done about this commissary. It appears to be the fault of the administration."

The only person in that room who stuck with me in that fight (and a fight went on that morning) was this one junior political officer named Dick Nyrop. He stuck with me. Everybody else, including the senior officers and heads of other agencies all backed down.

From then on, they, at least, knew what had happened. I said, "From now on, gentlemen, I will manage to get my stuff my own way."

The commissary was trying to make most of profits on the liquor sales. We were paying a horrible price for liquor, compared to other embassies. I asked a British colleague to put in an order for me. I bought all of my liquor from the British from then on, just to get around that problem. By the case. You had to buy it that way rather than by the bottle.

This problem involving commissaries is endemic to the system. By the end of my career I had seen enough to come to that conclusion, but this occasion was the first lesson to me. As I remember it, the man running the commissary in Karachi had been in Afghanistan where he had been fired from that commissary. It was always these single source operations in which prices were too high. I felt there was some kickback going on in the system. I think it was bigger than one person. That's my feeling. Back in the Department, there was something wrong with that whole structure. But, without a full scale investigation by the I.G., who could say for sure?

Anyway, out of this, I was not popular with the administrative counselor, especially after I raised all this hell about sending my daughter out of country for treatment.

In the end, nobody came to the Fancy party, they knew what the ambassador didn't want to hear.

My last night there was a Friday night. We were boarding the ship on Saturday morning.

Q: This was what year?

THOMAS: In the fall, early September? of 1965. The war is imminent. The embassy is pretending it's not happening. I had pictures, and had shown them to the political chief, of tanks being brought in. The intelligence people are talking about it, but you couldn't get the embassy...

McConaughy felt (according to feedback within the embassy) that if he admitted that Pakistan our ally, a member of both CENTO and SEATO, was in bed with Communist China, he could not compete with Bowles in Delhi. He didn't want this. He was keeping Pakistan in our court. Pakistan was in our court, and that was that. They weren't in with the Chinese Communists. That was the gospel. He was in a state of denial and self delusion.

It was very obvious that it wasn't going off that way.

The night before we were to leave, there were a lot of parties in our honor around the community. I'd gotten to know the Brits and the French and everybody. We had this China Club the members of which were for the most part the ambassadors or DCM's who had become personal friends.

Before we went to the parties, I got a call from Pir Pagaro. He said, "Look, you plan to come here last thing, after all your parties are over. Plan to stay all night, because I've got something I want to give you as a going-away present. I'd like to help your career."

I said, "Okay."

Well, it turned out the Pir had been called in two days earlier by the general staff of the Pak army and asked to sit in on the general staff meetings of the planning for the war. The Pir didn't approve of this war. But they wanted to use his bandit people, the Hurs, who also lived part of the time in India...nomadic.

Q: This was going to be the Sindh War, wasn't it?

THOMAS: The Sindh War, yes. It went off up in Karachi and in Kashmir and in the Sindh and across in to the Punjab.

Q: It was sort of called the Sindh War.

THOMAS: The Sindh War, '65. Anyway, it was close to Lahore, where the... and then in the Sindh. Well, the whole thing was planned, and they wanted the Pir to use his people as guerilla fighters. He was given the whole battle plan, when things were to start, the order of battle i.e. where the troops were, etc. for him to study and have for his use, so that he understood.

He said, "Here, now you copy this down. I can't let you have this, but you copy all this you want to."

I copied. I spent all night copying this damn thing, making drawings, quick drawings, putting troops where they were, and the whole damned battle plan.

I hadn't had any sleep. At six in the morning, I put the plan into my safe in the political section. It's a Saturday morning. I wrote a big sign telling the reader to get the security officer and have him open it and read the document inside. It was very important. Right on the safe, big sign.

After I got back to the Department, I learned that stuff never was sent to Washington. The whole battle plan we had ahead of time never got out of that embassy.

Along with this information that I had learned from the Pir and some of his connections, I also learned that this was not just to be a war in Pakistan, this was to be the start of a move to force America out of the Far East.

In other words, if this effort had been successful, it was only the first part of a total plan whereby there was to be a coup in Indonesia, which was to overthrow the right wing. You had a right wing and a left wing in Indonesia. But the left wing, the Communists, were to overthrow the right wing and move on Malaysia and move also on Vietnam, because we were having problems in Vietnam. This was '65. At the same time, they were going to get the North Koreans to move into South Korea. This was to be the first move in a broad scale effort all over Asia to force the Americans out of Asia. You know, the domino thing. All of this was being planned in Beijing.

This was not something that my ambassador wanted to hear anything about.

We boarded the ship. As it turned out, due to our socializing there, we'd gotten to know, but not realized it, the agent for Lloyd Tristino. He'd been to our home many times, and I never even thought of him. So when we decided to go by ship, I asked the travel section in the embassy to get me my reservations. Suddenly, I received a call from this guy, and he said, "You know, I'm their agent here."

I said, "Oh, I'd forgotten that."

He said, "You know your government's rules. You're going on that ship, but you're not going to have confirmation until the last minute, because you're going to have the best cabin on the ship."

It ended up, we did. It was right at the center of the ship, so the rest of the ship rolls around that position.

The voyage began in Yokohama and went all the way through to Venice; Karachi was the halfway point. The Captain's Ball was the night after we left Karachi. For my wife and me, this was our first social event aboard, all dressed up in tuxedo and fancy gown.

At the Captain's Ball, they gave away the captain's prize of a jeroboam of champagne to the winner of the elimination dance. The elimination dance was done using a bingo machine, if the number pasted to your lapel came up, you sat down. We were out there dancing, with a number on my lapel, suddenly one of the stewards came up and changed my number. I didn't even think anything about it. We're dancing along, and the numbers keep falling, and we keep dancing and we keep dancing and we keep dancing. At the end, we're the only ones left standing. So they deliver the jeroboam of champagne.

Most of the dance music being played all evening long was typical rock and roll music of the ''60s. Well, I had been dancing with this Italian crowd in Karachi, including this guy (he was an Italian) who was representing Lloyd Tristino at the local hotels. I would dance with the wives, and they all liked Viennese waltzing. I can waltz and many men don't. I learned this as a young man at military school. Many people there knew I could waltz, and my wife and I waltzed often in the ball rooms of the local hotels. They then announced, "Would the winner of the jeroboam of champagne lead off the next dance?" And guess what they played the minute we got up? A waltz, the first that evening. Of course, that tipped us that this was all set up. It was a setup.

Q: Well, why don't we stop at this point. You left in '65, and you were coming back to the Department.

Today is the 17th of April, 1995. This is also income tax day, because it's a Monday. Fred, we've got you leaving Pakistan in 1965. Then whiter?

[THOMAS: In retrospect, to this point in my career, I had served in two posts as a political officer, Korea and Pakistan. In both, one faced the same problem, a lack of integrity by those in positions of power to attempt to report honestly because it either would not be welcome in Washington or it would, in the eyes of our ambassador, reflect badly on his tenure. It appears that the development of a rational effective foreign policy, based on the realities of a situation, has become the hostage of dogmatically conceived views which have been concocted to serve the narrow economic interests of the "Establishment".]

THOMAS: I returned to the department, and was told that I would be given a posting someplace in the Far East where, after all that work in language school, I could use my Chinese. Every time they went to send me someplace, there was somebody willing to quietly shoot it down. But, as you can imagine, from what I have said so far, I was not the most political guy in the world when it came to bucking the bureaucracy. I realized that, but I had a philosophy that I had to live with, that I was brought up with, and it made it impossible for me to play the smart bureaucratic game. Therefore you do step on some toes when you call a spade a spade. And every time they kept turning... And so I sat in

limbo for about a year here, in sort of never-never land, just going into the office. It was like after all of us who left Vietnam, later. But in this case, it wasn't because there weren't enough jobs, it was that the jobs they had in mind kept falling through.

At last, I said, "Look, if this is going to continue, I've got kids and a wife, and I can't stay in limbo any longer. Let's give me a job."

There was an outfit known as the Office of Strategic Research, in the Department, and it had a function. There was a man whom I'd known. I'm trying to think of his name now. You know, names, after this many years... James, Jim.

As a flashback, he had been chief of the political section while I had been a student in Taiwan. And I had been told that I was going to be pulled out of language school there and sent to him to do what they call the political/military job, because they had to rewrite the Status of Forces Agreement there. I put up a hell of a fight, saying I hadn't come to this language school to have it interrupted, and I didn't want to do that, and if they insisted I come there right away, I'd just resign from the whole shebang. And so, when I said that, I remember the ambassador, Drumright, called me in. He had heard what I'd had to say, and he said, "All right, I'll give you three more months down there. In three months, you're to be up here," from the language school into that job. Well, by the time the three months were up, thank God they'd found somebody else to fill it, and I didn't have to go.

Anyway, he was back here and he was chief of the political section there, and we got to know each other, and I liked him; he liked me.

Q: Chief of the political section in this Office of Strategic Research?

THOMAS: No, he was in the Office of Strategic Research, one of the senior people in it by then. He said, "Fred, you've got an engineering degree, and we need somebody with an electrical engineering degree." At this time, they were spending gobs of money on the McNamara Line.

Q: Oh, yes. You might explain what the McNamara Line was.

THOMAS: They were designing electronics and all type devices to decide whether the Communists were coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and what was coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. It was massive amounts of money. I was shocked when I got into this.

They needed somebody who could understand the jargon of engineering, and somebody who had some imagination, who could take and look at a thing and determine its significance to the State Department and to the policy makers.

Out of this office, they had to have a couple of people who ran around doing liaison with the national security agencies -- Defense; State; CIA; NSA; the Energy Department; anything that had to do with highly classified projects. But the biggest one was DARPA,

which was the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency of the Defense Department. They were spending the most money. You had naval research doing some. You had the DS&T in the CIA, the Division for Science and Technology or something. And then you had people out at NSA who were working on projects. But, fundamentally, most of the time was spent with DARPA, running around looking at all the latest things going on.

I received more clearances than you can shake a stick at. I don't want to go into them all, but there were more clearances than most people ever need, mostly scientific-type clearances. I soon realized there were many levels of SI clearances, and I received many levels of them. I'd had the normal levels, but...

Anyway, off I go to look at all this stuff, trying to define it and what it meant. It was very interesting, but it wasn't a good career job for a State officer. You had a lot of clearances, and you saw a lot of things, and it was sort of fun. It was like being dumped as a Class I into being an aide or POLAD to one of the generals or admirals in the DOD. It's nice and it's pleasant, but you're not going any place out of that type job.

I can go into some things, but some things I'm sure are still classified. But I do know that I was not there to come up with ideas. With a thinking mind and an engineering degree, listening to people and watching what was going on, the first thing I noted, coming out of a military family, was this concept of engineers designing things that were completely over-engineered that it considered nothing but technology not only to design it, build it, and use it, but to put it in place. So this meant that whatever they wanted to plant had to be able to take nine Gs. They dropped it to the ground from up in the air, on bombing runs.

Q: They were basically like sending sensors down with a spike at the bottom.

THOMAS: Yes, that's right. I said, "This is crazy. First of all, these are seismic, or they're magnetic, or they're this, or they're that. But the average commander in the field is not going to believe beeps coming in. You know, a beep that's louder or a beep that's smaller, does it mean a truck? Does it mean a tank? This just doesn't go over." I said, "You've got to come up with something that shows him what's happening."

Out of this came a concept for which I was the idea man, the pusher and locator of money for the project. It was to look at things and send a visual image to a command center.

First of all, they starting looking at things with television cameras. Television cameras eat up a lot of power, especially the old-fashioned vidicom tubes. There was no way that you were going to put anything out in the jungle that could look at a jungle trail, where you had all that data that you had to send back, and do it with batteries using a vidicom tube. It was just impossible, powerwise.

I then started asking about solid-state sensors, which are light sensitive, that will tell what's going by them. The idea I came up with was the idea of what you call a solid-state

line array of sensors with a set of several sensors to the right and left which were to act as switches to turn on and off the full array. It was vertical in configuration, with a lens in front of it, looking out at a scene. It had a sweep circuit on it that swept the vertical line of sensors.(The flanking switch sensors turned on the sweep circuit and the full array.) Solid-state sensors don't take a lot of power. They're not like a vidicom tube. With a focusing lens in the front of them, they can be focused on. These trip sensors or switches said, turn on. The whole device is not truly on; just the switches or trip sensors that are monitoring the field of view. The trip sensor would then turn on a sweep circuit on the real sensor the minute it felt motion in front of it. Motion in front of it going this way, there was sweeping going this way, you'd create the...

Q: One of your hands is going vertically, and the other is going horizontally.

THOMAS: The horizontal is the vehicle moving, and the vertical is the sensor cutting that vehicle up. Because the vehicle is moving at such a slow speed, even going 60 miles an hour, if it were, but on jungle trails it was going 20, slow speed compared to electrical speed, it takes a very what they call narrow-band width in electronics to send that data. And a narrow-band width doesn't take much power to send out.

Do you follow this?

Q: Yes.

THOMAS: Well, because it doesn't take much power, it could be brought into a very low-level signal device that could send out that signal, and even encode it, and you could pick it up at a fair distance and keep relaying it. When it hit what they call a holding oscilloscope, the holding oscilloscope would take that and, with the sweep-circuit notches that go on each end of this, could tell that circuit to take each one of these and stack them, one against another, on the tube. And when it does that, suddenly you end up with a picture of what went by there. Okay? But it can be done with very low light levels. and with very low demands on power.

But this, therefore, meant you needed a combination of things. You couldn't just drop it into the ground. You needed people to deliver it and put it in place.

The CIA, at that time, was running all these little brown people, called the Montagnards, as trail watchers, trying to just mark down notches on a piece of paper as they saw something go by and come back. Well, that had its limitations, because nobody wanted to believe these guys.

But if you could put something like that in a tree, overlooking a trail, with a transmitter in it, which was properly packaged to withstand the weather, you could look at that trail and, in real time, see what was going down it, off at some command post someplace.

This was my contribution to the concept. But it was pretty late in the game by then. It was about 1968 when I came up with this idea; by then, the elections were...

Q: We were pulling out.

THOMAS: Conceptually, this whole thing went on to be used in some of the more sensitive projects of...

Q: Satellites.

THOMAS: Satellites and all that.

But that was my one contribution to this job, except finding it fascinating to run around to all these labs. I went to the Bell Labs, I went to Xerox. I saw everything in this country.

But then it made for real problems for me later, because when that job finished up, they decided that I needed to be civilized. I'd been in East Asia too long, and they were going to give me a nice tour in Europe.

It started out with a concept of sending me to Switzerland. I started doing some studies on Switzerland, and I saw at that time some data coming out of a Swiss magazine that had been published at the Osaka Trade Fair that pointed out that, in the previous year, 65 percent of all funds invested in all U.S. markets (not just stock markets; in all markets) had come through Swiss accounts. And this struck me as having long-term, very dangerous financial implications for the health of the world economy. Too much money going into too few hands, because it would be untaxed.

Looking into the reasons why, I wrote a paper pointing out the history of the issue - President Johnson in the mid ‘60s became very upset about American investment money moving abroad. Back when he first took over as president, he laid down some laws, or got some things put through to limit that investment, in terms of American dollars. It was that action that really created the Euro-dollar market. That's what started it all. The big money in the world was not being taxed while moving through Europe. I outlined what I saw of the history and how this thing developed, and suggested what was probably going to happen in time if this continued. We truly needed to look at what was happening in Switzerland more deeply.

My paper, caused questioning by the economics people. I guess this wasn't the thing to be saying, because suddenly my job was switched from Switzerland; I was to go to the political section in Bonn as what they called the Asian guy, working for Jock Dean.

Q: That's John Gunther Dean.

THOMAS: Yes. He had a brother, David, who was a Chinese linguist. I was going to go to work in his political section. I heard some real horror stories about how he was a real martinet to work for. I wasn't too happy about this, but that's the way life is.

Suddenly, the Magnuson Bill blew up in everybody's face. This was a bill in which they wanted to take the commercial work away from the State Department and give it to the Department of Commerce. I'd been a political officer until then, and suddenly there was something put through in the Department that took 100 political slots worldwide and made them commercial officers, in order to save the commercial work for the Department of State. It turned out that the job I was to go to ended up being one of them. I ended up, at the last minute, being assigned to Bonn as a commercial officer, to try to increase American exports, etc., to Germany.

Q: I always like to get the dates. You were in Bonn from when to when?

THOMAS: From 1970 to 1972. So I took a German-language course and was shipped off to Bonn. But, before I could go, I sat in a hotel, because they kept canceling. Every time I was to go, they'd cancel. We sat in a hotel I don't know how many weeks, because I had all these clearances, and nobody would let me go on any plane. In the end, I'm sure the plane they put me on was one of these... You know, there was all this kidnaping or hijacking of planes at that time. My orders were to get off the plane in Frankfurt and take the train north. I think they had sky marshals on that specific flight. So we went to Frankfurt.

Q: We're speaking of an era when there were a lot of hijacking, and there was concern about anybody with clearances or who had access to information that might end up in the hands of one of these terrorist groups.

THOMAS: They had their connections with the Soviets.

Q: They might have had their connection with somebody.

THOMAS: I was told I couldn't go into Eastern Europe; I couldn't go into East Berlin. I could go to Berlin, but I had to go on the train. There were certain rules I had to live by.

The commercial people in Bonn were great to me. I didn't know what the hell I was doing; it was a new thing for me. I looked at it like a political officer looks at things, I wasn't looking at it in the normal commercial officer's way. They were used to putting on trade shows and filling out all these forms. All that bored the hell out of me, so I started trying to figure out new ways to get the German government to help with our balance-of-payments problems.

I remember going around trying to sell the Bundesbahn on buying American toilet paper. They called me the toilet paper man. Then and probably now its "sandpaper" in the "roll" of toilet paper on the German trains. It became my mission to sell American toilet paper

in order to service the bottoms of the burghers who rode the Bundesbahn. What an ambition!

Anyway, I set up a series of conferences between the American PX system there, buyers, and the big German department stores.

The bureaucratic politics, which is important in such situations, involved the counselor of embassy for commercial affairs, who was a temporary appointee from the Department of Commerce. Then there was the commercial attaché and an assistant commercial attaché, who were both State officers; both owed their careers to the Department of Commerce and had been looked after by them. I was a commercial officer, but I had no connection with the Department of Commerce. Heading the whole economic-commercial section was the minister for economic and commercial affairs, Chuck Wootton, a State officer. He looked on me as being the person to look after State's interests in this situation, as compared to these other fellows. Therefore, he was more than happy to give me support for my rather unorthodox ideas. Because of my previous job, I was interested in high-technology sales opportunities. But Pollack, who was the...

Q: Herman Pollack.

THOMAS: He ran the science attaché department in the Department. He wanted nothing to do with commercial things. He wanted his science attachés to be strictly academic, doctorates, you know. The science attaché in Bonn had his doctorate. We hit it off, we were both hunters. He said "Come along. I'm not allowed to be commercial; you can be the commercial side of the science office." So, I joined the science attaché club and got to know a good many people that way. At the same time I was trying to drum up new business.

My big break came. The economic minister assigned me to fill in for him when he did not have the time to represent the Ambassador at various functions. This was due to the fact that the commercial counselor was an introvert, a nice, intelligent man, but very introverted. He couldn't go out and make a speech, so they had me going out and making speeches at these openings of American plants. The ambassador would be invited, but he didn't have the time; the job went to the minister; if he couldn't go, I ended up doing it. Out of this, I got the impression that we were building a hell of a lot of fully owned American plants there in Germany. At about the same time, Mansfield, back here in the Senate, was raising all type hell about pulling American troops out of Europe. This was worrying the hell out of the Germans.

Q: There was a Mansfield amendment that went on and on all the time. Michael Mansfield, the senator from Montana.

THOMAS: Yes, that's right. One evening, there was a dinner party; at that party was a senior official from the finance ministry. I was seated next to him at the dinner table. I started talking about the fact that they were allowing the Americans to build all these

plants there, obviously hopeful that this would create some political pressure to protect their investment. I said, "Really, that doesn't do it. You'd be much better off to have your German companies going to the right districts in the United States, where there were senators who sat on the appropriate committees, and having factories in those districts exporting things to Germany; let's say, car parts that were used in automobiles that were made here, under license. You'd get much more political leverage that way."

This guy listened to me, and a few days later, I received a call from him; could he bring some people over to call on me at the embassy, from the ministry. They came and we discussed the idea in depth.

I went to see my State boss, the minister, and explained what I'd said and what had happened. He got all excited, he offered to sponsor a conference in his office for the next meeting. The Germans had said they were going to call me again.

The next call came from a couple of them wanting to come with some people from Volkswagen. It seems that the German government owns a chunk of Volkswagen stock. The Volkswagen people, after listening to us, said, "We don't want to do this directly, but we export a lot of cars to the United States. Because we buy a lot of parts from Bosch, we're going to ask Bosch to look into having some parts, which we use in our Volkswagens, made in the States."

Bosch came around. Then I sent off my cable to the Department of Commerce. Boy, was I doing great stuff! The minister, Chuck Wootton, was pleased with it all. It proved State officers could really do commercial work. We were getting something done.

It all looked very good until about six weeks later, when the people from Bosch returned and came to call. I said, "What's wrong?"

They said, "We went around to these various companies that make auto parts. Nobody was willing to build stuff to our specifications. They wanted to continue to build this junk they build, that lasts two years and is shot. They refused to go along with our approach to what we wanted built under our name."

I said, "If that's the case, then you better plan on putting in your own factory."

They said, "We'll consider that."

That was the start to Bosch's entry into manufacturing in this country. It had that political basis.

Q: That's very interesting.

THOMAS: Out of this, the minister gave me the job of running a big benefit to make money for the school.

Q: You're talking about the American community school.

THOMAS: Yes. And so I said, If he'd let me run it my way. He said, "You run it any way you want."

I knew the big contracts there were let by the U. S. military, and that many of the American business people's children went to our school. I also knew that if this effort was to be successful, I needed them on board. The minister had made me chairman of this American School Benefit Committee. I went and enlisted as co-chairman, a colonel who, with his German born wife, were very socially active among the German community. He was the senior colonel on General Mearns's MAG staff. Mearns and I were good friends. He was a West Pointer, and he knew my family. So I'd gotten to know him well; he'd introduced me to a lot of Germans to go hunting, and gotten me a jagdschein.

Q: Jagdschein being a hunting license.

THOMAS: And very hard to come by.

Q: Oh, yes.

THOMAS: I enlisted Colonel DeSanto to become the co-chairman. He got some of his junior officers to become the administrative workhorses for this effort. In the end, we made a lot of money. We gave away a car, and we gave away a lot of other things at this banquet. Ford gave us an automobile to give away in a raffle; it was a big moneymaker.

Out of this, I'd become somewhat popular with the school administration. Chuck Wootton wanted me to re-up and stay on. But I wanted to get back to East Asia and Chinese, because here China had just opened up.

Q: Nixon had made his visit there in, what was it?

THOMAS: In 1971. China had opened up. I'd learned Chinese, and I wanted to get back to East Asia and China. In response to every inquiry, came the answer that all the slots were already filled. You've been away from the China crowd for a while. You'll have to come back and do your stint in Vietnam. Because that's where everybody was going. So I thought, well, that's fine.

I gave up this pleasant job, drinking wine on the Rhine and going around Germany and having a good time. Relatively, it was the most pleasant post I've ever had. It wasn't high excitement, but it was fun.

I came back to the States; was put through French-language school and sent off to Vietnam.

Q: You served in Vietnam from when to when?

THOMAS: From '73 to '75. I got there, and I was, first of all...

Q: When did you get there in '73?

THOMAS: Spring of '73. They not only sent me to learn French, but they also sent me to the consular course here in the Department. I was to be the supervising consul in Saigon. I didn't look forward to that.

Q: You're talking to the man who was the consul general in Saigon.

THOMAS: Is that right?

Q: Yes. I was there '69-'70.

THOMAS: Is that right? I was to go there at that time. It was a "rule or law based" job, and I didn't want it. Then suddenly it was changed to my being one of a group of officers to replace those assigned to the ICCS liaison office. They'd had a group in there on TDY, four officers, to handle this function, and the last of them was leaving just as I got there. He was the only one left. I got there and had a week's overlap with him.

Q: Could you explain what the ICCS is.

THOMAS: The ICCS was set up by the Paris conference in February of that year to oversee the keeping of the peace. It had four member states in it, each headed by an ambassador, with a general officer. Each delegation consisted of about 200-250 people. We're talking about 1,000 people in total. It started out with the Canadians and the Indonesians being the Western representatives, and the Hungarians and the Poles being the Communist representatives in this organization. You know, Communist. The guy I was replacing, he wasn't much help to me. He was too busy going to parties in his honor and leaving. I was not to be the boss man. The boss I awaited was a man named Pratt Byrd. I don't know if you know Pratt.

Q: Yes, I do.

THOMAS: Well, Pratt was to be boss; there was also to be a junior officer assigned, total of three people and a secretary. Pratt was leaving his wife in the States. I'd left my wife here. On the way out there, I had heard that there had been one officer in the political section, who was a Chinese linguist, who was leaving just as I was arriving, who had been allowed to keep his family on Taiwan. But Taiwan was a place where only AID people were generally kept. State people were kept in Bangkok. I wanted to keep mine, for Chinese-language reasons, on Taiwan. If I was going to run back and forth, it'd help my Chinese. My wife spoke Chinese. It'd be just more pleasant. On the way out, I stopped

at the embassy there in Taiwan and went to the AID people and tried to talk them into letting me be there. They didn't want to do it. The embassy in Taiwan wasn't much help.

I arrived in Saigon. We had an acting ambassador at the time. He was leaving, and our new ambassador hadn't arrived yet; everything was in limbo until Martin arrived.

Q: Graham Martin.

THOMAS: I went to see him about trying to put my family in Taiwan, and ask for his help. He said, "Well, wouldn't you like to bring your family here?"

No families with school age children had been allowed.

I said, "Why sure."

He said, "If you can get your kids in this local school, I'll let you bring your family."

This was a breakthrough.

I went around to see the Phoenix school people. It was a little school run by the missionaries, and they agreed to let my kids in. The minute I got there, they said, "We can't handle very many, but we'll let your children in." I got a piece of paper from them saying so.

Thus the ambassador authorized the Department to cut orders for my wife and children to come to Saigon. I went to Hong Kong to meet them on their way out.

In the meantime, Pratt Byrd arrived. But he wasn't bringing his wife; she was going to stay in the States. We were just starting to roll.

First of all, you have to understand that the ICCS office there was not popular. We were given what had been the administrative counselor's office, on the first floor of the embassy because we had to have access to these four delegations. Also, they didn't want them to go where there was anything classified. So the first-floor big office suite for the administrative counselor was turned over to us. Pratt and I shared those quarters. There were four offices: three smaller offices and the big office, which was also a conference room. The secretary had the office between mine and Pratt's, the junior officer had the office behind mine and Pratt had the big one, the conference room.

We stocked the refrigerator with booze. It was a different type operation than you usually have because the Hungarians and Poles drink in the middle of the day.

We decided to throw a party. Pratt asked me if I could finance it. At the time, I thought I could, until we got paid off by the embassy. He said, "But if we go ask permission, they're not going to give it to us because you know what they think about us."

First of all, the ambassador didn't like the ICCS; he made it very clear. He didn't like the concept of the ICCS; he didn't like these Communists who were there. It was that type situation. He had arrived subsequent to the arrival of each of the ambassadors who headed each of the ICCS delegations. According to protocol, he's to call on them; they're not to call on him. He was damned if he was going to call on any of them. You can understand the problems, from a diplomatic standpoint.

Q: Oh, yes.

THOMAS: And then you had four generals.

We had a military attaché, Colonel Charles Wahle. I got to know him well, and we became good friends. The air attaché, Colonel Garvin McCurdy, and I became friends.

At the first party we held, we invited the diplomatic corps, the press corps, or a big percentage of it. We invited every officer from the ICCS, both military and civilian, that was available, and all their female clerks. We invited a smattering of people from various sections of the embassy. And, of course, other diplomats from all the embassies. We borrowed the military attaché's house, which had been Westmoreland's mansion. If you know Saigon, you know that big mansion Westmoreland had.

Q: I never went there.

THOMAS: You know it sat on a... It had a porte-cochère and big rooms, and it was great for throwing parties. We borrowed it to throw this party. We hired a dance orchestra that played Myer Davis... style music. I enlisted the guy that ran the ICCS club to cater it, on the basis there was not to be any profit. I'd help him, look after him, but no profit. He agreed to this. You didn't take a loss, but no profit. In the end, I think it cost about $1,250 for this party of about 300 people.

I submitted the bill, but nobody was willing to pay it. They gave us $200. I was out $1,000 at this point. You know, I just sat there on this $1,000. I said to Pratt, "You got any money?"

He said, "No. You know, I've got kids in college."

I said, "Well, maybe I've got to swallow this one."

In the meantime, the party was a real success.

As a matter of fact, the New York Times correspondent who was there made the crack to Pratt Byrd that he never saw so many spooks dancing with so many spooks in all his life. You know, the place was just loaded with all these people spying on each other.

Then the chief of station came around and wanted to know when we were going to throw another party like that one. So did the Colonel Wahle the senior military attaché, come around. I said, "I can't afford to throw parties like that. Nobody's paying for it."

Our boss was Joe Bennett, and Bennett said, "Well, I can get you $200." But, what's $200 to $1,250? Joe was the minister for political affairs.

It was interesting, in the end, the military attaché tried throwing a similar party, and none of these people would come to his party. We're talking ICCS Communists.

The CIA station chief tried to throw a similar party; none of these people would come to his party. I mean a few, but just the top. And they wanted more than the top.

When they had their parties they fell on their faces. They made it so obvious that they were targeting the communist delegations... nobody came except the usual senior types.

So then they came to us, both of them, with a chunk of money, and said, "Here's your $1,000. When are you going to have another party?"

I said, "I want it up front."

During our tour there until the fall of Saigon, we threw, I think, two or three of those big parties, which got people together that you couldn't get out of the woodwork otherwise. You never would have met them.

Q: What was your impression? Here was this outfit, the ICCS, which was supposed to make sure that the truce held and that...

THOMAS: Oh, it was a spying mission for the Communists. In the end, the Canadians backed out, and the Iranians came in and took their place.

I had to travel frequently, going around to all these different bases. Out of this, I received quite an education as to what was really going on in Vietnam. In the evening, when I'd be out at these various places all over the country, I would go to the local American sponsored bar where the young men (because everybody was there alone pretty much) hung out, these State, AID, and CIA people all there, and talk to them about what they were doing and what was happening out there. You know, things weren't going well; it was pretty obvious, talking to these young people.

For the record, there was one major incident which fully illustrates the extremes we were willing go to kid ourselves about the truth of the situation in Vietnam. There was a report of a mortar shelling of a grammar school yard full of playing children down in the Canto area. The South Vietnamese government blamed the communists. The ICCS investigated and said it was the South Vietnamese Army which had been responsible. The embassy took the position that these children' deaths were due to the communists. The pressure

was on our office to give the ICCS hell. Pratt was drafting a memo to that effect. In Germany my wife and I had become friends with a couple who worked for the CIA through my wife's involvement with the local women's club. This CIA officer was by then in Saigon. Because his wife wasn't there, we would invite him to our home for diner occasionally. We were working late the evening that all of this was happening when he dropped by my office. Off the record, he told me he had just been with a high ranking Vietnamese agent who had told him that the mortar shell had been fired by mistake by the South Vietnamese Army. None of this ever came out at the country team meeting. The embassy continued to insist that the communists were responsible. Pratt Byrd and I shut up on that topic fast. We quit blaming the communists.

We paid all the bills for the ICCS through our embassy liaison office. These countries weren't paying for this; this was part of the agreement. Other people were supposed to kick in money, but nobody was but us. Since it was Kissinger's idea, we, in the end, put up all the money. We contracted for more airplanes from Air America than CIA did. I think about two-thirds of Air America was under contract to ICCS.

Q: Air America was renowned as being a CIA operation, although it was a commercial operation.

THOMAS: But we leased and had the ICCS insignia on these airplanes. More of their airplanes were flying missions for ICCS than were flying for AID; they also flew for AID. There was an AID office responsible for air operations, and the same for CIA. But we had most of them.

Q: But, as a practical matter, the North Vietnamese knew what was going on in South Vietnam. Obviously, they were getting good information.

THOMAS: Yet they were using these Communists delegations for quick passage of information.

Q: But I'm just trying to figure out what a Pole or a Hungarian could really contribute.

THOMAS: Communication facility. Speedy communication. That was really what they were contributing. Admittedly, they didn't know. They were like a lot of Americans. But they could move information (because they had the right to move information) much faster. It'd go to Europe and come right back.

In time, we had a situation grow up there in which the ambassador's daughter became a close friend or knew... Well, let's put it this way, the Iranian ambassador, an older man in his ‘50s, had married a younger woman, a British young woman, who had been working for the British Embassy in Rome where they met. She was a pretty blonde; she was his third wife, I think. Martin had, I think, been posted to Rome.

Q: He'd been ambassador to Rome, and, I think, had also been administrative officer in Rome. So he was an old Roman hand.

THOMAS: That's right. Well, his daughter had become a close friend of this young woman when she worked for the British Embassy in Rome while they were there. And she had been working for MI6 in Rome.

Q: Which is...

THOMAS: British secret intelligence. She then married this Iranian ambassador who was sent out to be ambassador to the ICCS for the Iranians. Here she was running around with the ambassador's daughter in Saigon. The Iranian ambassador wanted to socialize with our ambassador, but our ambassador refused. He didn't want to set a precedent, because he didn't want to do any business with any of these other ambassadors, especially the two Communist ambassadors.

An Indonesian ambassador, who'd been there since the beginning, wanted to socialize with our ambassador. He couldn't call on him, because for protocol reasons, he couldn't do that. He made it pretty obvious to me that he felt that this was wrong. He wanted to have a party in the ambassador's honor and have me and Pratt Byrd there.

First of all, the word got around through the ICCS that Pratt (whose wife wasn't there; he was running back to the States regularly to see his family; he spoke both Hungarian and Indonesian) was a spook. Therefore, people were more willing to deal with me, in terms of the diplomatic problems, than they were with Pratt. He was in and out of there, and so I was in charge a for extended periods regularly.

Q: One of the big problems in Vietnam was the fact that we had these R&R trips out, and people's tours were relatively short, so it was a little hard to keep a contact with anybody there.

THOMAS: That's right. I was there, and I was doing all the entertaining for the office in my home, the dinner parties and all that stuff. The ambassador wasn't entertaining any of these people. Any entertaining of their ambassadors, we did.

Q: Moving away from the social side...

THOMAS: But it made a difference in terms of who got to know what and who got to hear what. In the end, the social thing made for who was telling who what, and who was learning what was going on, and what, in the end, happened as we got further into the problem of the ICCS; what it ended up being able to do for us, which was never clearly understood by the ambassador or by the embassy as a whole. The communist delegations were there doing what you could expect them to do, from the Communist side. They were acting as a communication link for their espionage systems back to Saigon, and a very good one.

In the meantime, one learned a lot about these Communist people, and you learned many of them weren't very happy with the Russians. If you got to be friendly with some of them, got to know some of them, they could be helpful to us, in an informal, but very important, way. And that's, in essence, what happened in the end.

But I was starting to tell this story because the social things that occurred caused many problems, and it had an effect on my relationship with various people in that embassy.

Consequently, I sat down and wrote a memo. Pratt was out of the country. The Indonesian ambassador was pushing me for this dinner party for our ambassador. Our ambassador sent word back to me that, no, just have him come in and call on me. Well, I knew I couldn't say that, because you just couldn't do that. It was against protocol. Anybody doing the calling would be our ambassador. I wrote a memo explaining all this to our ambassador, and sent it through Joe Bennett, and a drop copy to the then deputy chief of mission, who was a quiet sort of man who didn't like rocking the boat. He was Wolf Lehmann's predecessor.

Then the ambassador decided he wanted to have a meeting. Pratt got back, and he wanted to have a meeting with the two of us. Since Pratt didn't know about my memo, the ambassador asked me, about the word he sent down to me "What about this meeting that I suggested you have him come in and call on me?"

I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, didn't you get my memo?"

He said, "What memo?"

I looked at the DCM and the chief of the political section, "Didn't you give him my memo?" Never got past them. They were scared to send it to him.

I explained what was in it.

It became obvious that I couldn't go through these guys and get anything done because they were scared of the ambassador.

Q: He was an interesting person, let's put it this way. A very difficult person.

THOMAS: He turned to me and said, "You're right. I can't do that."

When I explained what was in the memo, he agreed with me.

Nothing came of it all. But because of his daughter's relationship with the Iranian ambassador's wife he started seeing the Iranian ambassador on the q.t. This caused all type problems for us with the Indonesian ambassador. But he'd only see him once in a while, because he said this was going to cause too many problems.

Most of the information that we were getting about what was happening in the ICCS came from the Iranian ambassador who was a smart cookie.

At the same time, through contracts the ICCS had, its own communications net, a telephone system that was separate from both the military and Vietnamese civil systems, both micro wave and regular land lines had been installed by a contractor. ICCS had its own logistics system and its own air system. It gave our office a great deal of independence. It was all connected into and coming through our office, as was the money for support of the ICCS coming through our office. That meant we had a lot of leverage. But we had very little leverage with the front office in the embassy. This become clearer all the time to all of us. We were frustrated because we weren't getting any moral support. The money was there, and we were paying it out. We could do anything we wanted on our own. I saw advantages, not just disadvantages, in this situation.

At the same time, I got to know many of these Communists. One of them was a Pole. We had him for dinner, just alone, one night at my home. He became tight not drunk. He started talking about his youth and how the Nazis had killed his whole family. He then became a Communist. But became fed up with the Jews, because, in Poland, the Jewish Communists were just looking after other Jews. You couldn't get into a university if you weren't Jewish. It was a special game for them. He went on a lot about that. It turned out he was a very devout Catholic. I listened to all this. Over time, we got to be closer and more friendly; he'd tell me pretty much anything I'd ask for.

In the meantime, Pratt was home on leave. A young man, who was a West Pointer, had been brought out there by the ambassador, whose son roomed with this West Pointer while taking a Master's Degree here at Georgetown. This young man, named Ken Moorefield, met the ambassador through the ambassador's son.

Q: He was killed in Vietnam.

THOMAS: Moorefield had been decorated in Vietnam. He'd become a captain, had left the Army, and was looking around for something to do. The ambassador offered him a job, to come out to Vietnam as his personal aide. Ambassadors can do this. Ken Moorefield ended up in the ambassador's office, and got bored stiff up there. It was over-staffed with people; I think two or three secretaries. He just sort of ran around... We met, got to kidding each other; although, I was older, he liked me. He said he'd like to come to work as the junior officer in the section which he did. Pratt was away, and he and I got to discussing my frustration with the damned system, that nobody was paying attention to us, we were just third wheels there, and yet this was a function that had to be done.

He said, "What the hell. You know, you've got to make a political play sometimes. Why don't you just go and walk into the goddamned country team meeting and sit down?"

I said, "You know, I think I've got a good mind that I'll just do that."

They had a country team meeting once a week. When the country team meeting came up, I walk in and sat down. Joe Bennett looked at me with a stare of astonishment. But I just smiled at him and nodded. Nobody there knew whether the ambassador had invited me.

Q: Of course, you've got to take into context that the ambassador was known by some as almost a spider king. He played things very close to his chest, so you never knew what the ambassador had in mind.

THOMAS: That's right. I had this in mind when I did it, because the ambassador had seen me say, "You didn't send my memo?" So the next time Pratt was out of the country, I made this move. The ambassador greeted me pleasantly that morning. It soon became obvious, because I kept going to these meetings, that there were three people in the room that he treated with respect. I mean, he didn't cuss them out. Because he'd just cuss people out in front of each other. He'd give the AID director hell or the director of USIS. All these people had worked for him before. They'd all been brought there by him. They all sort of cowered in front of him. The only people he didn't pick on were Tom Polgar, who was the CIA station chief; Colonel Wahle, who was the senior military attaché there, who was the true military... (we had a general out there, for logistics reasons, but he wasn't running the intelligence side of it); and me. He treated us well. But the rest of the people got treated pretty badly in those meetings.

Out of going to those meetings, I started listening to all this stuff going on, from this fellow who was a friend of Moorefield's, Frank Snepp.

Q: He wrote a book, Decent Interval, which was very controversial.

THOMAS: Snepp was the briefer for CIA. And listening to these briefings once a week, I thought, Christ, this is 180 degrees out of phase with everything I hear when I go on these trips. If they believe this stuff, everything was fine; everything was rosy out there in the provinces. It was just the opposite, when you went out there and talked to the junior officers doing the reporting.

Q: When you arrived there in the spring of '73, how did you see the situation? What was going on in Vietnam?

THOMAS: My first trip out to the provinces didn't come until late summer of '73 because I was waiting for Pratt to arrive. We had to divide up the functions. He said, "I'm going to be traveling a lot, going to the States to see my family. I'll sit here in the office. You travel and come back and tell me what the hell's going on."

So I did an awful lot of traveling out to Hue, to Canto, and to all these different places where they had these stations for the ICCS. I got to know all the ex-master sergeants that had been hired to manage these places. I came to understand the communications net they had. I had a telephone installed in my office that was right on that communications net so

that I could pick it up and be into that net immediately. I had one put into my home, separate from the regular telephone system, so that I could talk and be in communication with these various bases and the Americans that were hired there, on my own, and find out from them what was going on. In essence, I had a chain of information that was separate from the embassy's. I had a transportation system, with the Air America bit, that was separate from the embassy's. I could move around without having to bother the embassy much. Since they were treating us pretty much as separate anyway, until I got myself going to the country team meetings, why...

Because ICCS controlled so much of Air America, we were on the evacuation committee. In other words, there was an evacuation committee that had been set up as part of the standard embassy, with the air attaché being the chairman of it, and the administrative counselor, the military attaché and myself being on it. This comes in later in the story.

From the time I got there, things were not going too badly, in the fall of '73. You didn't find the negative aspects of the reporting that I was getting later on. But, at that time, I wasn't going to country team meetings; so I didn't know what was being said there. But things weren't so bad out in the provinces. There had been a lull in the fighting. There seemed to be plenty of munitions arriving. Everywhere I went were big ammunition dumps full of stuff for our side. Everywhere. You'd go up near Pleiku, and there were just fields of supplies and munitions. You found, let's say, up through '73, things seemed to be going all right, relatively.

But, as we got into '74, I was going to the country team meetings. Let's say early spring '74, things were starting to turn around, and they didn't look as good, in terms of the pressure being put on. Not that they were losing any ground at that point, but there was more pressure, more fighting. From what I gathered at the time... we were reporting, and I was reporting back with all I was learning... One of the problems was that much of what I reported back I reported to Pratt, and then he would write it up in cables. Well, we made an agreement that, if the cable never got out of there (in many cases, it never did; it never saw the light of day), we would keep the unsent cable form on file in the chron file...

Q: You're talking about from the top. Graham Martin kept a very tight lid on what went in and out.

THOMAS: I kept saying that this stuff should be going to Moscow, because Moscow was as responsible for everything going on there as anybody. He wouldn't let us send a drop copy of anything to Moscow.

Q: Our embassy in Moscow.

THOMAS: Our embassy in Moscow. He wouldn't let us write anything to Moscow. I felt that this was wrong. I believed that Kissinger's detente policy with the Soviets was being falsely oversold as a part of a strategy to help Nixon who was under attack over

Watergate. Thus, nothing could be said that might indicate that the Soviets were blatantly undermining the Paris Accords which they were doing.

When I first got there, only two members of the political section were what you'd call liberal in political thinking (we're talking American politics), and that was Pratt Byrd and me. There were 30-some officers in the political section. That's a pretty big political section.

Q: Oh, yes, biggest in the world, at that time.

THOMAS: I remember this was the fall of '73 and winter. They had a party for the total political section that was hosted by the chief, Joe Bennett. I'd gotten to be friendly with his wife, because she's Chinese and we talked Chinese. My wife did too, because they took Taiji together. Joe liked me, but he was a milquetoast, if you know Joe.

Q: I don't.

THOMAS: Well, he was a very milquetoast fellow. Anyway, everybody was standing around at this Christmas party, and, about this time, the whole Nixon thing was the rage.

Q: We're talking about Watergate.

THOMAS: Watergate was the rage topic. I made a bet with Joe Bennett in front of everybody that Nixon would be out of office by the end of the next July. Everybody there was for Nixon -- oh, he was a great guy.

A flashback comes to me re Vietnam; if I've told this story, stop me. The flashback came right now that's important in all this, in terms of my approach to Vietnam, in being there and having talked about it.

At the time of the Geneva Conference in '54, there were certain people in the embassy wanting to send me to Geneva, to be there for the... because Korea was part of the...

Q: I think you did mention this.

THOMAS: All right. When I went off to language school and learned Korean at the Army Language School, right after I got home from there, in '54, I met some of my classmates from West Point, who had been in the Army and had been captains. We'd sit around and drink at the officers' club (they were bachelors), in the evening, and I'd preach the concept that, in Vietnam, we need special forces. We need, not regular Army, we need support for them. But they've got to fight their own war. We can't fight that. This is too nationalistic. It's not going to work, etc.

The thing that hit me, when I got to thinking about what they said, these young captains said, "Look, Fred, what you say I think is true. But it'll never happen, because of the

military/industrial complex..." (You've got to remember, this is the Eisenhower period.) "The military/industrial complex is too important in our country. They will never let this happen, an American war will be fought American style, with big tanks and all of that. The concept of special forces and what you're talking about will never fly. It will always be American style, because you can't sell big tanks to special-forces outfits."

Here we were, we got into Vietnam, and we were in the same old thing, but this time, we were trying to teach them, much too late, to fight their own war. And they weren't doing so well at it. The real trouble was that the leadership were creatures of French colonialism and lacked the will to fight; they were too corrupt.

The thing I wanted to say was all the cables that we didn't get to send were filed in with the cables we did. They were never torn up or thrown away. And this was an agreement Pratt and I had. So that when we boxed everything up to be shipped out of there, there was no time to go through anything. I didn't want to go through anything. I wanted everything saved, just the way it was. So we boxed it all up, at the end, and shipped it out. All that stuff was shipped. If historians are interested, what we wanted to say, but never got out of there, might be somewhere in archives.

Well, I'm trying to think of where we left off here. By the next spring...

Q: So we're talking about '74.

THOMAS: Through early '74, things were not as bad as they became in '75. But, in going into the fall of '74, you could see things turning downward.

Q: When you say "things," what are you talking about?

THOMAS: When you went out to the provinces and you got to talking to the junior officers, they would say, well...

Q: These were Vietnamese junior officers.

THOMAS: I didn't deal with Vietnamese junior officers, because, the Vietnamese wouldn't have anything to do with me. The only Vietnamese who were allowed to deal with me were General Hiep and a small group of people that were supposed to deal with the Communists. They were allowed to deal with the North Vietnamese, and they were allowed to deal with these delegations. But we were sort of pariahs, because we supported the ICCS which was not popular with the South Vietnamese government.

Q: So the officers you were talking to were American observers.

THOMAS: Observers who were at the grassroots level.

Q: With our consulates general as part of this.

THOMAS: Sometimes I would go to places where there weren't consulates general, but there might be an AID guy out there, or there might be a CIA guy out there. I'd just hook up with anybody that was there, that spoke English, that was around. Usually I'd find a place to stay; maybe it'd be a local hotel, whatever. But, generally speaking, I'd stay right on the ICCS base. The sergeant in charge would have a place for me to stay. They had these little bases they'd built out there for the ICCS, and you had four different groups there.

Out of this, it was kept running, kept reporting. But it was frustrating, because, as you say, Martin didn't tell anybody anything. You had to guess at what was going on.

I feel, from being there at the time, that he himself was partially responsible for the speed with which Vietnam fell. However, as I said before, the basic fault was with the Vietnamese leadership, their corruption and lack of will to fight. As for Martin's responsibility, a lot of people didn't understand this, but a lot has to do with psychology. He understood a lot about psychology; therefore, he refused to request orders for people to get them out of there because he didn't want to scare the Vietnamese. That was his argument for not getting orders for the wives and families.

Even before he did that, he made a major error. The major error came when he returned to the States to lobby for more armament for South Vietnam.

There was so much armament (and I knew this from reading stuff and talking to the military attachés, because I'd become very close, socially, with them), tremendous amounts of military supplies in the pipeline, and there was so much money sitting around waiting and stuff to be shipped, that even if they cut off the budget to nothing immediately, it would take two to three years to finish off all this stuff. Talking about where they were going to cut the budget for the South Vietnamese army this year wasn't going to have any immediate effect. It was academic, really.

But Martin was back here, making this big fight in front of Congress, publicly, which was being read in South Vietnam, talking about giving up on our Vietnamese friends. Of course, he was hoping to get the Americans involved, but that wasn't going to happen, but it had its effect on Thieu.

Q: President Thieu.

THOMAS: By the winter of '74, things had gotten much worse. I felt that everything I was hearing up at the country team was all pipe dreams.

Q: I sort of keep coming back to this, but you keep saying things were getting much worse. Can you be specific? What are you talking about?

THOMAS: There was much more pressure, and the Vietnamese weren't handling it as well.

Q: When you talking about pressure...

THOMAS: Military pressure.

Q: In other words, were the places...

THOMAS: Little places were starting to fall. Little places. People were starting to pull back. Not in a big way, but in little ways. The North Vietnamese were getting much more aggressive in the way they were handling things; you saw this aggressiveness.

Around the first of the year, '75, a province north of Saigon, Phuoc Long that was up next to the border, fell. Anyway, the first real move came up there, on the part of the Communists, I think it was in early January, and the Communists took over that area. But everyone said, it's not too important; it's not like a major victory. Everybody was down-playing it.

Right after it happened, in walked three French nuns to see me. They said that in the past, during the Tet Offensive (and I'd been out there at Tet in '68, on a TDY), their people had been shot and killed in this town, and they didn't want a repeat of this. They'd had two nuns who'd been captured by the Communists up there, and was there anything I could do to help them?

I thought a minute, and I said, "Yes, I think so. Just let me make a phone call."

I called the Pole who I'd gotten to know personally, and who was said to be, by our intelligence people, the chief of what is the equivalent of the Polish KGB in Saigon. I explained what was going on to him about these French nuns, and would he be willing to help them?

He said, "Yes, send them over right away."

I sent them over to see him.

I guess it was maybe two or three weeks later, in came the French nuns, with two more, and an American with them, to thank me.

I said, "Well, you don't need to thank me. You've got to thank that Pole."

They said, "We wanted to thank you first."

The Pole, I remember, was a good Catholic. These two French nuns spoke fluent Vietnamese. They said they'd been terribly treated by the Vietnamese. Suddenly

everything changed. They overheard one of the guard saying that some orders came out of Warsaw that they were to be given the VIP treatment. Everything changed, and suddenly they were infiltrated back through the lines and let go. But it was all due to this Pole.

I thanked the Pole, and they thanked the Pole. It showed you some things can be done in those situations, if one has made the right personal connection.

That was the first evidence that things were not going well, in a big way.

Q: Was the ICCS doing what it was supposed to be doing in this thing?

THOMAS: Our side was reporting back to their own governments, etc. For instance, in the fall, before the Iranian ambassador left, he predicted the fall of Vietnam by the summer of '75, and explained why and what was going on, from his own observations with his own people there. I wrote this all up for our ambassador. It was a big long report, concerning his own observations.

Ban-me-thuot was the next place to have trouble.

Q: Which was a major military center.

THOMAS: Up in the mountains, the south end of the defense of the central highlands. It was easier to attack than Pleiku and Kontum to its north and much less fortified. It had been the center of the area where the U.S. special forces had worked with the Montagnard tribe to defend the area. When it fell, a delegation of American missionaries called on me and asked for help. They had a group of medical missionaries there. At the time of Tet in '68, all of their staff there had been machine gunned by the communists. I immediately got in touch with this same Pole; he made sure no Americans were killed. He gave me periodic oral reports on what was happening to them. He told me they were being moved out of the area of combat for their safety.

The first thing that happened after the fall of Ban Me Thuot and during the time Martin was back in the States... It was on a Saturday morning.

Q: When are we talking about?

THOMAS: March, I think. Maybe mid-March.

Q: March '75.

THOMAS: (It was 15th March) I got a call from this retired master sergeant up at Pleiku, on this direct line I'd had put into my own home, on a Saturday morning at about lunch time, saying, "What do I do? I've got all these Poles and Hungarians and everybody here in this base. The senior American here is an AID official. He's quietly come around and told me and all the Americans to come with him and get the hell out of there, and to tell

only the Indonesians and the Iranians that they were leaving, but not to tell the Communists, that there's a pullback out of Pleiku."

I said, "No, don't do that. You stay there with those people. Your orders are to stay there. Don't leave. And don't tell anybody anything at this point. I want to know about what's going on. We're not going to play favorites in this situation."(The retired American sergeant later was given a decoration by the Hungarians for remaining there.)

I knew the thing was getting hairy. Ban-me-thuot had fallen. The military attaché said, "We haven't got long here. This thing doesn't look good." It had to do with the Vietnamese leadership's lack of will to do anything. They didn't want to fight. At Ban-me-thuot, our own military said, "No reason for this, except they just didn't have the guts to fight."

I went immediately to the embassy. Wolf Lehmann, who was...

Q: Who was chargé at the time.

THOMAS: I went into Wolf's office and said, "What in the hell is going on up at Pleiku?"

He said, "I just found out. Yesterday or the day before, President Thieu went up to..." What was that place on the coast there? You know, the place that had the naval base.

Q: Oh, yes. Cam Ranh.

THOMAS: Cam Ranh Bay, that area there. He'd gone up there and called the CG of the Second Corps. The Second Corps headquarters was at Pleiku. First Corps was up at Hue, up in that area, but Second Corps headquarters was at Pleiku. He called the commanding general down there, from that Corps Hq., and told him he wanted him to make a strategic retreat out of Pleiku-Kontum and bring all his troops back to the coast with an ultimate objective of protecting Saigon. He hadn't consulted with the embassy. He hadn't consulted with anybody. But he'd been listening to Martin back in the States scream about cutting aid, and he got cold feet. There was ammunition galore up there; there was plenty of stuff to fight a war with. But he ordered this, and this rout had started before we even knew it was happening.

The embassy got a message from Pleiku, from this AID official, who said he'd been told by the general that he's pulling out and told them they should get out. And then he went to the ICCS guy, who called me. This was how this whole episode started.

When this happened in this way, I told my people to stay, for the time being. The others were all pulling out, and had pulled out. The rout was on. They walked away from the big ammunition dump full of stuff up there in the highlands, and moved back towards the coast, starting that morning, without our even knowing it was going to happen. All because Thieu lost his nerve.

In the meantime, we received orders to call, and only call, the Indonesians and Iranians. This was Wolf Lehmann giving me these direct orders, in his office. Kinsolving, the other ICCS liaison officer, was there, too. He was departing that afternoon for a family visit and would be gone for several weeks. We were not allowed to call anybody else.

I said, "Christ, this thing is falling. These Communists, I've made connections with them, and they can be of help in this situation in terms of saving American lives. The American Marine Corps is not going to come in here and save lives. We have Americans spread out all over this country."

Wolf Lehmann was going to be a tough guy. Of course, like in the Army, you say, "Yes, sir."

I wasn't about to give up yet. I went down the hall (this was on the top floor) to the other end, to see the chief of station. I said, "This can't be. You've got to go in there and talk him out of this idea. You've got some connections in the Hungarian Mission."

Q: Was it Shepley then?

THOMAS: No, it was Tom Polgar, a Hungarian Jew who spoke Hungarian. He said, "I know the orders. I got the same orders."

I said, "Will you go in and ask him for permission for you to tell the Communists that this is happening, so that we get some leverage with them out of this goddamned situation."

Q: You're not going to hide it.

THOMAS: I said, "First of all, you're not going to get the Communists to attack the Poles and the Hungarians. They're not going to get hurt. The only people, out of playing this little game, that have any chance of getting hurt are the other two sides, plus the Americans. These people are the friends of the Communists. What's the sense in this? This is just stupidity." Polgar tried but was turned down.

I heard later, through the grapevine, that my whole arguments were not just played out in that office; they were sent to Washington, via back channels, saying, you know, I don't agree with this either, but here's what my orders are, and here's what I... What happened to this argument was this ICCS liaison officer suggesting this same thing. Polgar was told again by Lehmann that he couldn't tell them.

That night, I got a call from the Hungarian, who was a real Commie son of a bitch of a young man, accusing me of just what Wolf Lehmann was trying to cause happen, get them killed.

I said, "What do you mean? I notified the Indonesian ambassador, who was chairman..." They had a chairman for the month, every month, and it changed every month. That month, it happened to be the Indonesian. I said, "He didn't tell you? Why, I took for granted he'd tell you." I shifted the whole goddamned blame, right then and there. Of course, I didn't tell him not to tell anybody, but it was taken for granted he wouldn't, and he didn't. So I shifted the blame, because I wanted to have access to these people.

From then on, I never went back to see Wolf Lehmann again, ever. I never went near his office. I started doing my own thing.

Moorefield and I started a pool betting on what day the place was going to fall.

Frankly, the ICCS people were out of Da-nang a week before our embassy started to pull the consulate general out of Da-nang. Da-nang had to go out by sea, and people nearly got killed there. It was so bad that, when I was getting the ICCS out of there a week earlier, I was on a phone directly to the Air America people who were landing planes at Da-nang to get them out. They didn't dare stop the airplane. You had to be loaded on the run, because this plane would be swamped with people. The planes would go down the runway, and we'd pick them up out of Jeeps. I was on the phone, talking to the pilots when all this was going on. We were getting people out of places when that's as bad as it is, while the embassy hadn't done a damn thing at this point about getting anybody out.

Because we got all these people out and nobody was hurt, I was somewhat of a hero to the ICCS people. But I hadn't brought a damn word up to Wolf Lehmann or anybody else. I just did my own thing.

Moorefield was close with Snepp and a fellow named Don Hays. Hays was a young officer in the Foreign Service who had done some duty temporarily as third man in our office. He'd been rotated through there. These young guys came to me, and said, "Look, you're the only senior officer in this whole embassy who seems to realize this place is falling."

That was in early March. By mid March, towns had fallen. From the fall at Pleiku in March up until nearly the end of March, my time was spent getting ICCS people out and worrying about that, paying bills, and just doing my own thing, and not talking to anybody else about it. I figured this would be useful.

In the meantime, the Pole was looking after and keeping me informed of what was happening to the Americans the Viet Cong had captured in various points around the country, this the chief of Polish intelligence, who was very helpful.

It was the last week in March. I was embassy duty officer starting at noon on a Thursday 27 March.. That gave me certain power in the embassy because you see everything that's coming in, and you've got the right to originate cables and send stuff out. The air attaché called a meeting of the evacuation committee, as chairman of it for Friday afternoon the

28th. Martin had arrived back early that morning at about 3:00 am. Martin was "playing it cool" and paying no attention to reality, he was just off in his own dream world, he refused to admit that this place was falling around him. I arrived at the Air Attaché's office expecting to find the whole contingent of persons present who were listed as members of the evacuation committee. I was by far one of the lesser lights on the committee. Only three people were there: the Air attaché Garvin McCurdy, the military attaché Chuck Wahle and me. Missing were the Administrative Counselor, the Embassy Security officer, the Admin officers for USAID and for USIS, no one from CIA and forgotten others. McCurdy asked if I had been able to get up to the Ambassador's office. It seemed that the two attachés had tried to see the ambassador but had been stalled. I'd been up there; it was unreal. I said that it was my opinion that the only hope for a successful evacuation to come off at all was to do it without waiting for the embassy and the ambassador. I suggested we confer with General Smith at Thon Sonuit Air Base. Col Wahle called the General and we were on our way. General Smith heard my views on the situation in the embassy; his response was supportive and positive. It was agreed that they would begin bringing in military flights which would take any unofficial Americans and their dependents out as soon as possible. The flight that crashed with the orphans was scheduled at that time. The action officer was Smith's deputy an Air Force BG, Richard Baughn. This was being doing strictly through military channels. The flights were sent to Clark Air Base in the Philippines without U.S. Embassy, Manila clearance. Our ambassador in Manila, Sullivan was livid. General Baughn took the fall for this end run and was sent home because of Sullivan's raising hell. This, however, was the beginning of the evacuation of Vietnam - despite Martin's views.

The coming Sunday was Easter, 30 March. My wife, our children and I had invited the army attaché, Chuck Wahle and his wife to our home for Easter dinner. I was still the duty officer, as I say, duty officer. I said something about the situation to Chuck who said, "Get your wife an children out of here as fast as you can. This thing is not going to last much longer."

I said, "Yes, I think you're right. Everything's falling." We had already shipped our dog, a black Labrador to my sister and her husband in California. I noted that I would probably have to pay the fare for my family to leave because the ambassador wasn't willing to send them out on government orders. Wahle said do it.

It was then a matter of gambling on the day that it was actually going to fall. Monday morning arrived and I got a call from the code room, my orders had come in from the Department. We were leaving early. I started to think about all those security clearances I carried from my earlier assignment. They weren't taking any chances of my being captured. The packers came in on Tuesday. My 15 year old son who loved to go to the air base to play basket ball came home early that day and said he wanted to leave. He sensed the danger. I knew these younger fellows Moorefield, Hays and Snepp wanted me to stay on; after conferring with my wife, I went to Joe Bennett and volunteered to remain. Joe said "No, I have four consuls generals walking the halls now with no assignments - forget it." The ambassador said leave but tell no one you are leaving.

Q: How about these country team meetings? Was it still a rosy picture?

THOMAS: By then, no. As a matter of fact, by then, I don't think they even had them. There was too much pressure for that type stuff. You know, that was over with.

I said, "There's no reality to what's going on."

All these young officers knew it, including Snepp, as did the chief of station. But you couldn't convince Martin. He was going to save the day. They were going to stop before. they took Saigon. They wouldn't want to give up American aid, and all that sort of... It was not believable.

My duty officer stint was up on Thursday noon; I was scheduled to depart on Friday 4 April by commercial aircraft. I turned over my personal car for shipment on Thursday.

Since I was ordered not to tell anybody I was leaving, any Vietnamese. General Hiep, who was the ICCS general, was suddenly going to be made transportation minister, under a temporary government. He came to me and asked me if I'd be his unofficial advisor; I didn't dare tell him I was leaving However, there was one hold on my departure, I had to await the return of Kinsolving from family visit to take over the ICCS function. During this period after all of the ICCS personnel had been pulled back into Saigon, it was necessary for me to reassure the American contractor who ran their mess that he would be paid - just feed them now. This was all done orally. No paper work. I didn't have time to tell Kinsolving of my oral commitment. Later, in Washington I had to go to bat for this man in order for him to be paid.

The fall came, as you know, suddenly. By then, we had a pool going as to what day the place was going to fall, and I think I was off by three days. The evacuation of Saigon started early enough, and that's why we didn't have more Americans caught there, but it was done without Martin's permission.

Q: I have a long interview that I did with Terry McNamara, who was the consul general in Can- tho, and essentially he was left alone. The CIA took care of their own and left, and he more or less had to line up things. So he got out on his own.

THOMAS: I'll tell you why. I was at the embassy at the time; I pulled the ICCS out of Can-tho long before... The only reason they didn't want to pull anybody out was because it would look like the place was falling. This was Martin's own doing, so he insisted everybody stay in place. You couldn't even ship your wife out unless you did it with your own money. The place was seething with anger because people wanted their wives and children out of there. Mine were the first to come in, but then they allowed others in. It was a terrible situation.

Q: You left when, and when did it fall?

THOMAS: I left on April 4th, and it fell on the 28th.

Q: Where did you go?

THOMAS: I flew to Hong Kong and stayed in Hong Kong a while. I was so worried about friends there and people there, you know, Americans and other people, that I just didn't want to leave. But I'd been ordered to go. I even volunteered to stay, but wasn't allowed to. Hong Kong was a little too expensive, so we then went on to Taiwan, and stayed there for a while. Nobody was pushing to get me back to the States.

Q: They had too many people.

THOMAS: Laos had already fallen, and there were all these people out of Laos. I stayed in Taiwan for a while. I think we spent three weeks in Asia, until the fall. I saw some friends, I think, in Tokyo, who had gotten out as it fell. Then we came on back to the States and stayed for a while on the West Coast with my brother-in-law and sister. I talked to people who got out right at the end, but it didn't get any better. The realism.

Thank God for a few people there like Snepp, Moorefield, Hays and Lacy Wright. I think they received some medals out of it. They deserved them because they were the ones who really organized to get things moving.

Our effort was the first, the attachés and my meeting with General Smith started the airlift that moved non-official Americans. Without that early start many Americans would have been endangered. But, there were still a lot of people left behind, who paid the price for our inept policies.

Q: Then what did you do?

THOMAS: The Department, nobody wanted me back here. Nobody wanted any of us back here. When I got back, I went into the Department, and I was told to stay on leave, administrative leave, which meant you didn't pay for it. We couldn't keep staying with relatives. We decided get back into our own house. There were no jobs at the Department. The oil crisis was still brewing. It was the mid-''70s, late ''70s, and they had all these research projects going, on petroleum and the shortage of oil. I was sent out to do that. It was just make-work. I ended up doing research on oil, going out to the Department of Energy. I had these clearances, and these clearances let me go to a lot of places and see a lot of documents. But it was no job, really.

I kicked around with nothing really to do. They talked about giving me some more Chinese to bring my Chinese back, there was no job in Beijing at the time.

I was a year in limbo with no real job. It was more than that. They ended up giving me a research INR type job, which was dullsville, sort of intelligence analysis, which I found not my thing.

Desai had taken over in India, and they thought there was a big break in India, with Desai in.

Q: Desai was the new president who replaced Indira Gandhi.

THOMAS: Not president but the prime minister.

Q: And it looked like a swing to more friendly with the United States.

THOMAS: They thought there would be more commercial opportunities that I could maybe get some American investments, do what I'd done in Germany. What I'd been able to accomplish in Germany preceded me. I said, "If that's what I've got to do to get out of the country and get a post." I agreed to go off to New Delhi into that job.

Right after I got there, Desai turned out to be even worse than Indira had been. He insisted that Coca-Cola turnover their formula. He wanted some things out of IBM that they weren't willing to give him. Both of them closed up shop and walked out. When they did it, nobody was interested in investing anything in India. I had the Delhi belly for months on end.

Q: Delhi belly being a term for sort of like a mild-grade dysentery.

THOMAS: The ambassador to India was a man named Goheen, a Greek scholar out of Princeton. We had a fellow named Wyles, I think, who was the administrative counselor who was an ex-chief in the Navy. We had some type of foreigner, who had an American passport, who was running the commissary. The prices in the commissary were horrendous, with everybody up in arms about the costs and prices. We'd been there two weeks when I went to a meeting. Wyles was back in this country on TDY, arranging for another four-year tour (he'd been there four years), to stay on in India. Everybody was screaming about the costs at the commissary, etc. I got up and made a speech about what I'd found out about the commissaries in Germany and Karachi. According to law, the commissary really belonged to the membership. If you looked at the constitution of the commissary in India, it put all the real power in the hands of the ambassador's administrative counselor. That didn't mean that constitution had to stay that way, because the law stated that the membership had a right to change the constitution any way they wanted. The first thing you had to do was rewrite the constitution.

I got a big hand of applause from everybody when I made this little speech. Consequently I was elected to chair a committee to change the constitution of the commissary. I turned around and asked for volunteers to sit on the committee. No officers volunteered; only

one officer's wife offered to be on the committee. Everybody else was a clerk, a code clerk or a clerk of some type, on this committee.

Within about three or four days after this thing was set up, I got a call from this young Princetonian who had the same job Moorefield had. He'd been brought out there (tennis anyone? good looking, handsome boy, with a young wife) as aide to Ambassador Goheen. He came in to tell me what the ambassador wanted in that constitution.

I looked at this young man and said, "I wasn't elected by the ambassador. I was elected by the membership of the club. Once we've decided on the constitution, I'll send a draft around for the ambassador to look at. If he doesn't like it, he can tell me so. But, until then, well, let's not worry about what the ambassador wants in it. Right now, I'm worried about what the people who're serving here want in it."

He went back and told the ambassador. That didn't make me very popular with the ambassador.

The constitution was rewritten. In the meantime, my job was nothing, really. I wasn't getting anybody to invest. My boss, Bryant, who was the senior commercial attaché...

Q: Edward Bryant.

THOMAS: He looked on me as trouble, in the commercial sense, because I had a fairly senior rank, and I was a third wheel there, and, you know, they really didn't need me. I was always coming up with new ideas, and who likes new ideas; they only cause problems.

I just said, "Well, what the hell. I don't like this post, anyway. I'm not getting along or going to get along very well with Goheen. So I'm going to get myself out of here, if I can. But, in the meantime, I'll do what I can."

So we rewrote the constitution. It put the power into the hands of an elected board. There was to be a chairman of the board who was to be elected by the membership. The ambassador put out word that he wanted to make sure that I was not elected chairman of the board of that commissary. He got somebody to agree to run, who was head of the NSA unit there. He was a guy who got up and made a funny speech. At the meeting after he was elected, I was asked "Was there any job I preferred to have, because I'd arranged all this?"

I said, "Yes, I'd like to be chairman of the by-laws committee."

It's one thing to have a constitution, but the next thing, in terms of power, is the by-laws. I said, "I'd like volunteer to sit on the by-laws committee."

Well, by this time, all the officers in the place were coming around on the q.t. and saying, "Go to it. We're all for you." They didn't want to be openly for me, because the ambassador was backing Wyles, who was the guy fighting me.

In the meantime, I wasn't given a house to live in.

Q: Well, what was the problem with Wyles?

THOMAS: There was stealing going on. You couldn't prove this. First of all, the manager had been brought there by Wyles. He had one source, and one source only, for everything they sold in the commissary. It was out of Texas. It was the source of everything they sold, in terms of canned goods, anything. It came from this one source. The prices were horrendous. I wanted to get rid of this manager, and I wanted to put an American in charge. This manager had been given a diplomatic passport. Wyles had gotten it for him. He'd been given a very fancy house to live in, which the embassy was paying for. He was getting a big salary, much more than the average Foreign Service officer. this stunk to high heaven. You couldn't prove anything, but this looked to me to be a coterie of these guys sitting in administration back in Washington; that this whole thing was making money for several people.

Goheen was being fired up by Wyles, saying, "You're in charge here, and these people are taking away your power, etc." And Goheen wanted no part of it. He called a meeting with me, you know, in terms of discussing the issues. I just explained that these are adult people, and you can't treat them like children. He was madder than hell at me. Present in the meeting was the DCM, Arch Blood whom I liked. Arch stuck his neck out when he'd been up in Dacca.

Q: Oh, yes.

THOMAS: Based on the stories I'd heard about Arch Blood, I had a lot of respect for him. But he wasn't saying much; he was just listening because this fight was pretty open. I said, "We have to change what's going on here."

In the end, it was changed. They got rid of that manager. Wyles, who had arranged an extension for four years, suddenly asked for a transfer out of there, to go on to Brussels as administrative counselor.

All this time, I was trying to get an inspector general's investigation of the situation. But they were trying to shut me up. They didn't want to spread any of this in the open. There were other reasons and other things that you'd get to know out of a thing like that, that I knew that I couldn't talk about openly, because I couldn't prove it in a court of law. It was like that guy sitting outside a window, listening to that American sell America out. It was big corruption in the commissary, and big stealing.

In the end, it changed. My orders came. I'd asked to get out of there early, and I did.

Q: You were in Delhi from when to when?

THOMAS: I arrived there in, let's say, October of '77, and departed in June of '78. I had the school year with my kids there.

Goheen had left on home leave; I went in to make my final call on Arch Blood; I apologized for not having accomplished anything, in terms of my job there. He said, "Oh, you've accomplished a lot. What you did for this commissary and the morale here has been worth, you know..."

I took off for Washington. There was no real job back here, really. They kept kicking me from pillar to post. Suddenly, at a Christmas party here, I met someone from a large corporation; he heard I was a China linguist and that I was looking around; I was sort of fed up with bureaucracy. He said he thought he could line up a job with his corporation, and a new big contract they had in China. This was the winter of '78, Christmas time, and I listened to him.

In the spring of '79, I just decided I'd had it. I retired in June, with no written commitment, but an oral commitment, that I would be hired by this company to go to China for them.

Just as I retired, the Chinese pulled the rug out from under this company and a lot of others. They got scared they were spending too much money, and they cancelled all these contracts. I'd retired, suddenly, into what I thought was going to be a job. It wasn't a job, because it disappeared.

I tried to start a consulting business on China. I was just getting started, when I was hit from the rear in a terrible automobile accident. It was two to three years before I came out of the shock from that, the trauma.

I said, "Well, what the hell. I'm going to enjoy my retirement." I became involved in local political affairs.

That was pretty much my State Department career.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much. Fred. This has been very illuminating.

End of interview