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

ALFRED JOSEPH WHITE

Interviewed by: John J. Harter
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is an interview with Alfred Joseph White. Today is September 17, 1997. I am John Harter and I am interviewing Al White under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. This is the first of a series of interviews on Al's life and career.

To begin now, could you say a few words about your own origins, where you were born and raised, and something about your background?

WHITE: I'd be happy to do that. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on August 16, 1929, that rather fateful year in world history. My father was a lawyer. He had been born and bred on a farm in northern New York state. He went through college on a scholarship and studied law. My mother was from Scranton, Pennsylvania. While I was born in Philadelphia, we left there shortly after that, and I grew up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, my mother's home town. After I finished grammar school, I went up to Utica, New York, in my father's part of the country, finishing high school there in 1947.

I had thought all along that I would be a doctor because my uncle was a doctor and I was quite influenced by him. I had studied science in high school and had decided to go into a pre-med course. Syracuse University, overcrowded with veterans who had served during World War II, had just opened a branch in Utica, New York. This was very convenient for me because I could stay at home and go to college. I spent two years in a pre-med course at this branch of Syracuse University.

Q: Was there anything in your early life which attracted your interest in the world outside the United States? Did you think seriously about a career in this direction?

WHITE: That's a very good question. On the face of it I had grown up in a medium-sized city, far from Washington, DC. However, I grew up in a household where, every night at

the dinner table, I heard a great deal about what was going on in the world.

In the 1930s, of course, a lot was happening in the world. An aunt of mine had been in Europe after she graduated from college. I had two uncles who had served in the U.S. Army in Europe during World War I. At the dinner table every night we had a very lively discussion about what was happening in the world. Very early in my life I heard references to names like Mussolini, Hitler, and, of course, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Q: Storm clouds were rising on the horizon?

WHITE: Very definitely. It was a very grim time, probably one of the most tragic decades in world history. In fact, it's been called "The Tragic Decade," which it was. However, for a kid growing up, it was also very fascinating and exciting, as dangerous things can be. So I absorbed all of that, not thinking that the international field was anything that I wanted to get into at that particular point. As I said, my uncle was a doctor, and I assumed all along that that was what I would become. However, I had a real interest in world affairs. I noted that even when I was in pre-med, I always seemed to find time to avoid studying things like zoology, which I despised, and found myself doing a lot of reading on current events. I took courses in history.

Q: You were aware of the interconnections between what was happening elsewhere in the world and what was happening in the U.S.?

WHITE: Very much so. Bear in mind that this was what historians call a "seminal period," when a great deal was happening, particularly during the period immediately following World War II. I'm talking about the years from 1947 to 1949, some 50 years ago. That was the period of the emergence of the "Truman Doctrine," the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] Alliance, and the Marshall Plan. All of these things were developing. They were "exploding" in the headlines every day. I would say that the entire country was going through a period of intense interest in foreign affairs.

I say the "entire country." Obviously, this is an exaggeration. Many people didn't know or care about international affairs. However, if you had an interest in world affairs, an awful lot was happening.

Q: As an impressionable, young man, wherever you turned, events in the world were penetrating your awareness.

WHITE: Exactly. At that point the road led to Washington. I wanted to finish college at Georgetown University.

Q: What interested you about Georgetown?

WHITE: My uncle had gone to Georgetown Medical School, and I still wanted to go to Medical School. I thought that if I went to Georgetown University as a undergraduate, I

might have a better chance of getting into Georgetown Medical School. I was able to transfer to Georgetown.

I don't suppose that it happened suddenly but when I got to Georgetown, I found that I had gradually come to the conclusion that medicine really wasn't for me.

Q: You didn't like to dissect frogs?

WHITE: That's right. That wasn't the intellectual part of medical studies. Even to this day I can curl up with a book on endocrinology or some relatively strange aspect of medicine. I found out that there was an important element that people don't think very much about when they talk about what kids can do or fields that they can follow. It's not just a question of intellectual stimulation. There is also a question of temperament. Every profession requires a certain kind of temperament. Obviously, a doctor can't be squeamish. He can't be a person who faints at the sight of blood. That's a question of temperament. It has nothing to do with studying anatomy or physiology.

In those biological lab periods, which I came to detest, I had to cut up little pig embryos and things like that. I found that appalling. I suddenly realized on transferring to Georgetown that medicine just wasn't for me.

Q: That left a vacuum, and then all of your interest and concern with the world outside the U.S. came to the fore.

WHITE: Exactly. At this time I was in Washington, where all of these events were happening. Having decided that I did not want to pursue a career in medicine, the question was, what did I want to do? At that point I decided to take a "leave of absence." I left Georgetown and got a job at Johns Hopkins University in Washington. They had an "Operations Research" office there, and I got a job as a clerk. The work there was rather pleasant. I met very interesting, brilliant people.

I think that, very often, a change of direction is what young people need at that point, by the way. When you consider that we start school at the age of 6, it's a long grind until we finish college. Maybe by the age of 18 or so, young people should get out of school for a year. At least this period away from academic studies didn't hurt me.

Q: That was a little early for a sabbatical year, but that was part of the culture at the time.

WHITE: In a sense, this was because I was "changing gears." I knew what I didn't want to do but I wasn't quite sure what I did want to do. And frankly, it was nice to earn some money. That's always a consideration.

Q: So what interested you in the Foreign Service?

WHITE: Well, by the time I returned to college at Georgetown, I had made up my mind

that I would pursue study in the field of international affairs.

Q: And Georgetown had its School of Foreign Service.

WHITE: Actually, I didn't go to the School of Foreign Service. I went to the College of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown. The program at the college was a bit different from that at the Foreign Service School, but you could take courses at both. So I completed my undergraduate work at Georgetown in 1952 in the field of international relations.

Q: Had you developed some interest, even at that early stage, in international business?

WHITE: Oh, I did indeed!

Q: Because of Georgetown?

WHITE: Exactly. I had no interest in government service. I had no interest in becoming a bureaucrat. The term is a bit pejorative, but that's the way I saw it at that time. The Foreign Service, of course, was not like general government service. It is very distinct and separate. However, beyond that there was international business.

I remember being very much interested in the international oil business. To jump ahead, I ended up in Venezuela, my last post, where oil was my main concern.

Q: Did you have any connections with the oil companies?

WHITE: No, I had no such connections. I was simply interested in the oil business as a place to work but I hadn't made any decision about it.

Q: You were thinking about a career with Mobil Oil?

WHITE: I was thinking about a career with any big, international corporation.

Q: You took courses in international business at Georgetown?

WHITE: I took courses in economics and international economics.

Q: At this point was there anything that you saw as "accurate" or "inaccurate," "in focus" or "out of focus" about the way that academics approached the world of international business?

WHITE: There was very little concerning business content as such in the courses which I was taking. I didn't follow a "business major." The courses I took at Georgetown really weren't geared to international business. The feeling then was that a good, liberal arts education was the way you prepared to go into a business career.

Q: By the time you finished at Georgetown you were sure that you wanted a Foreign

Service kind of career?

WHITE: Well, I had two options. The Foreign Service had a certain appeal. However, in a way a business career appealed to me more. In my own mind these two options were rather evenly balanced. It may have been a situation where, in a sense, it was a question of which one would fall off the tree first.

I graduated from Georgetown University in 1952 and took the written Foreign Service examination in September of that year. I passed the exam. Meanwhile, Georgetown was kind enough to give me a full tuition scholarship in the Graduate School. So I began a program of studies in the Graduate School.

While I was going to the Graduate School at Georgetown, I was waiting for the Foreign Service oral exam. Then, of course, you and I had something else to face at that time. Bear in mind that the Korean War had started in June, 1950.

Q: My time in the service came up a little before then. I served in the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1945.

WHITE: Did you? Well, the point was that I had this military obligation hanging over my head, unlike today, when young people don't have to worry about that, unless they really want to go into the military service.

I had set my sights on Navy Intelligence, which required me to take some special tests. I pursued this objective. It was considered rather difficult to get into. The Foreign Service would not request, nor would I have asked for, any kind of deferment from military service. I think that that was the correct and proper way to look at this obligation.

Q: So you passed the Foreign Service written exam but were "stuck" in the military.

WHITE: Well, I was at the Georgetown Graduate School for a year and a half.

Q: You didn't get your degree?

WHITE: No, I was taking the regular, required courses. Then I took the oral exam for the Foreign Service in November 1953 and passed it. At that point I recall receiving a letter telling me that I was supposed to report for duty in the Department of State on a certain date. I had passed the written and oral exam and, of course, the usual security investigation.

Q: If you hadn't gone into the military, you would have gone into the Department of State at that point. I may have mentioned that I entered the Department of State in November, 1954.

WHITE: That's very interesting, John. We might well have come into the Foreign Service together. We can blame the U.S. military for that.

Q: Could you say at least a few words about your period of military service? Was there anything in that experience that permanently affected your attitude, enhanced your skills, or really influenced your Foreign Service work in any degree?

WHITE: To begin with, the Navy Intelligence assignment didn't work out for me. While the Navy was processing my papers, lo and behold, my Draft Board struck, and instead of being in Navy Intelligence, I was in the Army, going through basic training down at Camp Gordon, Georgia.

In its mysterious way the Army put me in the Signal Corps. Even then I thought that I might go overseas and see something of the world. However, that didn't work out, either. I spent the entire two years of my Army service [1955-1956] in the Army in the United States most of the time at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

I came out with very definite opinions about the Army. I thought that there was an appalling waste of talent. Most of my buddies, to use the Army word, were graduates of engineering schools. I remember one who was a graduate of Harvard Law School. We were all in the same boat. We had not gone through ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps], so there we were, serving out our two years. We had barracks filled with engineers, who did essentially nothing but "police the area," as they say in the Army. This meant picking up cigarette butts and that sort of thing in front of the Colonel's office.

Q: I came out of the Army Air Force at the end of World War II with a very definite, anti-military prejudice, which has persisted throughout my life.

WHITE: Well, in my case I wouldn't say that I came out of military service with an anti-military prejudice. Let's say that I did form the view that things might have been organized better.

Q: My opinion was that in a military situation, except when you're in combat, it's questionable whether there is any kind of efficiency.

WHITE: My own view at that point was that, since the Army obviously didn't have anything for us to do, we should have been separated from the service after six months and kept in the ready reserves. I thought that keeping young men essentially unoccupied in the service at that point in their lives, when every moment counts after all, was appalling. I suspect that that experience left me with a certain reservation about governmental bureaucracy in general. So perhaps I did come out of the Army with a rather jaundiced view, not only of Army regulations, but of regulations generally.

Q: In other words, hierarchical control which, I think, is necessary in a combat situation.

WHITE: Well, that's the difference. Like you, my brother served in the Army during World War II and saw combat. He came home, never complaining about what he had had

to do. After all, armies exist to fight wars, but when they're not fighting wars, what do they do? They train. Well, we went on maneuvers in Louisiana, which was kind of fun. It kept us busy. Frankly, our morale was higher when we were on maneuvers than when we were sitting around in the barracks out in Arizona. In addition to having highly educated people, we also had 17 and 18 year old kids from Appalachia who had joined the Army to avoid being drafted and because, I suppose, they had no work at home. These young kids tended to get into trouble, went off and got drunk, and God knows what else. So it was not a very pleasant experience for them.

Anyway, my Army service was over after two years. Finally, after a delay of a number of years, I was able to accept what I had been initially offered, an appointment in the Foreign Service. So in May, 1957, I went on board in the Department of State.

Q: Do you want to say anything about the written or oral exams before you came into the Foreign Service?

WHITE: The written exam was different then from what it is now. It was probably similar to the one you took. It was fairly long.

Q: I think that there was merit in the four-day exam. Among other things some people became exhausted after a day or two. Such people probably found it difficult to cope with many of the difficult situations we have to deal with in the Foreign Service.

WHITE: I guess that I would agree with that. There was a "plus" in the long exam. The longer the exam, the more opportunity you have to show what you know.

You remember the way the long exam was structured. There was a three hour exam in economics and another one in history. The three hour exam in history gave candidates a choice of questions. One of the questions I had was to compare Cavour and Bismarck. That is, Cavour in terms of the unification of Italy and Bismarck in the unification of Germany. That was a question which had fascinated me in college. I knew a lot about it and I wrote and wrote and wrote.

Q: Did you also have to discuss the Danish-German war [of 1864] and the Franco-Prussian War [of 1870]? Once Bismarck dealt with these wars, he put an "embargo" on military activity, for the most part, and concentrated on domestic concerns and consolidating the unification of Germany.

WHITE: Bismarck was certainly the most important German leader of the 19th Century. Unfortunately, you can almost date World War I from his dismissal from office as German Chancellor.

Q: He was dismissed from office in 1890.

WHITE: Cavour was also a fascinating man. Later, by the way, I ended up assigned to Turin, the city where he actually created the modern, Italian state. That question on the

written exam was almost made for me, and I did very well on it. I received a very high grade on that test, which probably compensated for some others on which I didn't get such a high grade.

Anyway, the Foreign Service written exam was an interesting exercise. I know that a lot of my colleagues spent the summer prior to taking the Foreign Service written exam in preparing for it. I spent the summer up in the Pocono Mountains [in Pennsylvania], digging ditches in a hunting camp. I figured that maybe that was a better way to prepare for the Foreign Service written exam.

The oral exam was interesting. I recall that it was held in the old Walker-Johnson building.

Q: Was that on G St.?

WHITE: No, it was on New York Avenue near the corner of 17th St. It wasn't far from the old Executive Office building. The Walker-Johnson building has been torn down, but there was a little park nearby which is still there. I remember that park because, while I was waiting for my appointment to take the oral exam, one of the secretaries kindly said to me: "You know, Mr. White, you don't have to sit here. You can go out and get a breath of fresh air." I remember going over to that park.

There was a young lieutenant ahead of me that morning. I was the second candidate to take the oral exam, and the last one to be examined that morning. I guess that we all went through that same drill. I was ushered into a room and seated at a table with five gentlemen sitting across from me, peering at me as if I were some kind of insect at the other end of a microscope.

Q: Was there anyone on that oral board that we have ever heard of?

WHITE: Well, I remember the name of the Chairman of that board very well. He was Cromwell A. Riches.

Q: He was a senior Personnel Officer at the time.

WHITE: At that time his title was that of Executive Director of the Board of Examiners. He was a very distinguished, very amiable fellow. Frankly, I have forgotten the names of the others. They were all very cordial, although one was rather distant. I had heard that they designated one member of the panel to be sort of the devil's advocate. I don't know whether that is true or not.

The questions I was asked were very general. It obviously was not a test of my knowledge. It was a test of how I dealt with questions. I remember that there was one "trick" question that we were all warned about. Sure enough, I was asked: "What Article of the Constitution states that there shall be a Secretary of State?" Of course, no Article of the Constitution says that.

The oral exam didn't last as long as I thought it would. After about 40 minutes the Chairman of the board suddenly declared that the exam was over, and I was dismissed. I was rather alarmed because the interview was over so suddenly that this couldn't be a very good omen. However, after I sat in an outer office adjoining the office where the Board had met for 20 or so minutes, Mr. Riches called me in and told me that I had passed the oral exam. I must say that I rather enjoyed the process. I thought that it was fair and, obviously, I thought that it had worked well in my case.

Q: Did you have to wait long before entering the Foreign Service? This was in...

WHITE: The oral exam was in 1953.

Q: You took the written exam before you went into the military and the oral exam later?

WHITE: No. I graduated from Georgetown in June, 1952, and then took the written exam in September, 1952. I took the oral exam a year later while I was in graduate school. You may recall that the Department was not rapidly hiring people in those days.

Q: As I recall, Secretary of State Dulles decided that there would be no hiring of Foreign Service Officers from the time he entered office in January, 1953. This "freeze" on hiring lasted until December, 1954. I was qualified to enter the Foreign Service in 1952 but had to wait a year and a half before entering.

WHITE: I was caught in that same, general delay. However, I had to serve in the military in any case. So that process brings us to May, 1957, when I entered the Foreign Service.

Q: What do you remember about your initial experience in the Department of State?

WHITE: There was a group of about 30 to 35 of us in the A-100 course.

Q: What did you think of the program at the Foreign Service Institute?

WHITE: The class was a very good group, very diverse both geographically, socially, and every other way. There were three or four women.

Q: Is there anything you can think of to identify those in your class who subsequently "prospered" in their careers, compared to those who did less well in the Foreign Service? Were these differences identifiable at that early stage, or was it more a matter of random differences?

WHITE: I would say that there were a few members of the class who, I thought, were probably not very suitable for the Foreign Service. However, who was I to say that? I was a novice in the Foreign Service myself. When I say some members of the class, I'm talking about one or two, who really didn't seem to fit into the mold, if that's the word. It may not be the right word. Regarding the rest of the class, I think that it was virtually

impossible to tell in advance how they would do in the Foreign Service. They were all intelligent and capable.

Q: They almost had to be capable to get through the exam process.

WHITE: Exactly.

Q: My conclusion now is that, to a large degree, it is the luck, the breaks, the circumstances which determine which members of an entering group of young Foreign Service Officers will really do best, will have the opportunities which fit their abilities, and will enable them to "ride the escalator" up the career ladder. Maybe you don't agree with that.

WHITE: No, luck is a part of everything. I think that when Napoleon was once asked what kind of generals he wanted, he said that he wanted the kind who were "lucky." Luck has a lot to do with how well you do in the career, but it's not only a matter of luck. If you look at any class of graduates from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and see how they ranked in their class, and then look at the generals who have become "brilliant lights" in their careers, there isn't much correlation.

For instance, look at someone like Ulysses S. Grant. He hated soldiering. On the other hand, you have someone like Douglas MacArthur, who was first in his class. Everyone thought that he was going to make it to the top, and he did. But there were others who, at any given point, people would have written off. George Marshall [chief of staff of the Army from 1939 to 1945] was essentially "written off" and was on his way to retirement in 1937, I believe as a colonel. Admiral King [later Chief of Naval Operations during World War II] was on the verge of retirement when World War II broke out.

However, I think that it's extremely hard to identify success in advance. At least, that's my perception. You can identify certain qualities. That's easy enough. However, the "mix" of qualities needed and, as you say, that other element of "luck" are more elusive. I would find it extremely difficult to say how that all mixes together and how it comes out.

Q: Then who, in your group, had the most successful careers in terms of the most orthodox measurements?

WHITE: If you mean successful careers in terms of the most orthodox measurements, I assume you are asking who became Ambassadors. Well, three members of the class were appointed Ambassadors. Maybe I've overlooked others.

Q: Any names?

WHITE: Steve Low, Dick Matheron, Lowell Kilday, I believe.

Some of the members of the A-100 class left the Foreign Service early on. One of them was a very able fellow, a lawyer by trade.

Q: My observation has been that many of the most capable and appropriate people do leave the Service during the early years of their careers.

WHITE: Some of them did, and this particular individual was assigned to the Embassy in Paris. He loved this assignment. He later told me that he had gotten what he wanted out of the Foreign Service. He quit, went home, and practiced law. So not all of the class stayed in the Foreign Service.

Going back to the nature of the class, it was a relatively small class, by today's standards. The A-100 course basically consisted of lectures given by people who came over from their own offices in the Department or other departments.

Q: Did you find the course very useful or did you find it dull?

WHITE: I found it useful. I didn't find it dull. What we were given was a "broad brush" survey of what goes on in the U.S. Government. Some of my colleagues were critical of the program. I thought that some of them were hypercritical. Our lecturers, after all, were not professors. They did their work and at a certain time, they got on a bus and went over to the FSI [Foreign Service Institute] and gave a lecture. I found these lectures extremely useful and beneficial. I learned a lot from them.

Q: Were there lectures on the Commercial Function?

WHITE: I recall going over to the Department of Commerce for a series of lectures. I remember that very well.

Q: Were the lectures enlightening?

WHITE: Very much so, but then I found it all enlightening. We also had lectures by people from the Departments of Agriculture and Treasury. After all, in three months you can't get very much in depth, obviously. I remember that Robert D. Murphy, who was then the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, spoke briefly to our class one morning.

Q: Do you recall any particular impression of him? Did he talk about his experiences in North Africa during World War II?

WHITE: No, he was basically there just to say "hello" to us.

Q: By then, and we're talking about 1957, he was retired, wasn't he?

WHITE: No, he was not.

Q: When did he go to work for Corning Glass?

WHITE: Maybe it was a few years afterwards. The Secretary of State, of course, was

John Foster Dulles. The legendary Loy Henderson was the Under Secretary for Management.

Q: He spoke to your class?

WHITE: Yes, at our graduation ceremony, as I recall.

Q: I got to know him fairly well, over the years. He was a remarkable person.

WHITE: I wish that I had gotten to know him. One of my most vivid memories is of that afternoon, when he came and spoke to our group. Maybe that was the day when we took our oath of office. It was a Friday afternoon. We were all anxious to get away.

Q: This was in 1957. It was early on in the "Wristonization" process.

WHITE: Yes, "Wristonization" was very much...

Q: And Loy Henderson was very much in the middle of that. He had been one of the most outspoken critics of the Wriston proposal [to bring a large number of civil servants into the Foreign Service as Foreign Service Officers]. So Henderson was stunned when Secretary Dulles asked him to implement the Wriston program. Henderson explained that he didn't agree with the Wriston program. However, once he got into it, he became thoroughly convinced that this was absolutely necessary.

WHITE: That sounds like President Truman and his first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal. Forrestal had been Secretary of the Navy and he bitterly fought against unification of the armed services. When it was all over and the services had been unified, lo and behold, President Harry Truman asked Forrestal, the most adamant of the opponents of unification, to be in charge of the unified services as the first Secretary of Defense.

Q: Later on, Forrestal went a little "crazy."

WHITE: Well, he had other problems of a personal nature. I've never believed that people are overwhelmed solely by professional problems. There are always personal problems. In the case of James Forrestal there was a personal element.

Q: Loy Henderson certainly thrived under the pressures and tensions of his position.

WHITE: Well, I must say that Loy Henderson impressed me. The remarks he made that afternoon certainly impressed me.

Q: What do you recall of them?

WHITE: He spoke very directly and without notes and in a very off the cuff but from the heart manner, and very eloquently. He was talking about integrity.

Q: That was one of Henderson's themes. When I asked him, in a recorded interview, what quality did he consider most important for a professional diplomat, he said, without batting an eye, integrity. He explained this point at some length. That was a central view of his. That's in a "Foreign Service Journal" article which I wrote and which contained excerpts from this interview.

WHITE: That's very interesting because he talked a great deal about "integrity" that afternoon. I was becoming a little annoyed at this, because I thought, "What does he think we are? Does he think that we're not men and women of integrity? Does he think that we're going to sell passports?" It took me a while to realize what he was really talking about. He wasn't talking about that kind of integrity, in the sense of honesty. He assumed that. In my view what he was really talking about was moral courage. He was talking about the integrity...

Q: Well, honesty, in the basic sense, involves integrity.

WHITE: Well, it does in the basic sense. However, he wasn't talking about the legalistic meaning of honesty. What he was really talking about was something more than that kind of honesty. He was talking about moral courage, the courage to say what you think...

Q: And standing up for what you believe.

WHITE: Exactly. Later on, I found out more about Loy Henderson and learned that that was a subject that he knew a great deal about. You know, it is not generally realized, even today, that the Department of State was "savaged" within the space of one decade, from both the Left and the Right. It was "savaged" by Leftist elements in the late 1930s. They clashed head-on with Loy Henderson, as you remember, over the question of policy toward the Soviet Union. Henderson was in Russia in the 1930s and knew what was going on.

Q: He attended the purge trials in Moscow. He described this experience to me when I talked with him.

WHITE: Certain elements in the Roosevelt administration eased him out of at least one important position, prior to or during World War II.

Of course, you know about the period after World War II, when the Right "savaged" the Department.

Q: In 1948 he was the most outspoken individual anywhere in saying that if we supported the establishment of the State of Israel, it was going to engender such turmoil of a continuing nature that it would ravage the Middle East for decades to come.

Clark Clifford [then a Special Assistant to President Truman and later Secretary of Defense], in particular, accused Henderson of being "anti-Semitic." Henderson was very

sensitive about that. He always said that many of his best friends were Jewish.

Anything else about this A-100 class that you might care to talk about at this point?

WHITE: Well, I think that we've pretty well covered it.

Q: What happened after you finished the A-100 class? You received an assignment at the end of the course?

WHITE: At the end of the course I was assigned to IES, which was the acronym for the International Educational Exchange program. It had a division called the Reception Centers Branch.

Q: Did you ask for this?

WHITE: No. I think that this was just sort of a peremptory assignment. I don't think that they asked us at that point. Well, they did ask us if we wanted to go overseas first or have a Washington assignment. I opted for a first tour in Washington for several reasons. First of all, I thought that it would be useful to learn how things work at "headquarters," as it were. Secondly, having been away in the Army for a couple of years, I was back in Washington and enjoying a pleasant social life.

Q: And you were still a bachelor.

WHITE: I was still a bachelor. I associated with a very pleasant group of people in the Georgetown area of Washington. Girls, or young ladies, I guess we say today, would team up and rent a house. We had a lot of enjoyable, social activities going on. I was quite content to stay in Washington for a few years.

The Reception Center Branch had responsibility for supervising the work of our Reception Centers. These were not passport offices. They were separate offices which, I think, we still have. We had these centers in Miami, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Hawaii. They had two, basic functions: first of all, to meet foreign dignitaries coming into the United States at their first point of arrival. They also administered programs handled by the Department of State, like the "leader grant" and scholar exchange programs.

As a first assignment, I enjoyed it. A lot of my friends were sent to something called Biographic Reporting. At the time this job was considered the "pits," and they didn't like it at all.

Q: This program was subsequently taken over by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency].

WHITE: That's right, just as IES was subsequently taken over by USIA [United States Information Agency].

However, as part of my duties I went up to New York to work in the Reception Center there and I spent two consecutive summers in Miami at the Reception Center. That would have been the summers of 1957 and 1958. While I was down in Miami, a lot was happening in Cuba. Fidel Castro was up in the Sierra Madre mountains [of eastern Cuba] and seemed to be growing stronger every day. It became obvious that it was only a matter of time before he would take power in Cuba.

Q: And there was "thunder" about that all over the U.S., that this man was a Communist.

WHITE: The curious thing is that down in Miami people didn't think so at the time. I attended a lot of social functions in Miami, including dinners and receptions, where I met people who, supposedly, knew what was going on. Fidel was regarded by many of them as, perhaps, a misguided revolutionary but not a Communist.

Q: Batista [Fulgencio Batista, then the president and dictator of Cuba] really was a dangerous man.

WHITE: Of course, everyone compared Castro with Batista. I don't think that even at this point Castro was calling himself a Communist.

Q: I think you're right.

WHITE: The general view was that whatever was coming next in Cuba, it would be better than it had been under Batista. I only met one person in Miami who told me otherwise. Apparently, he had the real story on Fidel Castro. He was a U.S. Customs officer.

I remember that I met him one night at a dinner. A rather wealthy woman in Miami who was very interested in world affairs gave a dinner, and I was invited. We were sitting around her swimming pool, having cocktails before dinner. She had a beautiful house out in the suburbs of Miami or in Miami Beach. I met this Customs officer, who struck me as a very sensible and down to earth person. He didn't strike me as someone who was ideologically driven. He claimed to have his own contacts in Cuba who, he said, were very well informed. He said: "Don't believe for a moment that Castro is just a harmless revolutionary. He is a hard core Bolshevik and he will be a disaster for the United States if he achieves power."

Q: At the time Castro took over the Cuban Government I thought that Castro was a pure opportunist.

WHITE: I think he was that, too. I think that eventually he came to the conclusion that the way to serve his own opportunism was to be an out and out Communist.

Q: When did he come into power, in 1960?

WHITE: I think that it was in January, 1959.

Q: When did the U.S. impose an embargo on sugar imports from Cuba into the United States? At that point what could Cuba do? They exported 90 percent of their sugar to the U.S. When he lost the U.S. market, the Soviets picked it up. Khrushchev was then in power in the Soviet Union. They agreed to buy all of Cuba's sugar. From that point on there was no question that Cuba was a Soviet satellite. I have heard people argue that until that point you could argue as to whether Castro was under Soviet control. I don't know about that. I am no expert on Cuba.

WHITE: My recollection is that the Eisenhower administration made a bona fide effort to get along with Castro. He was even invited up to Washington and New York at one point, if I'm not mistaken. I think that, at first, the Eisenhower administration welcomed his taking power. Who was our Ambassador to Cuba? He died just a few years ago.

Q: I think that it was Phillip Bonsal.

WHITE: I think that when he was Ambassador, we made a real effort to get along with Fidel. I think that we held a hand out to Fidel, but he cast it aside.

Q: Then you think that the trade embargo came after this point, not before?

WHITE: I really can't say.

Q: So what did you think of your experience in IES?

WHITE: Well, after one year doing that kind of work, which was fun and interesting, but obviously not very substantive, I was abruptly called back from Miami by phone one day. The Director of IES wanted a new staff assistant. So I was brought back to be his staff assistant.

Q: That kind of job is usually an indicator that you were appreciated.

WHITE: Oh, yes, it was a good job. I was quite flattered to be offered that job. I didn't even know that it was available. This was one of those "out of the blue" phone calls.

Q: Was IES part of the Bureau of Cultural Affairs, or CU, at that point?

WHITE: It became part of CU. It was not in the main State Department building. The new State Department building hadn't been completed at that time. IES was up on K St in a building of its own, around 18th and K Streets. The Director was Donald Edgar, a Foreign Service Officer and a very fine man.

I have no idea why I was selected. I was in IES at the time, so perhaps they felt that I knew something about the organization. Maybe they thought that, after all, I was having too much fun down in Miami.

Anyway, they brought me back, and for a year [1957-1958] I served as the staff aide to the Director of IES. That was a very fascinating position to be in. I was, of course, very much a junior officer, yet basically the people I dealt with every day were very senior Office Directors. In that kind of position you have to be very tactful. My job was to go around and say to Office Directors: "You know, Mr. Edgar wants this," and, by implication, where is it?

Q: You had to keep track of all of the papers.

WHITE: I had to nudge people more senior than I was very gently. I had to see that things were done that the Director of IES wanted done. Edgar's Deputy Director, by the way, was a very interesting fellow, John Hayes. They made a good combination. Hayes was not a Foreign Service officer.

John had been active with veterans groups. He had been an Army officer during World War II.

I got along very well with both Donald Edgar and John Hayes. They were very different and had different styles of operating. Donald Edgar was a Foreign Service Officer who was basically like all of us, I think. His preferred place was abroad, not in Washington. I think he had, a very good Deputy Director in John Hayes, who knew the Washington scene. As I said, they worked very well together.

You mentioned the Wriston program. I was never very "keen" on this program, not for the reasons that were generally mentioned at the time. I think that, in the end, this program sort of "petered out" like so many major reforms. Aren't we sort of back where we were before the Wriston program?

Q: Yes, but Loy Henderson's whole approach to the Wriston program was essentially "sabotaged" by "the young Turks" among the Foreign Service Officers. Well, there was a series of developments involved, but that's too long a story to go into now. I'd love to discuss that but I must repress the urge to do so. It can't be done in just a few words.

That kind of job as a staff aide gave you a good sense of how the Department of State worked and how papers flow up and down.

WHITE: Absolutely. It was an excellent job. What really amazed me was the degree to which my boss, Donald Edgar, allowed me and relied on me to go over all of the incoming traffic [that is, cables and other correspondence] in the morning which came to his office. In effect, I decided what he saw. I thought at the time: "Why is he relying on me to make these judgements?" But that was part of my job, and I guess that I did it to his satisfaction.

So every morning I would read over all the material that came in, including telegrams and all of the other paperwork that was coming up to Donald Edgar as Director of IES. By the way, IES was a large directorate. As I say, it occupied an entire building probably eight

stories high, on K St. Essentially, I, a very junior officer, determined what he saw. Unless, of course, correspondence came to him directly. I would get there early in the morning. Well, you know the usual work of a staff aide. It is to get to the office early and leave late. I went over a lot of incoming material and made a lot of phone calls.

Q: You did that for one year?

WHITE: That's right, one year. Then it was time to go overseas. I went to the FSI [Foreign Service Institute] and studied German for four months.

Q: Did you ask for German language training?

WHITE: I did and I wanted to go to Germany.

Q: Had you taken German previously?

WHITE: German was my first foreign language.

Q: That's what you took in the Foreign Service exam?

WHITE: That's right. I had passed the written exam in German before I went to the FSI. Even though I had passed it, I just had a written knowledge of German. I knew scholarly German, actually. So I took the four-month course in German at the FSI. At the end of the course, the students filed into a room and sat down. Somebody from State Department Personnel sat up on a stage and read out our names and assignments.

Q: What was your score in German when you finished the course? Such and such a number in speaking and reading?

WHITE: I got a S-3, R-3 [Useful speaking knowledge and useful reading knowledge of German]. I thought this was a generous mark, but anyway that was my mark.

Q: That was pretty good.

WHITE: It was considered a good mark. That meant that I had qualified in German.

Q: So what happened when they read the names out?

WHITE: My name was read and after it they said, "Bremen." Bremen, Germany, where we had a Consulate General.

Q: Gee whiz, that's good. Were you pleased with that assignment?

WHITE: Yes. Actually, I would have been pleased with any post in Germany. Any German-speaking post, for that matter.

Germany loomed very large in our foreign relations. We had fought two wars against Germany. My brother had fought against the Germans around Mannheim during World War II. I was fascinated by the country. Of course, I read a lot about its history. I was delighted with this assignment.

One of the things that I learned very early on in my career is that the Department doesn't always do things very sensibly. We had people who had studied German for four months and were not sent to German speaking posts, which is rather absurd. In fact, it might be worth mentioning that one of my colleagues was from the Department of Agriculture. He decided to join the Foreign Service and was accepted. He was a very capable fellow. However, he was not a natural speaker of foreign languages. He had to work very hard on German, but he did work very hard to keep up with our class for four, long months. At times, despite my advantage in having studied German previously, I was about to go around the bend. You remember those closed, windowless cells where we studied languages at the FSI?

Q: I was in Hungarian language training for eight months in one of those little rooms.

WHITE: I can't imagine how we retained our sanity. Anyway, this colleague of mine manfully struggled and he got through the course. I don't know what grade he got at the end of the course. However, when they read out his assignment, it wasn't to a German speaking post. I remember his saying to me: "Well, this is crazy! Why did I spend four months, knocking my brains out, and they send me some place else?" You know what he did? He resigned and went back to the Department of Agriculture.

About 10 years later, when I had just returned from somewhere, I was walking through the corridors of the Department. I saw a name on a door, and it said: "Director, Office of International Trade Policy." It was this fellow.

Q: You mean Howard Worthington!

WHITE: You know, I was about to mention his name, and you beat me to it by a second!

Q: I knew Howard quite well. He was a really intense guy. He died of a heart attack around age 50. He was a friend of Frances Wilson. She loved him.

WHITE: You're right, he was very intense, very hardworking. And 10 years later he was the head of the Office of International Trade Policy. I walked in to see him, and we had a nice chat. Later on, he went to the Treasury Department as an Assistant Secretary. I think that, somewhere along the way, he was an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Commerce as well.

Q: His assignment to the Treasury Department came not too long after he was the Director of the Office of International Trade Policy in the State Department.

WHITE: I think that his last job was as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. That was an

interesting case, and there were other people like him.

Howard just wasn't that type of conventional Foreign Service Officer. Again, we go back to the question of temperament. He probably didn't have the temperament to be in the Foreign Service. Probably, the best thing that he did was to resign when he did, at the outset of his career. Look where his career went. He did extremely well.

Q: So you went to the Consulate General in Bremen.

WHITE: I went to Bremen as Vice Consul.

Q: Did you have any special preparation for this assignment, beyond your language training?

WHITE: No, none whatever. In those days the Foreign Service was a rather formalistic service. I wrote my polite letter to the Consul General, saying that I was delighted to be assigned to his staff. I got back an equally polite letter, saying that he was delighted that I was coming to Bremen.

I traveled to Bremen on the SS AMERICA [United States Lines]. That was the period when we could travel by ship, first class!

Q: I never got to do that. I had to fly.

WHITE: I did it on my first assignment overseas. Our first European landfall was in Southampton, England. There I found a letter waiting for me from my predecessor in Bremen, Jack Carle. He said in the letter that he would meet me at Bremerhaven [the port of Bremen] and see me through the formalities of arrival at post.

When I arrived in Bremerhaven, the Consul General was there, too. I drove up to Bremen with the Consul General, he and I in the back seat of his car, with his German chauffeur.

Q: Were you fairly intimidated by this reception?

WHITE: Well, I suppose that I was impressed. I knew that I would rotate from one job to another in the Consulate General. That's what junior officers did in the Foreign Service at that time. I expected to rotate...

Q: Which was sensible.

WHITE: The Consul General told me: "Well, we're going to put you in the Admin Section for a year." Anything less than a year wouldn't have made any sense. I said that that was fine. I didn't know anything about administration and I didn't join the Foreign Service to do administrative work. However, that's what the Consul General assigned me to do, and that's what I did.

Q: Had the previous Administrative Officer already left?

WHITE: No, Jack Carle, who had met me in Bremerhaven, was Admin Officer at the time. He was on the verge of leaving the post, but we still had an overlap of about a week. Remember that we almost always had an overlap, if possible.

Q: At least he could give you some orientation as to what your work was going to be.

WHITE: Oh, yes, we had a week of overlap.

The Consulate General building in Bremen was beautiful, one of these marble and glass structures, very modernistic, built in the 1950s, probably using counterpart funds from the Marshall Plan. It was well located in downtown Bremen. I was ushered into one of the biggest offices that I ever had in my life, at my first overseas post. There was a sofa and easy chairs, with a big desk and a big chart behind me with the post organization pattern set out on it. There was a huge shelf with the Foreign Service Regulations displayed on it.

The Consul General, with a sort of gleam in his eyes, said: "Well, you'll have to read all of those regulations!" Of course, he didn't mean that, literally. So that's how I really started my Foreign Service career.

Q: How did you learn how to be an Administrative Officer? This reminds me of the old "New Yorker" cartoon. Somebody was skiing down a hill, reading a book on "How to Ski."

WHITE: Well, you know, you just "get your feet wet." I got my feet wet the very first day that I was there. One by one the officers at the Consulate General, most of whom were married and had children, came in to see me, not together, but one by one. They had a problem. We had a school bus that took their children out to a British school near Delmenhorst outside of Bremen. The nearest American School was at Bremerhaven, where we had our major Port of Embarkation. But that was a bit too far. In the winter, fog and bad weather were causes for concern. Somebody, I don't know who, maybe some accountant down in the Embassy in Bonn, questioned the use of the bus and said we would have to get rid of it. It allegedly violated the regulations.

I was a bachelor and had no family, so the issue didn't affect me directly. It was a good sort of "first case." What should I do? So I turned to the shelf full of the Foreign Service regulations. The best thing in a volume of the Regulations is the index. I also made some phone calls to the people in the Embassy in Bonn because I was "brand new" and really didn't know anything about what I was doing. I also spoke to the Consul General and learned that in his view it probably was contrary to the regulations to be using this bus.

I said to the Consul General: "Look, if we cancel the bus, we're going to have a morale problem." He was a bit skittish about this because, after all, he was responsible for the administration of the post. I remember thinking to myself one afternoon, as I was poring

over the Foreign Service Regulations: "Wait a minute. I have a lot of people on the staff here who can read the regulations. What was my job, after all? Was it to read the Regulations and parrot them? Or was it to interpret the Regulations in a positive way to take care of the needs of the post?" I decided that my job was in the latter category.

I told the Consul General that we should continue to use the bus. He said: "It's risky, and I don't think we should do it." We talked again about morale. Then he said: "Okay, but it's your responsibility." This was fair enough. I really couldn't object to this. So we kept the school bus. I guess that I was quite popular with my colleagues for keeping the school bus.

To run ahead with this story a little bit, at the end of that first hard but very fascinating year, we had a Foreign Service Inspection. I don't know how inspections are viewed today, but then, you know, Foreign Service Inspections were sort of like the "crack of doom." The words, "You're being inspected" sounded menacing. Not only that, but we were told that the administrative inspector was a very tough man.

Q: And as post Administrative Officer, you were right at the center of the inspection.

WHITE: Right. My colleagues would say to me: "For all practical purposes, you're bearing the weight on 95 percent of this Inspection." At that time the preparations for an inspection were "humongous," as my kids would say. An infinite amount of paperwork had to be prepared, covering every conceivable aspect of post operations.

Now Bremen was what I would call a medium size Consulate General. We had six Foreign Service Officers: the Consul General, a Political Officer who served as his Deputy, two Consular Officers, an Economic Officer, and myself as Administrative Officer. That was the Foreign Service staff. We also had a USIS [United States Information Service] office, a Department of the Army office with several people assigned, and a U.S. Coast Guard office, believe it or not. Curiously enough, the Coast Guard had an office in Bremen, made up of one Commander and one Chief Petty Officer to look after all of the American seamen that would come into Bremen or Bremerhaven.

Q: Was there a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] presence in the Consulate General that you knew about?

WHITE: Not to my knowledge.

The Consulate General was responsible for all Foreign Service shipments in and out of Central and Eastern Europe. This was a big job. I had a separate shipping unit which had an excellent German staff. We had one American woman Foreign Service Staff Officer in the code room. My own staff consisted of about 25 or 26 people, all of whom were German, with the exception of the American woman who handled the code room, files, etc.

Q: You needed a competent staff in a place like Bremen. In some parts of the world the

local staff people are very difficult.

WHITE: I had a very competent staff. My attitude was that these people seemed to know what they were doing. I let them do their jobs. I had no problem delegating authority to them, provided that they always kept me fully informed about what they were doing. That arrangement worked very well.

Q: And you had no problems with them?

WHITE: No. To go back to the school bus problem, I think that this was an interesting, Foreign Service matter. Two Foreign Service Inspectors arrived. The Administrative Inspector was John Crawford.

Q: His job was to work full time on you.

WHITE: That's right. As they moved from post to post through Germany, we were getting reports on how they operated. We had a lot of posts in Germany: Bremen, Berlin, Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, Munich, and so forth. I had reports that John Crawford was bad news. [Laughter] He was reportedly strict, by the book, and looked into everything.

He came to see me the first morning they were in Bremen. He was very affable. As he sat in my office with me, I could see that he was going through a kind of routine set of questions. Then he said: "Tell me, Mr. White, are there any particular problems which you want to bring to my attention?" I had made up my mind that the only thing to do with a problem was to bring it to the attention of the Inspectors, because they were going to find out anyway. I thought it was better to take the initiative and lay it on the table.

So I said: "Yes, Mr. Crawford, I have a problem that's been bugging me. It's a nagging problem, but I cannot find any other way to handle it than the way I'm handling it. That is the matter of the school bus." So I went into a description of it. I could see that he was looking rather appalled. I was sure that I was going to get zapped on this one. He went everywhere with me in the Consulate General building. By the way, we had staff housing, we had a Residence for the Consul General, a lot of real estate around Bremen.

I made it a point, and I think that it's a good point, to go where the action is and see what's going on. Whenever you're responsible for anything, go down where that activity is taking place. I used to go down to the Motor Pool about once every month or so. I would go right into the room where the man in charge of the Motor Pool had his office. There was another room where the drivers stayed between trips. I was the chief, the boss. The Germans had this approach to authority. I would chat pleasantly with them and then I would ask to see the Motor Pool records. The man in charge of the Motor Pool was an artist and a very good one. However, wars do funny things, and I guess that he was glad to have a job, running the Motor Pool at the American Consulate General. He would open the drawers of the cabinets and pull out all of his records. I would look at them, although half of the time I didn't know what I was looking at. I would nod sagely. But that was for

a purpose. That was to let them know that they had a boss, that he was interested in them, that he came down to their work place and talked with them, and that he looked at the records. So they knew that they had a boss who: (a) cared something about them and (b) knew what they were doing. They knew that I was watching over their shoulder. I think that that's a very important point in management. I can think of some Secretaries of State who never did this. But that's beside the point in this discussion.

To return to the post, Inspector Crawford even wanted to see the boiler room. We climbed up and down ladders and so forth and looked around the boilers. I didn't know anything about these pipes. However, I had been down there, and I had seen to it that they were painted.

Q: There were no cobwebs around.

WHITE: Right. At the end of it all, I got a wonderful report on the Administrative Section and I was quite proud of it. However, as the inspector was leaving, he came back for what they call the "exit interview." He was getting up to leave, after all of these accolades. I said: "Hey, what about that school bus?" He stopped dead in his tracks, turned around and thought for a moment, and then said: "You know, that is a problem. However, if I were you, I would just go on doing what you're doing."

Q: Did he say: "But it's your responsibility?"

WHITE: No. Anyway, it was an interesting moral to learn. You have to assume responsibility and do what you think is right.

Q: And you have to be a bit lucky.

WHITE: You have to be a bit lucky, too. He could have thrown the book at me. However, I was always sure that I could defend my position to my satisfaction.

Q: It is important for your boss to know. I assume that the Consul General knew what the Inspector had said.

WHITE: Right. He was very pleased because the results were successful. The Consul General was a pre-World War II kind of Foreign Service Officer. He was rather stiff but distinguished looking. He was definitely of the old school, as we say today. Although today I suppose that some people would talk about me as being of the old school.

Now, if you want to, we can get into the commercial aspects of the Consulate General.

Q: What was the transition there? You were told at the outset that you would be doing administrative work for one year.

WHITE: I was assigned to administrative work for one year. Then it appeared, since everything had worked out well, that I would continue doing administrative work for a

second year.

Q: Yes, if the Consul General was satisfied with your work and you got a good inspection report because of it, there would be a tendency not to rock the boat and make changes.

WHITE: Exactly. I was quite prepared to continue doing administrative work. I felt that during the first year I had kind of earned a second year that would be less hectic. I felt that I could relax a bit and rest on my laurels, let's say. That is never a good idea, by the way. To my surprise, the Consul General called me in one day and said: "I want to set up a separate Commercial Section."

Q: There was no Commercial Section before?

WHITE: We had an Economic Section. Of course, the Economic Section also did whatever commercial work needed to be done. However, this function was not identified as a separate section of the Consulate General.

Harrison Lewis, the Consul General, had done commercial work himself in Japan, during a previous assignment. He thought that the commercial function was important. Even then we were beginning to hear some dire reports about our balance of payments and our balance of trade situation. Already at that time the feeling was emerging that the U.S. should be doing more exporting.

Remember, after World War II there was what was called the "Dollar Gap." I recall writing a paper at Georgetown University on this subject. Well, you know what the world was like after 1945. There was virtually only one country that was producing anything, and that was the U.S. The world was eager to buy our goods. They didn't have the U.S. dollars to buy them. That was the Dollar Gap. In fact, the Marshall Plan was created to deal with the Dollar Gap. The world was our "oyster in those years.

However, by 1959 that situation had already begun to change. When I went to Germany in 1959, that was only 14 years after the end of World War II. You remember those pictures of how Cologne looked in 1945? Nothing standing but the two towers of the Cologne Cathedral. By 1959 there was scarcely a trace of World War II in Germany. The country was booming. You had to look long and hard to find a trace of all of that devastation. Occasionally, in Bremen you would come across a lot that was vacant. You understood that there probably had been a building there before the war. The Germans just hadn't gotten around to rebuilding on that particular lot.

I traveled widely in Germany. The Ruhr area was booming. You would think that there never had been a war. Germany was rising, but, of course, Western Europe was rising, too. The game was changing. Consul General Harrison Lewis understood that and wanted, in his own, modest way and with the modest resources he had available to highlight the commercial function.

As it was, on the first floor of the Consulate General there was a huge space where USIS

had been storing films. They weren't using it for offices. It was a prime location. The Consul General thought that this was a silly use of space. So we worked it out with USIS. They stored their films somewhere else, probably over in the Amerika Haus, which was a binational cultural center. In Bremen the Amerika Haus was a separate facility. Ironically, I think that our commercial library was the largest I've ever seen in the Foreign Service with the possible exception of the Embassy in Paris.

So we set up the Commercial Section where USIS had previously been storing films. I was given a German secretary and one, local professional employee. The local employee I hired was a young man, fresh out of a university and very dynamic and eager to get busy. I had an office, this young man had an office, and my secretary was out in the commercial library.

Of course, we had a lot of help from the Embassy. I haven't mentioned the role of the Embassy so far. The Embassy, of course, was always available to me.

Q: I meant to ask, was the Administrative Officer in the Embassy in Bonn your "father confessor?"

WHITE: Oh, very much so. He was Arch Jean. I don't know whether you knew him.

Q: Oh, sure. He was a Personnel man also.

WHITE: When I knew him he was Administrative Counselor at the Embassy in Bonn. He was very supportive of what I was doing. He helped me out of some jams I managed to get myself in, as a result of my youthful exuberance. The Commercial and the Agricultural Counselors often visited Bremen for trade shows or exhibitions of one kind or another.

Q: These would have involved economic matters.

WHITE: Yes. We had a lot of help. Anyhow, we set up the Commercial Section in the Consulate General. We had a huge reception when we opened the Commercial Section. We invited all of the local people interested in trade.

Q: Who was the Ambassador then?

WHITE: The Ambassador was Walter J. Dowling. By the way, he traveled in a special train. Those were the days when our Ambassador in Germany, in effect, was a kind of "Viceroy."

Anyhow, all of the elite of Bremen attended the reception. They were largely the descendants of the old, Hanseatic families.

Q: So this would have been early in your first year as Commercial Officer in Bremen?

WHITE: It was in the fall of 1960 that I launched this project of setting up a commercial office in Bremen.

Q: What did your regular work involve in that capacity? This was your first, real assignment as a Commercial Officer.

WHITE: Yes. The Economic Section of the Consulate General had its own officer.

Q: Was the Economic Officer your supervisor?

WHITE: No. There was only one boss, the Consul General. We were all essentially junior officers, except for the Deputy to the Consul General, who was a mid-career officer.

Q: I've always felt that the commercial function should be subordinate to the overall, economic function. That's probably something that we will get into later on.

WHITE: Yes, we can discuss that matter later on in greater detail. The commercial function was handled as a separate unit of the Consulate General. Obviously, we worked closely together, but the Economic Section had an officer, a secretary, and two senior local employees. You know how valuable those senior local employees are.

Q: This is quite a thing to set up a unit like that, when you really hadn't had operational experience in that area.

WHITE: I had none whatever.

Q: You didn't have a wall of Foreign Service Manuals to refer to, with an index. You didn't have any of that.

WHITE: No. We had the Thomas Register of American firms, but that's a little different.

Q: And you had your own imagination.

WHITE: That's right. Of course, we had very good relations with all of the chambers of commerce in the consular district.

We started from scratch and kind of thrashed around.

Q: What did you do?

WHITE: Well, we worked out a deal with the Embassy, whereby we assumed "national" responsibility [that is covering all of the Federal Republic of Germany] for certain industries, in terms of commercial exploitation. One of our areas of responsibility was textiles and clothing.

Q: Were textiles and clothing major concerns in the Bremen area?

WHITE: Historically, they had been mainly imported through Bremen. There was also a textile and clothing industry in the area, giving Bremen responsibility for textiles and clothing was part of the division of labor with the Embassy. The theory was a good one. Rather than have the Consulates in Germany report on their separate districts, the idea was to split the economy up. Like many such divisions of labor, it was probably arbitrary to a large extent. Anyway, we had the textile and clothing industry.

We also had in our vicinity one of the most important trade fairs in Europe, the Hanover Fair.

Q: That went back to the Middle Ages.

WHITE: Exactly, and it's still going strong, as far as I know. Technically, I think that Hanover was in the Hamburg consular district. Remember that we had a larger Consulate General next to us in Hamburg.

Q: Were you aware how politically sensitive the textile and clothing industries were in terms of U.S. trade?

WHITE: I was aware of that, but bear in mind that these two industries were not all that sensitive at that time.

Q: By the 1960s the reason that Luther Hodges of North Carolina was named Secretary of Commerce under President Kennedy was that, as Governor of North Carolina, he knew a lot about textile plants in North Carolina, which were threatened by foreign competition, especially at that time.

WHITE: Well, we were getting into that time. Now, we had responsibility for the textile and clothing industry throughout Germany.

Q: I assume that there would be as much interest in the Department of Commerce in those industries as in any industries, given the position of Luther Hodges. What year was this?

WHITE: I'm sure there was great interest in the Department of Commerce in the textile and clothing industry in Germany. This was in 1960, at the tail end of the Eisenhower administration. We had the Chairman or the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of Burlington Mills, one of the big American textile and clothing firms, visit Bremen.

Q: Do you remember his name, offhand, because that's a major company?

WHITE: I can't remember his name, right now. We had done a study of the textile and clothing industry. I remember going down with one of our local employees to the Ruhr area. In doing this study we worked very closely with the Economic Section of the

Consulate General. One of the senior local employees of the Economic Section went with me. We were separate and distinct from the Economic Section but we didn't have a firewall between us. We did a lot of research and came up with a market survey on what items of clothing would be the most attractive in the German market. It was all sort of humdrum, but anyway, of all things, we found out that there was a fantastic market potential for American products in the baby attire and women's lingerie sectors.

Q: Was there a lot of interest in blue jeans?

WHITE: German women loved American baby clothes and lingerie. Don't ask me why. It was a little early for interest in blue jeans. Anyway, that was the potential.

As I said previously, this man from Burlington Mills visited our office, and I gave him a copy of this survey. He showed great interest in it. I'm sure that he thought that I was a young whippersnapper at the time. I told him about all of these great possibilities. He seemed interested but then he leaned back and said: "You know, it's not worth our while to modify our product lines for this market." That was the attitude, and I don't think that it was unique to him. I think that that was a fairly general attitude in American companies at that time. They seemed to feel that if the world wanted to buy our goods, that was fine. We seemed to feel that our markets were so assured that we didn't have to go out and hustle for new customers.

Bear in mind that foreign trade, as late as the 1950s, accounted for only about 5-6 percent of our GNP [Gross National Product]. It loomed large in absolute numbers. However, the American economy was so vast that, in percentage terms, foreign trade was still rather minimal, unlike Germany, where 33 percent of its GNP was in foreign trade.

We made a lot of calls on business firms in Bremen and Bremerhaven, by myself and my commercial assistant. We would go out and call on big companies, find out what they were interested in, and what American companies could do to supply their needs.

Q: You were looking for trade opportunities?

WHITE: Exactly. We did a lot of that. By the way, I keep talking about Bremen. In fact, the whole northwestern section of Germany was in our consular district, including Osnabruck, Oldenburg, and Emden, right up to the Dutch border. That's a heavily concentrated area in terms both of population and industry.

Q: I had the impression that, with regard to commercial opportunities, many people feel that these are pretty routine and not worth spending much time on. They tend to let the local employees handle them and then send them off to the Department. I gather that you took these commercial opportunities very seriously.

WHITE: We did. Do you remember an officer named Bill Krason? He was our Commercial Officer in Duesseldorf. He was something of a legend in his own time. He flooded the Department of Commerce with a tremendous number of trade opportunities. I

remember that, after a while, he came under some criticism because some people thought that this was just a lot of paper work. Well, it was not just paper work. These trade opportunities were being reported to Washington. Now, what Washington did with them is another matter.

Q: We'll get back to that when we get to your assignment to the Department of Commerce.

Did you have a trade mission?

WHITE: Several trade missions came to Bremen. The Port of Long Beach, California, sent a major trade mission. They were interested in promoting the port of Long Beach. Bremen, of course, has been a Hanseatic town and has had close trade relations with the United States. There was a very sophisticated group in the Bremen business community. Bremen is a traditional, cotton importing town.

Q: Was there an American Chamber of Commerce in Bremen?

WHITE: Yes, there was. It was a small group. The main Chamber of Commerce was in Hamburg. I spent a lot of time dealing with people in Hamburg. Pan American Airways was our airline in northern Germany at that time. The airline had a very aggressive promoter who often came to Bremen. We did a lot of travel promotion with Pan Am and with local travel agencies. I remember being asked to speak to the monthly luncheon of the travel agencies on the theme of "Visit the USA."

Q: You mean that you made luncheon speeches.

WHITE: That sort of thing. Oh, yes.

Q: Was your German good enough so that you could make the speeches in German?

WHITE: I made formal speeches in English for two reasons. First of all, they all understood English perfectly, and it was frankly easier for me. My German was good enough for normal conversation, but I don't recall giving any formal speech in German.

Q: Regarding these trade missions, some people see them as a kind of boondoggle and a waste of time and money. Did you feel that they really were useful?

WHITE: That raises an interesting subject regarding the whole issue of trade missions. I've had different views about it at different times.

Q: But now you're speaking of what you observed in Bremen?

WHITE: Well, we thought they were useful. The question is always how useful they were. The Long Beach group was a large mission. They came to Bremen but also went on to Hamburg and, I think, to Rotterdam. They were interested in developing German

awareness of the port of Long Beach. They did that. We worked hard. We had a series of conferences and individual one on one interviews between members of the mission and German importers.

Q: Was there feedback later on the value of the trade mission?

WHITE: I'm sure there was, in the normal course of events. There was another trade mission that went to Bonn, and then individual members of it went to different German cities. That was an interesting concept. One of them came to Bremen. I believe that he was interested in the textile industry. We arranged a two-day program for him at the Chamber of Commerce, including a schedule of interviews so that various German companies could talk with him about his field in textiles.

It was a very busy year doing nuts and bolts commercial work.

Q: But before this you had a vague feeling that you might be interested in the business function. This experience presumably heightened this feeling? It didn't turn you off? Did it intensify your interest?

WHITE: It intensified an interest that I already had. As I mentioned earlier, I was very interested in international business, even before I entered the Foreign Service. I would say that this was a natural progression.

Obviously, I got very interested in it when, out of the blue, I was asked to set up a separate Commercial Section in the Consulate General in Bremen. Remember also that, in doing that, we often had regional meetings in Bonn. I met all of my counterparts at other posts in Germany who were doing commercial work. Of course, I met a lot of people from the Department of Commerce. Do you remember Ted Hadraba? At one point, he was Commercial Counselor in Bonn.

At the end of that year 1961 my tour in Bremen was up. I went back to the States on transfer orders to Africa.

Q: That was quite a dramatic contrast. It could hardly be greater.

WHITE: Very much so.

Q: What did you think of that assignment?

WHITE: That was a time when Africa was very much on the front burner of attention in the Department of State. People tend to forget this today, but back in the early 1960s Africa was coming into its own.

Q: The process of decolonialization was moving ahead. In the aftermath of World War II the old British and French Empires were falling apart. The metropolitan powers were trying to cling to their colonies, but, of course, we were pushing them in the United

Nations and elsewhere to apply the principle of self-determination among nations.

WHITE: That was the Zeitgeist [spirit of the times], as the Germans say. At that time, it seemed, every month some new country was gaining independence.

Q: Of course, this was intensely controversial in the Department of State. Some people really got purple in the face over the issue of just feeding these newly independent nations.

WHITE: I know that this was a controversial issue. Of course, we tend to do everything whole hog, shall we say, or we did then. Africa was rapidly shifting from colonial rule to independence, all over the continent.

Actually, I was assigned to South Africa. My orders were to Johannesburg.

Q: When was this?

WHITE: From Bremen to Johannesburg at the end of 1961.

Q: South Africa was my first Foreign Service post. I served in South Africa from 1954 to 1957. My wife was originally South African.

WHITE: Well, I was on my way to South Africa at the end of 1961. My orders to Johannesburg came, and I thought that I was on the way there. I was very happy about that assignment.

Q: Did you have an assignment as Commercial Officer?

WHITE: Either Commercial or Economic. I forget which now. Remember, we had combined Economic and Commercial offices during that period. We didn't really separate them out. Another reason why Africa beckoned was that a lot of officers assigned to Germany were transferred to Africa because their other language was English. A lot of these newly-independent African countries were former British colonies where they could use English. I was not an Arabist, for example. But I'm getting a little ahead of the story.

I was assigned to South Africa. I went back to Washington for consultations. I walked into the office where the South African desk was, and they didn't know me from a hole in the wall. They said: "There must be some mistake." I went down to Personnel, and some bureaucrat said: "Didn't we tell you?" I said: "Tell me what?" He said: "Well, there's been a change, and you're not going to South Africa. You're going to the Sudan." I said: "Where?"

Q: That's quite a change.

WHITE: They said: "The Sudan, the Embassy in Khartoum." That is, "fabled Khartoum."

Q: Sudan had only recently become independent.

WHITE: Actually, it was one of the first African territories to gain independence. It became independent January 1, 1956. James Moose was our first Ambassador there. He was a long time Arabist, I believe.

What had happened was that the Foreign Service Inspectors had gone to South Africa. I was told that the position to which I was to be assigned had either been reorganized or eliminated. Anyway, I was going to Khartoum instead of South Africa.

As a filler, until the post opened up, I spent about three or four months translating articles from "Neues Deutschland," which was the party organ of the East German, communist regime. It was deadly and boring work. It wasn't terribly taxing, but anyway I spent four months translating articles from German into English.

Q: You might have been assigned to INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] to do that.

WHITE: It was the East European section of INR where I spent those months.

Q: Any State Department desk officer would drop dead before he would spend four months translating articles from the communist press.

WHITE: You're right.

To get to Khartoum, I took the SS CONSTITUTION to Europe and then flew down from Rome to Cairo.

Q: This was your second boat trip.

WHITE: I had gone back to the U.S. from Bremen on the SS UNITED STATES.

Q: You were becoming an expert on travel by sea.

WHITE: Yes, I was quite maritime in those days.

Actually, one of my major jobs in Bremen, to which I referred, was handling shipping in and out of Germany. So I got to know the lore of the sea.

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Q: *Today is September 17, 1997. I am John Harter, conducting this interview of Al White for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. We have been discussing Al White's career in the Foreign Service. Al, when we met last time, we were completing our discussion of your assignment to the American Consulate General in Bremen, Germany.*

One element that we left out of the discussion was your experience with shipping affairs.

WHITE: I was responsible for shipping matters. I had a very good shipping unit whose employees did a lot of the work. We were responsible for Foreign Service shipments into and out of Bremerhaven involving Germany and much of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Director of United States Lines for that part of the world was one of my contacts. I was often invited on board either the SS UNITED STATES or the SS AMERICA, either one of these two great passenger ships. Both of them served the shipping route from New York to Bremen. That took up a lot of my time, the nitty gritty of shipping back and forth across the North Atlantic Ocean. But it exposed me quite a bit to maritime issues and problems.

Of course, we had a community of American businessmen in Bremen, including representatives of Lykes Lines, U.S. Lines, and so on. I was exposed to their problems. As you know, the U.S. maritime industry has some ticklish problems.

Q: You were discussing a four-month hiatus in the midst of your assignment to Bremen. You were buried in a big stack of East German documents.

WHITE: I was translating a lot of East German propaganda, which was a tedious job, to say the least.

Q: Was this the least interesting part of your Foreign Service career?

WHITE: I would have to say so, because what we were translating was utter "junk." I don't know whether you've ever done this, but it was obvious, even then, that whatever intellectual justification communism might have had was long since burnt out. The articles that we were translating were utterly predictable and outrageous and had just been spewed out by communist party hacks. It was all totally ridiculous and implausible. It's hard to believe that anyone, even a German in East Berlin, could have read them with any degree of belief.

Anyway, to return to Africa, the 1950s and 1960s were a time when a lot of people were excited about this area. Many African countries were becoming independent, and there were glowing hopes for the future of these African countries. Sudan was no exception to this tendency. The British, I think, had done an extremely good job in Sudan. When they granted independence to the Sudan, they left a very well trained, civil service in place. Many of the officers in the Sudanese Army had been trained at Sandhurst [Royal Military College at Sandhurst, England], as I recall.

In fact, during my two years in the Sudan [1962-1964] I don't think that I ever heard criticism of the British by the Sudanese. This is a rather remarkable thing to say, since the British had been the colonial power. In fact, in their attitudes toward the British the Sudanese didn't love them, but they respected them. Sudan continued to maintain very close relations with the British. The Sudanese banking system was British, for all

practical purposes. Much of the trade of the country was in the hands of the British or with British companies. I think that the most influential foreigner in Khartoum during the two years I spent there was the British Ambassador, even though the United States loomed much larger than Britain in terms of its political and economic power.

Q: Is there anything that you should say about your preparations for going to the Sudan before you went there?

WHITE: Preparation? There was no preparation, frankly. It was understood that I would be speaking English, because Khartoum was basically an English-speaking post, although we had Arabists in the Embassy there.

Q: Was there a Sudan desk in the Department?

WHITE: There was a Sudan desk in the Department. At the time I left for Khartoum the Sudan desk was headed by Cleo Noel. You know, of course, what happened to Cleo some years later. He was assassinated in Khartoum.

Q: He was then the Ambassador.

WHITE: Right.

Q: Cleo Noel was assassinated, along with Curt Moore, who was a very good friend of mine.

WHITE: I didn't know Curt Moore. I knew Cleo Noel very well. I think that David Newsom was the Office Director of that particular region in AF [Bureau of African Affairs] at the time. When I returned from Khartoum in 1964, I remember calling on Dave Newsom.

Q: Were you sort of informally reading about Sudan, including "Chinese" Gordon and so forth?

WHITE: Of course, I was doing that. Well, actually, I knew a lot of that already. In fact, just about at that time two very good books were being published on the Sudan by Alan Moorehead. "The White Nile," I think, had appeared in 1961 or 1962. It was a brilliantly written book. That was followed by "The Blue Nile," which was published a few years later. I knew something about the country already. However, I don't recall being sent to any program of area studies at the time. I'm not sure that we had them available.

Q: But were you pleased at the prospect of going to the Sudan and this area, which was relatively far from civilization?

WHITE: Pleased? Well, I was under no illusions. Khartoum had the reputation of being THE most difficult post in the Foreign Service, if there is such a place.

Q: Did it deserve that reputation?

WHITE: I would say that it did. At the same time, at least then, there was a kind of unwritten understanding in the Foreign Service that you had to accept your share of hardship posts. I did nothing to avoid assignment to Khartoum, so that was...

Q: You still had no family, so...

WHITE: I had no family. I wouldn't say that I was keen to go to the Embassy in Khartoum, but on the other hand, I decided that I would make the most of it. That's the spirit in which I arrived at the post.

This time I knew what I would be doing. I would be the Assistant Economic Officer and the Consular Officer for the whole country. By the way, Sudan is a big country, amounting to more than 1.0 million square miles. All of the U.S. East of the Mississippi River would fit into the Sudan. Of course, it's a transitional country between the Arab world and Sub-Saharan Africa. Several of our people in the Embassy were Arabists who spent a lot of their lives studying Arabic and knew Arabic countries well. For example, the Political Counselor and his deputy were Arabists.

Q: What was the political situation when you arrived in the Sudan? You have somewhat touched on it. You have said that it was a newly independent country which didn't have generations of tradition as a sovereign nation.

WHITE: The Sudan had a very troubled and chaotic past. I think that one of the reasons why the British were rather well regarded in the Sudan was that the Sudanese, when you got to know them, would tell you that the British had at least brought law and order to the Sudan. And it was true that they had done so.

You wouldn't necessarily remember this, but before the British came to the Sudan, there was nearly total chaos in the country. The Egyptians tried to run the country and led it into disaster. The slave trade loomed large in the Sudan.

If you mention the word tradition in connection with the Sudan, if there was anything traditional associated with the Sudan, it was the slave trade.

Q: I thought that the slave trade was mainly connected with West Africa.

WHITE: I don't know about that. Read Alan Moorehead's book on the White Nile and you'll learn all about the slave trade. It was historic, it was widespread, it was horrible. The first thing that you have to understand about the Sudan, I would say, is that it is really two countries, lumped together as one. The northern two-thirds of the country are part of the Arab world. The topography of northern Sudan resembles that of southern Egypt. It is desert, rocky, flat, and hot. The language of the people in this region is Arabic. The religion is Islam. The Sudanese, all of them, are black. However, the people in the northern two-thirds of it are Islamic. They are just as much a part of Arab culture

as Egypt.

The southern third of the country, or what we call the southern Sudan, or Equatorial Sudan, is totally different. The people living in this area are very primitive, Nilotic tribes, with names like the Nuer, the Dinka, or the Shilluks. They are animists or were. They have their own indigenous culture. Christian missionaries have been active in the southern Sudan for a long time. The result is that almost all of the leadership in southern Sudan is composed of Christians. They were educated in Christian missionary schools. So not only are these people not Muslims, not only are they not Arabic in culture. The leaders are Christians.

In my own personal view, the southern Sudan should never have been connected with northern Sudan as part of one, sovereign political unit. The British did that. Now, why they did that, I don't know. I've never understood why they did it. Put it this way. The British tacked on the southern Sudan to the northern Sudan. I suppose that this was because the Nile River connects the two regions. So there is a geographical logic in it, but it's the only logic.

Regarding our own interests in the Sudan at the time I served there, remember that the Cold War was being waged.

Q: Were people in the Department afraid that the country would go communist?

WHITE: Well, it may sound cynical, but I guess that the truth is that we were more interested, not in the Sudan as such, but more in its position in terms of world strategic positions. Remember that Gamal Abdul Nasser was in charge in Egypt at the time. Nasser was moving closer to the Soviets. Remember the Suez Crisis was in 1956. Nasser was riding high when I got to the Sudan in 1962. He had already invited the Russians into Egypt, and they were there in a big way.

By the way, the Sudan had always been regarded by Egypt as a part of that country. I would dare say that, even to this day, if you ask the average Egyptian what he thinks of the Sudan, he'll say that historically it's a part of Egypt. That's not to say that they'd go off and fight a war for the Sudan. However, two of the choices when the Sudan was becoming independent [in December, 1955], and they had a plebiscite on this, was union with Egypt or independence.

Q: Refresh my memory, Al, Luxor is in...

WHITE: Luxor is in Upper, or southern, Egypt. Abu Simbel is very close to the Egyptian-Sudanese border, in the southern part of Egypt.

The Sudanese had a choice, between independence or union with Egypt. Colonel Nasser was putting a lot of money into tipping that choice toward union with Egypt.

Q: So the U.S. political interest, narrowly construed, was to see that the Sudan didn't get

connected with Egypt.

WHITE: We preferred an independent Sudan not ruled by Nasser. Remember again where the Sudan is. Just across that narrow Red Sea is Saudi Arabia. That's the Middle Eastern oil world.

When I arrived in Sudan, there had been a big flap over whether Aeroflot [a major Soviet international and domestic airline] would be given landing or overflight rights in the Sudan. That's the way people were thinking at that time. Aeroflot eventually got landing and overflight rights in the Sudan, with some restrictions.

Q: Were you involved in that controversy?

WHITE: No, that had been resolved just before I arrived in the Sudan.

Q: However, you were mainly involved in consular and commercial work. How did all of this political background affect what you were doing?

WHITE: Well, it affected me only indirectly. In connection with consular work it affected me more directly because, of course, there were Christian missions in southern Sudan, American missionaries among them.

Q: Was there quite a number of them?

WHITE: There were American Catholic and Protestant missionaries there. In terms of numbers, perhaps a couple of hundred.

Q: That's a good number.

WHITE: But they owned a lot of property. They had houses, clinics, schools, and agricultural stations.

Q: Were there Seventh Day Adventist missionaries there? Those missionaries usually did some pretty good work.

WHITE: There were various kinds of Protestant missionaries. However, their official names were “The Sudan Interior Mission,” “The African Inland Mission,” etc. One group, the American Mission, was Presbyterian connected.

Q: Did these American missionary groups have hospitals?

WHITE: They had clinics and hospitals. There were also Australian and English Protestant missionaries. Regarding the Catholics, I think that they were all Italian missionaries. In fact, there was an Italian missionary order which was very active in the southern Sudan, although some of the Italian missionaries were American citizens.

Q: Did the missionaries cause you consular problems? More than the routine run of problems?

WHITE: We saw the missions as a political problem. There was, in effect, a civil war going on in southern Sudan, reflecting what I just described here, the cleavage between North and South.

Q: So the southern Sudanese wanted their own, sovereign nation?

WHITE: They wanted independence or at least autonomy. They wanted to run their own affairs. Even before independence was granted to Sudan, the southern Sudanese had revolted. As a result, there was a bloody, nasty, guerrilla war. It was the worst kind of war, fought in equatorial jungles. I'm sure that I don't have to spell it out for you.

The Christian missionaries were there. They were caught in the middle. The Sudanese Government could never be convinced that they were not aiding and abetting the insurgents. Undoubtedly, if the insurgents came to the door of a resident at 3:00 AM with a machine gun and said: "We want food," well, people would be inclined to give them food, right?

Q: Personally, I would not ask too many questions in such a case.

WHITE: Well, the war was getting worse, and the Christian missionaries were more and more on the spot. Now, they always claimed that they had nothing to do with the war, and I'm sure that's true. However, they were there, they were in the middle of it, and that was a problem that preoccupied our Political Section. The Sudanese Government was always trying to put restrictions on the missionaries. It was a very tense relationship between the government, which was, of course, Arabic and Islamic, and the Christian missionaries in the South.

My involvement at first was simply that of a Consular Officer, giving them citizenship services, such as seeing that their passports were renewed and that sort of thing. The missionaries would come into my office all the time, and I would deal with their consular problems. However, the basic problem was considered a political one, which it really was. That was why it was dealt with in the Political Section of the Embassy.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

WHITE: William Rountree was the Ambassador.

Q: How did you evaluate his performance?

WHITE: He was a very fine man but rather aloof. I think that he used to say that he was born an FSO-1 [at the time the most senior position in the Foreign Service]. He was a civil servant from Georgia. He came from a very humble family. I recall his telling people, when he was reminiscing, that he and his brothers and sisters ran around without

shoes. He came to Washington, got a law degree at George Washington University, I think, after attending classes at night. He entered government service as a very low ranking clerk. He worked his way up and, somehow, came under the eye of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.

Rountree was Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs at a very critical time. He had also been Ambassador to Pakistan. From there, he was sent to Sudan as Ambassador, after John Kennedy became President in 1961. I suppose that position might have been considered by some as a step down, but it probably really wasn't. In any case, Sudan was an important country at that time.

He was stuck, of course, with the problems of the missionaries. My own situation in the Sudan is that I literally had two bosses in two different offices in the embassy. It was a rather frustrating situation. In terms of consular work as such, I reported directly to the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], who was Tom McIlhenny. McIlhenny was a very fine and competent officer. He was also very sympathetic to me. He understood the difficulties involved in my situation. He knew that I was working for him but that I was also working for the Economic Counselor, Giles Kelly. We were all good colleagues, but it was frustrating at times.

Q: It's always unsatisfactory to be split between two jobs and two bosses.

WHITE: Exactly. In the morning I would show up at the Economic Section, where I had my office across the hall from the Economic Counselor. There I did economic and commercial work. It was an integrated economic/commercial section. We had a small, commercial library. Then, around 11:00 am I would go down the hall to the Consular Section and deal with all of the problems at that end of the building until we closed at 2:00 or 2:30 pm. We worked six days a week.

Q: You mentioned consular work. How about the commercial work? How did that compare with and how did it differ from what you had done in Bremen?

WHITE: Of course, the nuts and bolts of commercial work were similar. Commercial work is not always very dramatic work in some ways. You have to have good reference works in the library, such as the "Thomas Register" and all of those basic reference books.

Q: You had more sophisticated reference works in Germany, of course.

WHITE: Yes. You can't compare the two situations, which were totally different. What does a Commercial Officer do? First of all, he deals with the problems which the business community brings to him. There are commercial difficulties which need to be solved, and we had a hell of a lot of those. There were problems with the Sudanese Customs authorities, in particular. Sudan was a long way from the United States. Sudan was not a major market, but there was some trade going back and forth with the United States. So all of these trade problems had to be dealt with. These were particularly frustrating in a

country like the Sudan.

In terms of dealing with the Customs authorities, I remember that two American businessmen came rushing into my office one day. They were very indignant. A shipment of their product, and I forget now what it was, had been held up in Customs, and the Sudanese Customs authorities were going to slap a high tariff on it. They went to the Sudanese Customs authorities. They were not very tactful, and the answer to every question they asked was: "No, no, no." So then they came to see me. They were very aggressive. Do you remember that novel, "The Ugly American?" Well, these guys were two ugly Americans. They were pushy and condescending. They had leaned all over the Sudanese Customs officials. Well, the Sudanese are very nice people. They're very patient.

Q: What kind of business were these American businessmen in?

WHITE: I have long since forgotten.

Anyhow, I had to go down and mollify the Sudanese Customs officials. There's a lot of psychology involved in this.

Q: Were the Sudanese Customs officials reasonably competent? In some countries like the Sudan they are frankly not particularly competent.

WHITE: Let's put it this way. The younger officials weren't terribly sophisticated. When I got to Sudan in 1962, the country had been an independent country for, what, seven years. They were essentially still in the throes of setting up their own government. Many of the government offices still had British expatriates working there, sort of acting behind the scenes and providing advice. For example, the Director of Civil Aviation was a South African. Maybe he didn't have any official title, but he was the expert to whom the Sudanese officials all deferred in that kind of work.

In terms of Customs, I don't know. However, when I went over to the Customs office, I could imagine the impression which these American businessmen had made on the Sudanese officials. The best psychology for me was not to identify with the two Americans but with the Sudanese Customs officials with whom, I'm sure, these Americans had been very abrasive. I went in and saw this very pleasant, Sudanese official in his 30s. He was overworked. His office was in miserable, dingy quarters, where the normal temperature was about 100 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit. He was trying to do a decent job. I said to him: "You know, you and I have the same problem." He said: "What's that?" I said: "It's these two American characters who are in town." He smiled and sat back. I had established rapport with him, and we were then able to solve the problem. That kind of problem was always coming up.

Q: Was there an American business group there?

WHITE: Not a resident American business group.

Q: Was there an American Club, as you might have in larger cities? Were there enough American businessmen there in Khartoum to form an American Club?

WHITE: Not resident American businessmen, no. Bear in mind that the Sudan was a very poor country, with a population of about 12 million people. There was only modest trade with the U.S. The big business in the Sudan involved very large projects, like the construction of dams. Two huge dams were being built.

Q: Were these banks financed by the World Bank, AID [U.S. Agency for International Development], or some other agency?

WHITE: AID was a major presence. In a word, the AID Mission was huge.

Q: Did you work with AID?

WHITE: Of course. I worked closely with them, and they worked closely with me.

Q: Tell us something about that.

WHITE: The Program Office of AID in Khartoum had an excellent staff.

Q: That is fairly characteristic about AID. The program people in AID tend to be pretty good.

WHITE: They were very good. I found them to be very helpful. Hopefully, I was helpful with them in other ways. As I say, this was a relatively large AID Mission. The Embassy was in what everyone said was the tallest building between Cairo, [Egypt], and Johannesburg, [South African Republic]. This was said half in jest, but it may have been literally true. This was a seven or eight story building.

You're familiar with the pattern. The Foreign Service staff was very small. There was the Ambassador; the DCM; the Political Counselor with one assistant; the Economic Counselor, also with one assistant, namely me; and the Consular Officer, also me. That was about it, except of course for our American secretaries and communications and other staff corps people.

Q: Was the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] represented in the Mission?

WHITE: Yes, but I'm talking about the core of the mission, the Foreign Service as such. The Foreign Service component consisted of six or seven FSOs.

There was a USIS [United States Information Service] operation, of course. Some of the attaches in Cairo, such as the Agricultural Attache, had regional accreditation. The Agricultural Attache would come down from Cairo to visit the Sudan from time to time. FAA [Federal Aviation Authority] people would also come down from Cairo. As I said,

there was a huge AID Mission in Khartoum.

It filled most of the Embassy building and spilled over into an annex.

Q: What were they doing? Were they involved in supervising the construction of these big dams?

WHITE: The AID Mission was basically providing a lot of technical assistance to the Sudanese. Among the AID programs, and the best program, in my view that AID was responsible for anywhere, was bringing people to the United States for exposure to the U.S. and training. The AID Mission in Khartoum did a lot of that.

Q: Did the AID Mission have an education program?

WHITE: They had an education program across the board, including bringing people to the United States. This was for short-term, medium-term, and long-term training in any technical field that you can think of. That was a big operation. In fact, this activity was housed in the annex behind the main Embassy building.

Q: What was the worst program that AID had?

WHITE: Well, let's start first with the good things that AID did. The AID Mission had a very good agricultural section which did a lot of good work in terms of agricultural development. One of the things that they were doing was digging wells in the Western part of the Sudan to bring up water from deep underground sources mainly to provide water for cattle. Raising cattle was the economic mainstay of southern and western Sudan.

I think that one of the most questionable things that AID did was to build a road that extended for about 40 kilometers outside of Khartoum, and then stopped. AID also built a textile factory.

Q: They built a textile factory?

WHITE: AID provided the funding or part of it. That created some controversy later...

Q: I would assume so. Do you remember any of the details on that?

WHITE: No. I think that that project was developed after I left the Sudan, but it was under consideration at the time I was there.

On the whole, my impression was that the AID Mission had too many people and that it was throwing money around too freely and on projects which I wasn't sure had been very well thought out. AID once carried out an end user study of all of the equipment which AID had been sending to the Sudan. It was considered "UNCLASSIFIED" at the time. One of the things found in this study, and I remember this vividly, was that x-ray

equipment had been sent down to the southern Sudan. Sending x-ray equipment was very noble and very laudable. However, they found that this equipment was simply sitting in railroad cars on sidings or out in the rain. It was ruined in the equatorial climate. It had never been unpacked.

I remember reading that report and thinking that the publication of this study was going to create a stir. It didn't create any stir, as far as I could see.

As I said, I thought that the AID Mission had too much money available and was spending it too freely and had too many people assigned to the Sudan. Frankly, the AID people conducted themselves as if they were totally apart from the Mission.

For example, here's a silly thing, in a way, but it's very indicative. I remember our Post Reports. Maybe they look better now, but they used to be just amateurish, mimeographed products. The Embassy Post Report in the Sudan was also like this at the time. The AID Mission had a separate Post Report, which I picked up and read one day. It was printed on glossy paper, like "Time" magazine, with pictures in color. AID had its own administrative operation, its own warehouse, and everything of its own. I thought that this was ridiculous, in a community as small as the official American community in Khartoum. Frankly, I thought that this was rather offensive.

When I was there, the embassy set up something called CAMO, the Consolidated Administrative Management Organization. CAMO was put under an Administrative Officer from the State Department, as I recall. How well CAMO worked I don't know, and I wouldn't want to judge how good it was. Just let me say that I put in a requisition for some furniture that AID had in storage in their warehouse. It was never delivered to my house. But that's a minor thing.

Q: Did you handle some of the liaison activity between the Embassy and AID?

WHITE: I worked with them all of the time, although this wasn't a formal liaison arrangement. For example, one of their Program Officers, John Walsh, was a man more or less my own age. I was not a professional economist. John Walsh was a professional economist. I hadn't majored in economics, although later on I took economics here at the Foreign Service Institute. I found him very helpful.

Individually, the AID people were very capable, and I mean to cast no reflection on them. I simply thought and still think that probably, and not only in the Sudan, the AID program could have been better, more tightly managed.

Q: Do you have any further comments on your experience in Khartoum?

WHITE: Actually, the most interesting part of my tour in the Sudan came at the end, and it really had nothing to do with commercial work. It had to do with those American missionaries that I told you about.

Ultimately, the Sudanese Government expelled all of the missionaries in early 1964 when the war flared up. They were given 24 or so hours to pack a suitcase, go to an airport, and get out of the Sudan. They had to leave all of their property there, which had to be disposed of one way or the other. The Ambassador, of course, was under tremendous pressure as a result. The missionaries had considerable clout in Washington, far out of proportion to their numbers. You might be surprised at this. Of course, they had very legitimate grievances. As a major foreign aid contributor, we could hardly stand by and let the Sudanese Government treat American citizens in such a rough shod manner and force them to leave all of their property there. What could be done with this property? Leave it to rot in the jungle, presumably.

Well, the Sudanese Government had panicked and hadn't thought this issue through very well. However, they did it, and we were stuck with it.

Anyway, Ambassador Rountree now decided that missionary affairs was a consular, rather than a political matter. So he asked me to go down to southern Sudan and straighten it all out, to the extent that I could.

Q: What did he mean when he told you to straighten it all out?

WHITE: Well, we got into his limousine one day and rolled across dusty Khartoum to call on the Minister of the Interior. Ambassador Rountree introduced me as point man on this matter. The Ambassador patched up an agreement with the Sudanese Government, and I was then left to implement it. This is a long story and not very germane to the commercial function.

Anyway, at the end of my tour of duty of two years, when I was supposed to leave for reassignment elsewhere, I went down to the southern Sudan to Juba, Malakal, and Wau, the three provincial capitals in the South. There I met designated representatives from the different mission groups. We traveled through the southern Sudan by airplane, motor convoy, or boat. We used all different means of transportation. I went to certain mission stations. What they wanted to keep, we trucked back to the provincial capitals, to be shipped out of the country. The missionaries decided to leave a lot of the property with their own mission representatives or sell it there. So that was the end of my tour in the Sudan.

In terms of commercial work I learned a few things in Khartoum. As I say, it was not a major market for U.S. goods. Regarding those big contracts for the construction of the dams, the Italians are extremely good at this kind of thing. The Italians won the contracts to build the two major dams. There was also a lot of subcontracting under these large contracts.

Q: Did the Italians do a good job on the construction of these large dams?

WHITE: I presume that they did. I never heard otherwise. There were the Kashem el Dirba dam in the Atbara River and the Rozaries dam on the Blue Nile. These were huge

projects, but there was a lot of American made equipment involved, such as Caterpillar earth moving equipment and that sort of thing.

The main commercial lesson that I learned in Khartoum was that in that kind of a market you can't really separate the commercial aspect very sharply from the political aspect. The customer for these major projects was really the Sudanese Government. Of course, when you're dealing with the government, you're dealing with politics. This means that you have to know the political scene in a way that you don't have to know it in a country like Germany. It's a totally different kind of environment in which to operate.

Q: This involves the culture. Was there corruption there?

WHITE: Well, a lot depended on who knew whom. I'm a little reluctant to use the word, corruption. I've served in other countries where corruption is considered endemic. However, I think that what we call corruption is often a matter of doing things we don't approve of in a different cultural context.

I think that there is also a certain element of hypocrisy when we talk about corruption. For example, you may think it appropriate to pay a commission to an import agent. Now, in one way, that's a perfectly straightforward business arrangement. If I want to sell my house, I pay a man a commission. Say, I pay him 6% of whatever he gets for my house. On the other hand, if the commission is 8%, is that too much? If it's 10%, is this a kind of corruption? Is it a kind of bribe? I think that this is a difficult area in which to make quick or neat moral judgments.

Q: I think that this is an issue which we'll want to discuss later and in other contexts.

WHITE: I'm thinking, of course, of that legislation passed by Congress [prohibiting the payment of bribes by American business firms overseas]. I think that this legislation was unfortunate. It has caused numerous problems for American business overseas.

Q: I think that we'll definitely want to get into that.

WHITE: However, with regard to your question about the Sudan, I think that there was real value in doing commercial work, because the Sudan is one of those countries where the main customer is the government. This means that you have to know the politics of the country. For example, who are the real decision makers? The real decision maker may not be, let's say, the Minister of Communications, if you're with AT&T [American Telephone and Telegraph Company] and you're trying to sell something. The real decision maker may be somebody else, and that's what you have to know. What I'm saying, in effect, is that in countries like the Sudan, a Commercial Officer has to have a pretty acute political sense.

Q: I think that this would be a good place to stop, Al, if that's alright with you.

WHITE: That's fine with me.

Q: Thank you very much.

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This is September 24, 1997. I'm John Harter, and this is an interview with Alfred J. White being conducted on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. We are resuming the interview that we started a week ago. Al, I think that we had a good discussion of your assignment to the Embassy in Khartoum. During the week that has passed have you had any further thoughts about anything that we left out or any comments that you'd like to make about Khartoum?

WHITE: I don't think that I have much to add except that I might say something about my travels in the Sudan. These were often personal, but they all had a great deal to do with my professional development and attitudes.

Q: As a matter of fact, my general view is that you can't understand a given country solely from what you can pick up in the capital. You have to get out into the hinterland.

WHITE: I would say that that is true of any diplomatic assignment. I've seen the wisdom of that comment in many different situations.

Q: Did you see the relevance of that comment in the Sudan?

WHITE: Of course, the Sudan is a very large country, geographically. It is largely empty in the sense that two-thirds of it is largely desert. By contrast the southern third of the country is very equatorial, very green, and tropical jungle is the rule.

I traveled a great deal. First of all, to Port Sudan, on the Red Sea. This is the only significant port in the country. All of our equipment and household effects came in and out of there. Once I went to Port Sudan for a very unusual purpose, from the commercial point of view. I'm talking now about 1963. The Japanese had come up with the idea of sending a floating trade show around the world. This involved a ship which the Japanese had converted into a large and very impressive, floating exhibition of Japanese made goods.

We had received a cable from the Department of Commerce in the United States about this floating trade show. They were intrigued by this, more as an exhibition device than in terms of specifics.

Q: They weren't exactly looking for something to import into the U.S. They just wanted to see what the Japanese were doing.

WHITE: Exactly. The Department of Commerce asked me to go over and look at this ship when it arrived in Port Sudan. It was cruising all through that area, going up and down the Red Sea. It had stopped at just about every significant port between Tokyo and

the Mediterranean Sea.

So I went to see the ship. It was extremely interesting. I remember sending a long report back to the Department of Commerce. I picked up all kinds of printed material about the ship and the goods it carried. This showed how imaginative the Japanese were. Frankly, I've never heard of a floating American exhibition hall like that. I'm sure that the Department of Commerce looked at this idea. This showed how assertive and imaginative the Japanese were.

Q: What sort of things did this ship have on exhibition?

WHITE: It displayed a lot of consumer goods and industrial equipment. What surprised me was that the ship was packed with people. Port Sudan was a city of, perhaps, 40,000 people in a country that, at that time, did not have more than 12-15 million people. Of course, the whole business community from Khartoum was in Port Sudan to visit the Japanese ship.

Q: The novelty of it appealed to them.

WHITE: The novelty of it appealed to the local residents, but it wasn't novelty that brought hard-headed businessmen from Khartoum. I think that I mentioned before that most of the business community in Khartoum was composed of expatriates, you might say. They were Lebanese, Greek, Armenian, some Italians, and British of course, as the Sudan was a former British territory.

I remember that the Japanese exhibitors were distributing almost literally tons of brochures at every single port stop. A lot of that, of course, was more intended for people who came to look rather than to buy. However, this exhibit also represented a very serious trade effort. I think that our conclusion was that the exhibition was very successful, at least to the extent that we could measure these things.

Q: Do you think that anybody read your report on this Japanese ship exhibition?

WHITE: Well, I recall receiving a message back from the Department of Commerce. As I recall it, the instruction which led to my writing the report, was a circular message addressed to just about every post along the ship's route. I remember that after it was all over, a circular cable went out, thanking all of the posts for their reports on the event.

Then, when I went back to Khartoum, I was supposed to fly back, which would have taken about an hour or two. However, our very enterprising General Services Officer prevailed on me to escort a convoy of trucks back to the Embassy in Khartoum, in a country virtually without roads. I was young and foolish enough to agree to do that, while he sat in the hotel in Port Sudan and arranged, I guess, to fly back to Khartoum. The contents of the trucks included the household effects of Embassy personnel and equipment which the Embassy had ordered.

There was a railroad which we had been relying on, operated by Sudan Railways, which the British had made into a very impressive rail line. However, by that time the equipment and the quality of the service had already declined considerably. What should have taken five days to reach Khartoum might take five months, or at least a long, long time. So we decided to bring in the effects and equipment by motor vehicle. We had a convoy of trucks, and some American had to be in charge of it.

So I was placed in charge of the truck convoy. The morning that we left Port Sudan, the General Services Officer handed me a revolver with a clip of bullets. I said: "What on earth is this for?" He said: "Oh, well, you know, you could run into trouble up in the hills." We were passing through various tribal areas. Our drivers were from one tribe, and they were passing through what was traditionally "enemy territory" for them. They were afraid. The thought was that they would be more at ease if they thought that an American official leading the expedition had a revolver with him! The trip was an interesting, four-day adventure, but I won't bore you with that.

However, as I mentioned before, I also traveled throughout the southern Sudan to deal with the missionary problems, wrap up missionary affairs, and help dispose of their property.

Farther afield, I traveled in East Africa. I flew over to Eritrea and down to Ethiopia. I spent several days in Addis Ababa. I went on to Nairobi, [Kenya], where I had been invited to stay with our regional Civil Air Attache, a delightful man named Bruce Miller. That was the week when Kenya was getting its independence. This was in December, 1963. There was a week-long celebration. It was a fabulous time to be there. About all that I knew about Kenya concerned the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s. I remember that Robert Ruark wrote a famous book about it, called "Something of Value."

To my astonishment, Jomo Kenyatta was the new President of Kenya. He was an extremely forward-looking man. Instead of finding fear and recrimination in Nairobi, I found a city that was exuberant. Kenyatta had appointed several of the so-called "white highlanders" to positions in the government. His Minister of Agriculture was a man named McKenzie, or something like that. He had welcomed the former British colonists to stay on. He knew perfectly well that to develop his country, he needed Western capital and know how. I thought that he handled this transition brilliantly.

There's always been some speculation about how deeply Kenyatta was involved in the Mau Mau uprising. The British had actually exiled him to a very remote area in the northern part of the country. Certainly, from what I saw of Kenyatta in action, he was extremely able and shrewd and was a very sensible man. Indeed, for a long time after Kenya got its independence, it was the showcase of Africa. Kenyatta realized at the start that state model business, which became so prominent in other African countries, just wasn't enough. He encouraged the private sector. However, in more recent years Kenya has had real problems. But I would say that for a long time after Kenyatta launched the country, it was the showcase of Africa. It is a beautiful country, of course, and Nairobi was a beautiful, modern city.

Q: Could you say a few more words about the political situation in the Sudan? I think that you said something about that during the previous interview.

WHITE: Sudan was founded as a parliamentary democracy. Now, the degree of corruption in that Parliament is another matter. A military government took power in 1958. As I think I said before, the people voted in a referendum on their future. They could have opted for independence or union with Egypt. Of course, union with Egypt is what the Egyptians wanted.

We're talking, of course, about the Nile Valley. Regardless of who is in control in Egypt, the Egyptians have to be vitally concerned about the Sudan, because the Nile River, their life's blood, flows through the Sudan. Indeed, the Sudanese are in a position to control the flow of water in the Nile River.

Q: When you were in the Sudan, we had good relations with the Sudanese Government.

WHITE: We had excellent relations with the Sudanese Government. We had a very large aid program.

Q: I was thinking more in terms of whether we had a formal policy statement which indicated what our objectives and goals were. Or were individual American officials just extemporizing as we went along?

WHITE: I think that our policy very clearly was to support the Sudanese Government in general. Not any one government in particular, but the democratic system that had been established. We had to bear in mind that most of the people in the country were illiterate. Therefore, you obviously couldn't expect the kind of evolved, democratic system that we have in our country. We supported the Sudanese Government and its internal economic development program because, by and large, it pursued a foreign policy that was not inimical to our interests.

Obviously, Sudan had to maintain good relations with Egypt. That was a delicate relationship, but both of those countries have to get along with each other, given the common interest that they have in the Nile River. Our attitude toward the Sudanese Government was favorable. We supported it diplomatically and in the way that really counts. We supported it with a major investment in aid money. We wanted the country to succeed under a parliamentary democracy, however imperfect it was. And of course we had our own, selfish reasons for supporting it. I am referring to the international situation and the Cold War, which loomed very large at that time.

Q: That was what I was getting at. In most places where I served the anti-communist element of our policy seemed to me to be too prevalent and too much related to the past. Very often this led to the United States taking the view that, whatever the opposition to the local government was...

WHITE: No, that was not our attitude. First of all, I would say that the Sudanese Government, while it was pro-Western, was not slavishly anti-communist. The people who ran the government were sophisticated. One of the political parties was descended from the Mahdi [19th Century Muslim leader in the Sudan]. Sudanese political parties were essentially representative of religious currents within the Islamic religion. We enjoyed very good relations with these political parties. The Sudanese Government leaders, for their part, took a rather statesmanlike view in desiring close relations with the United States. They also wanted correct relations with Egypt.

By extension, they also wanted reasonably close relations with the Soviet Union. If I am not mistaken, the first state visit to the U.S. during President Kennedy's administration was that of General Abboud, the President of the Sudan. Abboud was a general, but he was a rather avuncular type of person. He certainly wasn't the typical junta leader. Actually, there had been a kind of coup d'etat in 1958 by which General Abboud came to power. However, his government was a benign kind of regime. I think that we were quite comfortable in dealing with it. The politicians had made a mess of things, and most of the country welcomed the Abboud government. It was a bloodless coup, tacitly accepted by the politicians.

Also, I remember that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia made a state visit to the Sudan during my tour of duty in that country. Of course, Ethiopia was a neighboring country, with some border problems with Sudan. Eritrea was in revolt against Ethiopia.

Chou En-lai, the Prime Minister of the PRC [People's Republic of China] also came for a visit to the Sudan. The Chinese Communists had a great interest in the Sudan. They had a modest aid program. We tend to think that the Sudan, because it was a very poor country, was sort of off the main drag. However, on the other hand, if you look at the map, a large part of the western coast of the Red Sea is in the Sudan, just across from Saudi Arabia. The Sudan is on the old British imperial lifeline through the Red Sea. The Chinese communists were very forward-looking, and they understood that. Communist China had an Ambassador to the Sudan. Of course, the Soviet Union also had an Ambassador to the Sudan.

You know there was a great game being played in the Middle East. I mean the 20th century great game, as distinct from the 19th century great game described by Kipling and played between the British and the Russians. This 20th century great game was being played by many countries. All of these countries had an interest in the Sudan, because of its size and its pivotal, bridge position between Arab North Africa and Sub-Saharan Black Africa.

So I would say that our relations with the Sudan were good. They were subject to some strain because of the problem with the missions. In fact, what relationship between two countries is not subject to some strain? As I mentioned before, Ambassador Rountree went to great lengths to keep the problems with the missionaries under control. For example, that was why I was sent down to the southern Sudan to deal with that problem at the end of my tour of duty there.

Q: So what did you learn from your service in the Sudan?

WHITE: I would like to repeat what I said earlier. The Sudan was a good place to watch a Third World economy function and to observe how politics and government played a very key role in all of that. It was unlike Western Europe, where business really can almost be conducted in a vacuum in terms of the political situation. That stood me in good stead in later years. It was that kind of economy. Of course, a lot of economies around the world are fairly similar to that of the Sudan, including a lot of Latin American economies.

As I said before, if the amount of money involved is big enough, a given economic question is no longer commercial. It's political, and this was true in the context of the Sudan. Apart from that, Africa as a whole was in what could be called a very positive phase. I recall going to the Governor General's Garden Party in Nairobi on the evening when independence was granted to Kenya. This was very much like the situation in Hong Kong recently, when the territory was returned to Chinese Communist control, amid pomp and ceremony. In the case of Kenya there was a very impressive ceremony at which the King's African Rifles gave way to the Kenyan African Rifles. I remember that Prince Phillip was there to represent the British Crown.

Attending the ceremony was a kind of "Who's Who of Africa." I remember meeting Kenneth Kaunda, who became president of Zambia; Tom Mboya, who was then one of the leaders of Kenya; and, of course, Jomo Kenyatta. Just about all of the African leaders were there for that week-long celebration.

This was a time of great hope for Africa. It has to be said that Africa has gone down hill since then, for various reasons. This has certainly been the case in the Sudan. The British left a very able civil service to administer the country. I knew these people. I worked with them. I knew some of the Governors in the southern provinces who were appointed from Khartoum. They were part of the elite civil service of appointed Governors around the country. There was great promise in the Sudan, which certainly had, and has, great potential.

There was a small Mobil Oil Company office in Khartoum. I knew that AGIP [Italian oil company] was prospecting for oil, which they never found while I was there. I certainly had no doubts that there was oil in the Sudan. The cynics used to say that the big oil companies find oil when they want to do so. When they don't want it, they're quite content to leave it in the ground.

Later, and I'm going forward a number of years, the Chevron Oil Company found oil in the Sudan. Sadly, Chevron had to abandon that prospecting effort because of the civil war in southern Sudan. The civil war in the Sudan had actually been going on before the country got its independence on January 1, 1956. It's still going on now, and the amount of hardship it has caused is just unbelievable. The media has not "discovered" Sudan, by the way, in the way that it "discovered" Somalia. To an extent that is rather frightening in

its implications. In fact, "the news" is whatever the media says it is. If the media doesn't cover an event, this means that nothing has happened. The media hasn't really "found" the Sudan. One of these days, I suppose, the media will go looking for something and will "discover" the Sudan.

Q: The media found the Sudan briefly, when Cleo Noel was assassinated.

WHITE: But that was just for a very brief time, and that, of course, was not under any circumstances which one would want any country to experience.

What happened to Cleo Noel was horrible. A sad aspect of this is that it happened in the Sudan. In fact, it really had nothing to do with the Sudan, although you could blame the laxity of the Sudanese authorities in tolerating the coming and going of extremist groups.

Q: Apparently, the problem was that one of these extremist groups thought that Cleo Noel was the chief of the CIA Station in the Sudan. They thought that Cleo had organized a lot of things in the Middle East. That was not so. Cleo was an old friend of mine. He was very sympathetic to the Sudanese.

WHITE: The Sudanese had a great deal of regard for him. He had been there for a number of years in different tours.

Q: It's the one image that flashes across American minds when the Sudan is mentioned.

WHITE: Exactly. But to go back to the war in the Sudan, until the problem between the northern and southern Sudan is solved, we're not going to see much progress in that part of the world. If it is solved...

Q: Could there be a role for the international community? It might be necessary to assemble a group composed of elements from the UN, NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], and the U.S. to establish the conditions for peace in the Sudan.

WHITE: The UN, of course, is involved in the Sudan and has been for a long time, in terms of refugee assistance. I don't think that the UN can do much beyond that. There has to be a political will on the part of both participants in the war in the Sudan to solve this problem.

My own view is that in the Sudan as in Cyprus, the solution lies in de facto separation between the warring parties. Now, you can take a de facto situation and dress it up in all sorts of different ways. However, fundamentally, whether this involves independence or autonomy, or something in between, there has to be a solution based on autonomous arrangements, so that the people in the southern Sudan feel that they are running their own lives. That result cannot be imposed on them, any more than the Greeks and the Turks can impose a solution on each other in Cyprus.

For various political reasons, let us say, everyone pretends that the problem in Cyprus

(although I am going pretty far afield in this respect) has not been solved but needs to be solved. I believe that a problem such as that in Cyprus can be solved de facto, but people need to have the political courage to accept it as having been solved. Something like that also has to happen in the Sudan.

Q: What were your feelings on leaving the Sudan?

WHITE: I had put in two years of service there. I didn't want to stay any longer than I had. I made the most of this experience. I found the Sudan fascinating. I traveled and learned a great deal. However, in terms of my own professional interest, my time in the Sudan was not part of that interest. My interest was Germany in particular and, by extension, Europe. So, after putting in two years in the Sudan, I was anxious to get back to Europe and get into something that was more related to my own interests.

Q: So you were then transferred to the American Consulate in Turin, [Italy]. Did you request an assignment there?

WHITE: No, I did not request an assignment to Turin. I must have put in a list of requests. Certainly, Germany must have been at the top of the list. To me, it would have made a lot of sense to go back to Germany.

I had a colleague in Bremen. When I was transferred to Africa for two years, he went to the U.S. Mission in Berlin. He had two back to back assignments to Germany. This kind of experience really lets you solidify your knowledge of a country, its language, its culture, and all of that. So I am certain that I indicated that I would like to go back to Germany, or at least to a German-speaking post in Europe.

Instead, the Department sent me to Italy. I had no background in Italian affairs. I had visited Italy and, of course, everyone loves to visit Italy. I didn't know Italian and had no particular interest in the country, other than the interest that any American might have in seeing its historical treasures and so on.

In fact, I did not want to go to Turin.

Q: You didn't?

WHITE: No, I did not. I left the Sudan in August, 1964. I had had to scrap all of my vacation plans because my tour of duty in the Sudan had been extended because of the problem with the missionaries in the southern Sudan.

The plane was supposed to leave the Khartoum at 3:00 am. If this schedule had been followed, I would have seen almost nothing of the Nile from the air. However, the plane was delayed and I left at about 6:00 am. All the way from Khartoum to Cairo the plane virtually just followed along the Nile River, with the exception of a few places, where it took a more direct route. Because the air was so clear, I could see the Nile River clearly, which stood out against the desert. It was just like a picture postcard. I got an

extraordinary view of that part of Africa. Of course I knew the general course of the Nile, but when you see something so vividly, it is really something to remember. I looked down and saw a long, very narrow green strip of cultivation, with a thin, blue line in the middle of it. Beyond, on both sides of the river was utter desolation, the kind of desolation that you read about in the Old Testament.

You know, it's really a rather fascinating thing. The three great, monotheistic religions that we know, that is, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, were all born in that part of the world. In fact, they are all very closely related. Islam is much more closely related to the other two religions than the average American realizes. For example, in Islam, Christ is a prophet.

Q: The theory is that these three religions are all derived from early Egyptian civilization. Was it called Amen-Re?

WHITE: The religious structure of ancient Egypt was quite polytheistic, as you know. But Amen-Re was the prime god. My own view is that this had something to do with the desert and the sameness of the desert and the sun. There is a kind of frozen immobility about it. In that kind of a situation, it is very easy to conceive of a God who is immobile in the sense that he has always been there and always will be. That is, there is something eternal about him like the sun. I think that there is some relationship there. There has to be, and I think that it has something to do with the desert.

I don't know whether you're familiar with desert climates, but there is something different about them. There are no seasons. There is little variation in the weather from one end of the year to the other.

Q: I have a sense that Joseph Kenneals talks about this. Did you know that Kenneals is the great expert on myths and camels?

WHITE: No, I don't recall him.

Q: He's the fellow whom Wim Hoyer introduced for several programs on the classics on TV. He was a great Egyptologist. Perhaps we can talk about this later, some time.

WHITE: In any case, you have the fact that these three religions were established within the same, rather closely circumscribed part of the world. These religions have contrasts and similarities. For much of their respective histories their adherents have been killing each other. However, in fact the three religions are very similar. They all came from the same area, and this tells you that there has to be some explanation for that.

Anyway, to go back to my assignment to Turin, Italy, I went back to Washington from the Sudan. I told the personnel people I didn’t want to go to Turin. They looked at me with astonishment. They thought, and I'm sure sincerely, that they were doing me a favor, because I had accepted a two-year assignment in a hardship post in the Sudan. So the Personnel people felt that they were rewarding me, so to speak. I had wanted to go to

Europe, and the Consulate in Turin was in Europe. However, from my point of view, my first post had been what I call a medium sized Consulate General in Bremen.

Q: An assignment to Western Europe? Gee!

WHITE: I had then gone to a small Embassy, in Khartoum, where I had done a great many things. In terms of a natural career progression...

Q: It was time for a large post.

WHITE: Time for at least a large Consulate General, or maybe another Embassy, a medium-sized Embassy. I saw Turin, professionally, as a backwards step. I had done that kind of work. How does the saying go: "Been there, done that."

I said: "I would rather go back to Africa than go to Turin. I have no aversion to a hardship post. I want to do work that seems not only meaningful and reasonably important but work that I can justify in terms of a career progression."

Well, the personnel people didn't buy that. John, maybe this happens to all of us, but at that point I almost resigned from the Foreign Service.

Q: Huh!

WHITE: It was not because the assignment they were offering me was in Italy, which had obvious attractions. However, you have to justify a period of time to yourself. You have to convince yourself that a given assignment is worthwhile and that it makes sense, to put it in those terms.

Again, I was looking at international business. I now had friends in Mobil Oil whom I had known and worked with in Khartoum. In a small post like that you get to know people very well. I was just about on my way to New York to talk to the people in the oil industry. After all, I had a certain cachet. I had worked in the Arab world. I knew something about international business.

The personnel people in the State Department were adamant. Finally, they said: "Well, you know, something could open up in Rome, once you get to Turin. So why don't you go to Turin and see what happens?" That was the lure that they used. So, to make a long story short, I went off to Turin, not really convinced that, professionally, it made any sense to go there.

Q: So what did you think of Turin when you got there?

WHITE: When I got there, I found that Turin was a small post, as I had known that it would be. There was a Consul General, but the post was a Consulate. I was the Number Two officer in the Consulate. That was one consolation.

Q: You were the Deputy Principal Officer. Who was the Consul General?

WHITE: The Consul General was Wallace La Rue. He was an officer of the old school. We had one Consular Officer.

There was a fourth officer position, that of a junior officer. He did whatever was left over to be done.

Q: You had received a couple of promotions by this time?

WHITE: Yes. I was promoted for the first time to FSO-7 in 1960. My second promotion to FSO-6 came just before my tour in the Sudan began. So I had had two promotions by that time. These numbered grades were under the old system.

Consul General La Rue was a very interesting man. He had been very unpopular with some people. Wally La Rue had been in the Foreign Service for a long time. Somewhere along the way he had lost a lung. He had a cylinder of oxygen in the back of his car. He couldn't go any distance without that tank of oxygen. He was a frail but very cultured man, a man of the world in the best sense. He was a sort of Hollywood cast Ambassador. He looked the part, shall we say. He was tall, erect, and a bachelor at this time.

He ran the post in a very peculiar way. I think that he knew, even then, that this was his last post in the Foreign Service. He had a reputation as being very brilliant. However, at that point, he was not well, and there were limits to what he could do. He would come to the office at about 10:30 am, do whatever had to be done, and leave for home at around 3:00 pm.

Q: He would sign the letters that you had prepared?

WHITE: Yes, but it was more than that. He knew his job. He did it and he did it very well. He was a wonderful conversationalist. I would go in to see him, and he would come out from behind his desk. He was very courtly in manner, a sort of "Old World" figure. He would discuss whatever I wanted to talk to him about. He would then begin to talk about his days in North Africa. He would tell wonderful stories, reminiscing about the Foreign Service. Or he'd talk about art or literature.

As I say, he was a very cultured man. If, for example, there was an exhibition opening in Turin, he would always go to that sort of thing. He had a beautiful library. He always had very much the manners of a "Grand Signore," as the Italians say. The result of all of this was that after a while, he left the running of the post largely to me, not that there was that much to run.

I learned a few things at the Consulate in Turin. When I first arrived, the staff was small, with four American officers and seven or eight local employees. We had one senior local employee [Foreign Service National], who was a legend in his own time. He had started to work in the Consulate in Turin as a boy. When World War II began, the Consulate was

closed, and this man was persecuted for his association with the Americans. The Italian Fascists were convinced that he was an American spy. They threw him in jail and roughed him up. Of course, he had nothing to tell them. He had worked in the small American Consulate in Turin. What could he possibly know that would be of interest to the Fascists? They let him out of jail at one point, and he fled to the hills around Turin.

When World War II ended, he was up in the mountains, somewhere, hiding out from the Germans. It was a very nasty time for him. Then he came back to Turin and helped to reopen the Consulate. This is a past which is perhaps worth dwelling on, because this whole question of our Foreign Service local employees is an interesting one. This man had dedicated his life and risked it in a way for the American Government. He had married an American citizen of Italian origin who lived with him in Turin. They had no children. He was absolutely devoted to the United States.

We throw this word “dedication” around too much. However, you do encounter people, from time to time, who are really devoted to what they do. This man was really devoted to the American Government.

Q: What was his name?

WHITE: His name was Cesare Tavella. We always called him "Ches" for short. He regarded himself and was accepted as the number one local employee in the post. He was certainly that in terms of longevity of service. You might say that he was a sort of Special Aide to the Consul General. He knew everybody and everything in Turin. He knew the intricacies of European protocol, which can be very difficult for Americans to understand, but which is very important in the European context.

Several of the Consuls General over the years tried to get him some recognition for his services to the United States. One of the things that they tried to do was to get him some monetary compensation for those years, from 1942 to 1945, when he was not working in a Foreign Service job but was being persecuted for his relationship with the American Consulate in Turin. It never worked. Even I got involved in this effort. We were never able to arrange this. I've always thought that it was unfortunate that we were unable to help him in this respect. Oh, he got all sorts of awards, and that kind of recognition. But he didn't get the special kind of treatment which, I think, he should have gotten.

In any case he was very much a major presence in the American community in Turin. We had one economic assistant who was an older and very interesting man. He had taught in Italian schools in Alexandria, [Egypt]. He knew Arabic, among other languages. He was a very learned man. His name was Bassignana, and we called him "Professore Bassignana." The other members of our local staff were much younger. There was a generational gap here. One was still going to school and obviously had a good future ahead of him in business. He was a very bright young man. He was our Commercial Assistant. Most of the others were young women who did consular work. So that was the local staff of our consulate.

Q: How about the American community in Turin?

WHITE: That's interesting, too. Our Consulate was a small post. I had heard, and I have no reason to doubt this, since I heard it many times, that in one of those periodic, economy waves that strike the Department like a disease...

Q: The Department wanted to close some posts.

WHITE: Yes. Back when John Kennedy was President, the Department had selected Turin as one of the posts to be closed. The story goes that President Kennedy received a phone call from Giovanni Agnelli, the President of FIAT and sort of the Henry Ford of Italy. The FIAT Company is the property of his family. He is a very important man in Italy and in Europe.

The story is that Agnelli simply called President Kennedy, who was in the same jet set with him and said: "Jack, I hear that you're closing the American Consulate in Turin." You know the Consulate is kind of convenient for me and my staff." So the Consulate wasn't closed.

The most important thing in Turin is FIAT [an acronym which in English stands for the "Italian Automobile Factory in Turin."]. This leads to a bit of history. The first American Embassy or legation in what later became Italy was in Turin, because Turin was the capital of the Kingdom of Piedmont. Cavour was the Prime Minister of Piedmont, which had been an independent country in Europe for hundreds of years.

Piedmont was the only independent country in Italy for centuries. It had its ruling dynasty, the House of Savoy. It controlled Sicily at one point and Nice [in France], which we all think of as a French city. Its name was "Nizza" in Italian. The province of Savoy was also ruled from Turin.

Piedmont was a medium sized kingdom, but it was the nucleus which Cavour used to create a modern, unified Italy. He did it through a combination of diplomacy and war, and that is his great place in modern European history. Like Bismark in Germany, Cavour created what had really never been there before. It had always been Italy, but there had never been a unified Italian state, unless you want to go back to the Roman Empire. Cavour's name was everywhere in Turin. There was a Piazza Cavour, a Via Cavour, Cavour restaurants, Cavour everything.

As I said, Turin was also the home of the FIAT automobile company. By the time I got to Turin, FIAT was one of the world's genuine, multi-national corporations.

Q: Could you say a few words about Agnelli?

WHITE: When I left Rome in 1987, a long time later, one of the last reports that I wrote was a long, biographical study of Giovanni Agnelli. I had seen him occasionally over the years. I met him first in Turin, then in Washington, when I was on the Italian desk. Later,

and here I am jumping forward a number of years, I was Economic Counselor at the American Embassy in Rome. Of course, Agnelli was still very much on the scene and still is now.

His first name is Giovanni, but he is always called Gianni. When I first met him, in 1965, he was being groomed to be President of FIAT. Like the Ford Motor Company, FIAT is a family dominated company. His father had been President of FIAT. His grandfather had founded the company.

Q: When was it founded, in about 1910?

WHITE: Around the turn of the century. He was pretty much in the same timeframe as Henry Ford. As I said previously, the name FIAT is an acronym for the Italian Automobile Factory in Turin.

Agnelli was very personable and very much in the John Kennedy mold at that point. He was very dashing and affable and considered something of a playboy. We tend to think that anybody who has a lot of money when he is young is a playboy. I never believed that Agnelli was a playboy. I'm sure that he played, the way that Jack Kennedy did.

He was by no means a nonentity. He was an extremely intelligent man and had a very quick mind. He spoke flawless English because he was raised with English speaking governesses. I'm sure that he speaks flawless French as well. By the way, I think that there's another connection between FIAT and Ford. Henry Ford II was married to a woman of Italian background who name was Cristina. She was Italian and circulated in the same, jet set circle as Henry Ford II and Agnelli.

You would often see pictures in the papers of Agnelli on his yacht, on the Riviera, or skiing, and all of this and that. In fact, as time has shown, he proved to be a very able and very serious minded man.

Our major beat in the Consulate in Turin was FIAT.

Q: Did you do economic reports on FIAT?

WHITE: We had an interesting arrangement in Italy. There were other, important automobile companies elsewhere in Italy, but FIAT clearly dominated the industry.

The Consulate in Turin had national reporting responsibilities for the automobile industry. Our reporting responsibility in this respect cut across consular district lines. For example, at one point I went to Milan to talk to the head of the Alfa Romeo automobile company. That was located in the district of the Consulate General in Milan. I was the one who went, although I brought someone from the Consulate General in Milan with me on this call. It was only proper and sensible to do that. However, I had national reporting responsibilities for the Italian automobile industry.

FIAT was much more than an automobile company. As I said, FIAT was already a multi-national company. This is where I really learned, from the inside, how a multi-national company works. FIAT was into other fields beside automobiles. It was involved in aviation, electronics, marine engines, and construction. FIAT was very active in Latin America. It was very active all over Europe. FIAT had all kinds of licensing arrangements with U.S. companies and was very close to the U.S. military-industrial complex.

When I went to Turin, something very important was happening, which actually attracted high level attention in Washington. Remember, this was the 1960s, and we were still in the Cold War. There was a thaw, shall we say, in the Cold War.

The President of FIAT at that time was not Agnelli. The President, not only in name, but the real President and guiding hand of FIAT was quite old. I think that he was in his 80s. His name was Vittorio Valletta. He had been with FIAT for many years. I guess that he was the right hand man of Agnelli's grandfather. We knew Valletta very well. He was one of those geniuses of industrial development. He was a rather frail man, as I remember him, very sharp, quick, and decisive. He was the man who really built FIAT. Agnelli inherited what Valletta had built. Agnelli did well, but the fact is that FIAT had been built up by Valletta. There were three important men in the history of FIAT. There was the man who founded the company, the original Giovanni Agnelli. Then there was Vittorio Valletta, and Gianni Agnelli, the current President of the company.

During this thaw in the Cold War in the mid-'60s, FIAT was negotiating a deal with the Soviets to build an automobile factory in Russia. This factory would not turn out tanks, and that sort of thing, but automobiles for people to drive. This was Khrushchev's policy of putting a human face on communism, which he sometimes called "goulash communism." FIAT made a very ingenious arrangement with the Soviets. To remain competitive, FIAT had to keep replacing its production lines. They had a whole production line which they were going to replace. So what to do with it? Scrap it?

The solution, believe it or not, was to move the whole thing to Russia. Guess what the name of the city was where FIAT was going to locate this factory? It would be called "Togliattigrad." Does the name "Togliatti" come back to you? Palmiro Togliatti was the head of the Italian Communist Party during its very militant days following World War II.

Anyway, FIAT wanted to go ahead with this project, but they wouldn't do it without an approving nod from the United States. FIAT had too much to lose if it queered its relationship with the United States. Dean Rusk was the Secretary of State at the time and was apprised of the situation. These negotiations were going on when I arrived in Turin, so there was high level interest in Turin.

Q: I think that Dean Rusk paid a lot of attention to economic matters.

WHITE: Let me tell you something about Dean Rusk that is rather striking. He had a

particular interest in Italy. This was not surprising. A lot of Americans are fascinated by Italy. I was telling you about Ches Tavella, a Foreign Service Local employee of the Consulate in Turin. Just before I arrived in Turin, I think that everybody who had ever worked with Ches Tavella chipped in to buy him a ticket to Washington. They arranged for him to call on Secretary Dean Rusk. This was a very nice thing to do.

Ches and, I'm sure, his wife, flew to Washington, stopping off in New York on the way. The appointment with Ches Tavella was on Secretary Rusk's calendar. Ches often told me about that. He was very proud of this meeting with Secretary Rusk. He was scheduled to be given the usual five minutes and then be escorted out the door. You know, there was to be a photo op, involving a handshake, and the picture would appear in the State Department Newsletter.

Q: Rusk could be very charming.

WHITE: Well, according to Ches, who told me this with great pride, the meeting went on for a half hour. Rusk sat down with Ches, and there's a picture of the two of them, sitting there, like world statesmen. According to Ches, Rusk was very interested in Italy and wanted to know all about Italy, Turin, and so forth.

The U.S. Government gave the nod to FIAT on this deal to build a factory in the Soviet Union.

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Q: This is Wednesday, September 24, 1997. I'm John Harter. We're continuing our interview covering Al's experience with FIAT in Turin. Al, please continue.

WHITE: Valletta had obviously instructed his top people to be accessible to American officials and to keep in very close contact with them. Of course, Valletta had his own relationship with Freddy Reinhardt, our Ambassador in Rome. Reinhardt was a man who was as admired as he was able. I don't know whether you had any dealings with him.

Q: No, but he was extremely well known in the Department of State.

WHITE: He was well known and well liked. I got to see something of him.

Q: He was Ambassador to Italy for some time?

WHITE: Yes. When I arrived in Turin, he was the Ambassador. I think that he had been there for a while. Of course, Ambassador Reinhardt obviously had his own relationships with the FIAT high command.

Without being asked, the members of the FIAT high command would come to see us and brief us on the activities that they were engaged in around the world. This was a very close relationship. I was always struck by it. It was very obvious to me that this

relationship had been established pursuant to a very high level decision. It was clear that the entire FIAT organization had been instructed to be open and cooperative with American officials. That included our people in the Consulate in Turin as well. Valletta, for example, always came to the Consul General's reception on July 4. He could have gone down to Rome and attended the Ambassador's July 4 reception, but he chose to come to the Consul General's reception. The entire FIAT high command came to this reception as well.

I remember one day that the Commercial Director of FIAT, a very senior official, came to see the Consul General. I guess that we would call him Vice President for Sales. There was some problem about this meeting. The Consul General was out of the office and couldn't get back in time. So I was there to receive this man when he came to the Consulate.

We sat down in the Consul General's office. I was amazed at the man's candor. I, of course, was fairly junior, but here he was, telling me things that the company normally would not tell a perfect stranger.

Q: Could you give us an illustration of what he said?

WHITE: Well, even now, I think that some of it might still be considered sensitive. Let's just say that he was remarkably candid. He wasn't answering our questions. He was volunteering this information, to keep us informed. This was an excellent relationship with FIAT.

FIAT people were very helpful to me in my work. I had to write an annual report on the Italian automotive industry. That was a big report under the Department of State's "CERP" [Combined Economic Reporting Program] schedule. Of course, a lot of the work on that report was done by my Economic Assistant, "Professore" Bassignana. There were probably 25 or 30 tables that went in with this report. It was a "magnum opus." I was responsible for the analytical portion of it. As I said, I also went to Milan to talk to the President of the Alfa-Romeo Automobile Company.

Q: Were you also responsible for reporting on the activities of the Olivetti Company?

WHITE: Olivetti was also part of my responsibility. The Consular District of Turin included all of the historic Piedmont, the northwest quadrant of Italy, and it included...

Q: Bordering on Switzerland?

WHITE: Bordering on Switzerland and France, of course. It included Piedmont and the Val d'Aosta. Now the Val d'Aosta is just to the north of Piedmont. Its dialect is more French than Italian. It is part of Italy, but it has a very separate status. It is like an autonomous zone of some kind. In fact, De Gaulle occupied it at the end of World War II and left only when President Harry Truman forced the French to leave. This was an interesting little footnote to World War II. Of course, this didn't endear us to General De

Gaulle. By the way, at the time that I was in Turin, De Gaulle was riding high in Paris. Lyndon Johnson had just been elected President, in his own right.

Q: That was in about 1964...

WHITE: 1964. De Gaulle was riding very high and was kicking the British around, who were then trying to get into the European Common Market. At that particular time I think that Harold Wilson was the British Prime Minister.

The Italian automotive establishment was part of my responsibility, including FIAT, Alfa-Romeo, Lancia, Ferrari, and the whole prestige line of Italian cars. By the way, I should mention that Turin was, and maybe still is, the mecca for automobile designers. In fact, when I was in Turin, in my social set was a young American from Detroit who had been sent to Turin to learn automotive design. In terms of almost any kind of design, the Italians are considered number one. That includes automotive design. Many American cars have really been designed by people with an Italian connection. The most closely guarded places in Turin were the workshops where the various companies were designing new bodies for future automobiles. Of course, that is a highly competitive field.

This always amused me. We were always invited to visit factories. That is part of what an Economic Officer does. However, when we got to that one section in the course of a factory visit, we were politely told: "That's off limits." That was the reason.

Also Turin had, and still has, one of the world's greatest automotive shows. Many major countries have annual automotive shows, just as they have air shows. One of the oldest automotive shows in the world is the one in Turin, which is held annually in the fall of the year. For about a week everybody who is anybody in the automotive industry was there. That included General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler. First of all, they had their cars on display. There is a week of wining and dining, cocktail receptions, speeches, and presentations of one kind or another. Traditionally, the American Ambassador went up to Turin from Rome for the annual automobile show.

Q: So you had to arrange for his accommodations?

WHITE: That's right. During my first year in Turin [1965] Ambassador Reinhardt came to attend the automobile show.

Q: So you got to know him pretty well.

WHITE: I saw him in Turin, yes. He was a wonderful man to deal with. He was very cordial, considerate, and thoughtful. He was a man who looked very much an Ambassador. He loved cars. He had a kid's fascination with cars. He knew a lot more about cars than you or I might know. He knew a lot about the technology of cars. I still have a memory of Ambassador Reinhardt, standing with Lambourghini. You've heard of Lambourghini?

Q: Yes.

WHITE: He was still alive at that point. Lambourghini was explaining to Ambassador Reinhardt something about the engine. I overheard their discussion, which dealt with very technical matters. Ambassador Reinhardt loved this. I also saw him at the Embassy in Rome, and I'll get to that later on.

However, because FIAT was involved in so many things, our reporting on FIAT developments got us into a lot of different areas. When I was in Turin the Italians also wanted to have their own aviation show. You know, the French had an aviation show, the Americans, of course, had one, and the British had the famous aviation show at Farnborough. So the Italians established their own aviation show while I was there. Because this was the first time that they held such a show, they came to us a great deal for advice and assistance. They wanted our influence in getting the American aviation companies to come. I remember that we worked very hard to get a squadron of U.S. military aircraft up to Turin for the aviation show.

So I got deeply involved in the lore of big exhibitions up in Turin. There was the automobile show and then there was this new exhibition, the aviation show, and several others. I'm not sure how the Italian aviation show has prospered in later years and whether it's still being held or not.

You asked me about the Olivetti Company. Olivetti was in our consular district in Biella, maybe about an hour's drive outside of Turin. Olivetti was an industrial heavyweight then. They mainly produced electronic equipment for offices. They made electric typewriters. Again, even there, design was the key to their success. You know, for many years a typewriter was black. It was boxy and kind of ungainly. I remember pictures of young women banging away at typewriters. The Italians finally realized that, if you have to bang away at a typewriter all day long, why not make it attractive or pleasant in appearance? So all of a sudden we had colored typewriters.

Q: When did this start?

WHITE: I think that Olivetti probably started this trend in the late 1950s or early 1960s. They brought out red and green typewriters, and led the whole process of streamlining the humble, ordinary, day to day typewriter. Of course, women loved this sort of thing.

Olivetti was also getting into the early stages of the computer age. I remember once going up to the Olivetti factory. They were showing me how computers were made. They were producing a computer of some sort. It was almost like visiting a factory where women were sewing clothes. About 95% of the workers in the Olivetti factory were women. They were all weaving wires as you would thread. I was fascinated by this process. The end product was a computer, and it was obvious that these ladies knew nothing about the technology involved in these computers. Most of them were housewives. Then I found out how computers are made. You have an assembly line of people, none of whom knows what the final product will be. All that they know is that they're supposed to make a

particular knot in a particular kind of wire.

Of course, there were engineers there, who ran the show. However, you didn't need many engineers. At the end of the production line you got computers, but even computers are produced in this way by people who just perform minor functions on a repetitive basis, all day long.

We knew the Olivetti people very well. Their engineers were always coming into the Consulate to get visas for travel to the United States. I've always been fascinated by this relationship between commercial work and consular work. People think that these are totally separate jobs. What could be more different than stamping visas and selling goods? However, that's how you find out who's visiting the United States.

At every post where I have served, I have made an effort, from the outset, to get the people who do the consular work to feed back certain information to substantive officers in the Political and Economic Sections. Very often, the first time you find out about something is when some businessman comes into the Consulate to get a visa. We saw these businessmen constantly, on their way to and from the United States. There would be FIAT, Olivetti, and other executives going to the United States. We knew what they were doing. One of them would come in to the Consulate to get a visa. We would ask: "Why are you going to the United States?" So the visa process was a very good source of information.

I did the same thing when I was in the Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela. I've done it everywhere I've ever served. It's just one of various methods that you use to keep in contact with people and to find out what's on their minds. Very often, the people in the Consular Section would send these businessmen over to me. Or they would come across the hall and say to me: "By the way, Mr. White, another executive from FIAT has just come in to pick up his visa for the United States." Then I would meet him. It's a very simple thing, but very often these simple things are very important. They are often overlooked.

Another thing that I might mention about Turin. It was in Italy that I saw the real effects of American investment abroad. American companies had "discovered" Italy. Of course, some of them were there before World War II, but there was a surge of American business activity in Italy after World War II. This is the time when that famous French book was written about "The American Challenge."

Q: It was written by Jean-Jacques Servan-Shreiber.

WHITE: Exactly. Europe was getting very concerned about this. De Gaulle was riding high. The French were very uppity about American penetration of Europe. American companies were flocking to Europe and to Italy. They were building or buying factories.

We saw both the positive and negative aspects of this. One company, Beloit of Italy, comes to mind in this regard. Beloit is or was a company which manufactured

papermaking machinery. Its headquarters was in Wisconsin. They had established a factory near Turin. I had been to many of these openings, with the American and Italian flags prominently displayed. The head of the local province was there, and some politicians might come up from Rome. They always found some local bishop who looked as if he were 100 years old, all dressed up in his robes, who blessed the factory. The atmosphere was one of "Happy days are here again" and Italian-American cooperation.

However, when I was in Turin, Beloit laid off some of its workers. Papermaking machinery is cyclical work. People don't buy machines worth five million dollars every day to make paper. From the standpoint of the American company, laying off some of its workers was a perfectly natural thing to do. It was clearly understood that they would be called back later on. They weren't being fired. They were being laid off.

When these workers were laid off, all hell broke loose. Bear in mind that the Communist Party was very strong in Italy. Many although not all of the unions were communist-dominated. The unions in Italy were very politicized. Each of the major political parties had its own affiliated union. The Communists had a union, the Christian Democrats had a union, and the Socialists had a union.

Quite apart from the details of union affiliations, the political culture of any given country is very difficult for foreigners to understand. In Italy it is very hard to lay off workers. It was almost never done. Whatever you do, a company has to find some means or mechanism by which to avoid laying off workers. At the end of the day if the company can't hack it or survive, it goes to the Italian Government in Rome, and the Government will try to provide the company with money to make it possible to avoid laying off workers or so it was at that time.

We tend to be a little too blase about these matters. The average American might think: "Well, Italy is a country just like the U.S. It has a free market economy." This is true, but there's a difference. Italy is very much like France. There is a tradition of a paternalistic state in these countries. The Italians have a life style that many people and many Americans admire. However, it does not include our kind of rough and ready, no holds barred, laissez faire economics. You don't lay off workers very readily in Italy. That's a problem in other European countries as well, and that's one of the reasons that the unemployment rate in Europe is so high right now. People are reluctant to hire, because it’s so difficult to fire.

The point is that there is a kind of cultural clash between Italy and the U.S. in this respect. It got very nasty on this occasion, and the American Ambassador in Rome became very much involved in this. You could almost see the headlines: "Brutal American Capitalists Throwing Italian Workers Out of Their Jobs."

The junior officer in the Consulate in Turin had been assigned to follow labor relations. This was part of his job, so I was watching this situation from somewhat of a distance. Our Labor Attache in Rome was very much involved. Remember, labor unions in Italy are very politically oriented. This was at a time when the Cold War was still going on.

The Italian communists were regarded as a menace. The Italian Communist Party was a very big party. It was not in the government, but we saw them as a constant threat. This labor conflict was really a public relations nightmare.

Like everything, this problem settled down with time. The American company, by the way, was very enlightened. They were caught off base by this dispute, but they understood the public relations aspect of this. They worked something out with the unions. I forget exactly what they did, but the dispute subsided. However, this was a good example of the kind of problems you can run into when you invest in a foreign country.

Another problem, of course, was the Italian view of taxation. It was very peculiar by our standards. I used to tell Italian friends that if I handled my income taxes the way Italians did, I'd be in jail. And I would be! Again, this relates to something that we were talking about earlier, that is, the whole subject of corruption. Italians view the state in a different light than we do. At bottom, I think, they believe that the state is out to get them, so they're out to avoid being taken by the state. Does anyone in Italy ever declare his or her full income for tax purposes? No. If they did, they would feel that they were being foolish, and the Italian Government authorities know that. So it's a kind of game played back and forth.

You take an American businessman and plunge him into this environment, and he doesn't quite know how to function. He may buy a company in Italy, and he finds out that the company has at least two separate sets of books. One set of books is for the American company's headquarters in the U.S., and the other set of books is for the Italian Government tax authorities. These are very difficult things to work out. Anyway, Turin was a good perch from which to view all of this.

Something else that I saw in Turin was this. I received a call from an American businessman who had come down to Italy from Switzerland. He said that he had a problem in Italy and asked if he could come to see me. I said: "Sure," and he came to my office. He came in and looked sort of awkward. He said: "You know, I'm not sure whether this is a problem which you can help me with at all. Maybe I'm just taking up your time. I was in the hotel last night. There was another American there. I was telling him about my problem. The other American said: 'There's an American Consulate here in Turin. Maybe they could help you.'" My visitor told me that he didn't know what a Consulate was. This was an American businessman, working out of Switzerland!

Not to go too far into the details, but his problem was that his company was shipping a chemical compound to be used for waterproofing roofs. It was a tar-like substance. However, this was big business. This compound came in by railroad tank car. This wasn't a matter of little packages. Then it was processed and distributed to the customers. He had been coming to Turin every month for some time. Every time the railroad cars transited the border between Italy and Switzerland, the product was charged a different custom fee by the Italians. For example, one car would be charged 12% ad valorem tax, the next car might be charged 18%, and the next one might only be charged 6%. He said: "Look, I don't care what the Italian customs duty is. I need a constant figure so that I will

know what the duty is, so that we can work up our cost data." He said: "I can't run a business this way."

I took him in to see the Consul General. I'm getting a little ahead of myself. We had a new Consul General, a delightful man. Wallace La Rue, the former Consul General, had left Turin. The new Consul General was Givon Parsons, who has now retired and lives here in Virginia. We are in regular contact with each other.

Anyway, we discussed the problem with Consul General Parsons and quickly determined that this businessman was going out to the Customs shed and dealing with very low level Customs officials. I could see him out there in a windy, drafty, Customs shed. He wasn't getting anywhere with his problem. So the Consul General called the Director of Customs, "Il Direttore," in Italian. This was a big job, and this man was a big shot. So Il Direttore got a call from the "Console Generale," the Consul General of the United States. Within an hour we had an appointment with the local Director General of Customs. The American businessman was absolutely flabbergasted. He thought that he was going to see an intermediate level official. In Europe a senior official like this has a big office at the top of a big organization. The Director General was the "capo," the boss.

So the director called in one man, and I could hear them going back and forth in Italian. Then they would call in somebody else. Finally, we got to the problem, which was very simple. The waterproofing solution was not always the same. Every time that the Italians would test it, it had a different chemical composition. You know, customs procedures are terribly bureaucratic and boring. They went down the list. They found that the composition of the compound was different in each case, so the tariff charged was different. Yes, there was a solution. The company agreed that it would present the Italian Customs with all sorts of authorizations and authentications which would set out the formula for an homogeneous mix. You shook it all up and you got a result. Italian Customs accepted that proposal. The problem was solved.

The American businessman, still amazed, told me, "You have solved a problem that I have been trying to solve for six months, and you dealt with it in one afternoon."

Q: This was the result of dealing with sensible people.

WHITE: You know, it made me realize how little many American businessmen know about what the U.S. Government can do for them. I have seen that kind of problem come up time and time again.

About two years ago I was asked to address the annual meeting of a trade association. It was held somewhere in Virginia, involving a group of about 50 very senior American business executives. They were sitting around a huge table. I could tell that they were already tired, having listened to one presentation after another. I spoke just after lunch, and they didn't greet me with any enthusiasm. I asked the man who was organizing this meeting: "What do you think that they want to hear? Do they want to hear about our trade negotiations or what we are doing with the Department of Commerce?" He said: "Keep it

basic." I said: "Well, how basic?" He said: "Tell them what an Embassy is." I thought that he was joking.

Anyhow, I started on that tack, and you can always tell whether you have an audience with you. You can always tell if they are really listening to you or whether their eyes are glazing over. I started out by telling them what an Embassy is, how it's organized, and how it can help them. You know, I quickly had a very attentive audience listening to me. And these were senior business executives of major American companies. For example, I remember telling them that when their representatives go abroad to open an office, and they have to hire people, find housing, or find schools for their kids, they ought to consider going to the American Embassy or Consulate and asking questions about these matters. There are people in the Embassy or Consulate who can tell them what they need to know. I told them about the simple matter of registering their presence in a Consular District. They didn't know about this. They also didn't know that, once you are registered, if you lose a passport, you can get another passport very quickly because you and your passport number are registered with the Embassy or Consulate.

That problem has been with us for a long time, and I am convinced that we still have that problem. The American Government and the Department of State do a lousy job of advertising the services that they can provide American businessmen.

Q: We can go further into this at another point. Maybe you could now finish up with your time in Turin. You were Deputy Principal Officer at the Consulate in Turin. That would be a pretty big job.

WHITE: I was the Deputy. However, when Parsons arrived, it turned out that he had a very different style from that of Consul General La Rue. Parsons was very much an activist. He loved to get around and he pushed his officers to get out and circulate in the consular community. I remember that from time to time I would look up and see him standing in my door. He would say: "You know, you've been at your desk a lot this week. It's time to get out and circulate."

So I would get out. I visited all of the provincial capitals in the consular district. I would set up a whole day's schedule of calls on the chambers of commerce and the leading companies in that region. I would usually have lunch with the Chamber of Commerce and have other meetings in the mornings and afternoons. I did a great deal of that. I criss-crossed the consular district and found this very rewarding. I remember going out and attending the inauguration of a plant belonging to Scott Paper Company, which had opened up near Turin. I recall that the Italian Minister of Industry came up from Rome for that. The Minister was named Andreotti. He was Prime Minister many times after that and now is one of the grand old men of Italian politics.

I had some other problems there which were more administrative in nature. USIS [United States Information Service] had an information center there. It was in a prime location, on the Piazza San Carlo, a very prestigious address. In one of those spasms of economizing that the U.S. government always seems to carry out in a great hurry we got a telegram

one day stating that the USIS center was going to be closed. The instructions to me were to close it. Just like that. You know, there were 12 or 15 local employees who had been with USIS since the end of World War II. It was not a very pleasant experience to deal with the bureaucrats down in the Embassy in Rome on this matter. They just wanted to walk away from this problem. The USIS local employees wanted to know about their benefits and the myriad questions that come up, including disposal of the property and all of that.

Once the Embassy decided to close the USIS office, they just wanted out, which I thought was scandalous. I remember at one point calling the Embassy in Rome and to read the riot act to the Director of USIS. Then I got a little action. This sort of conduct is very unsettling. The way that people often deal with their own subordinates is very reprehensible.

When I first arrived in Turin, morale was not good among the local employees of the Consulate. I asked "Ches" Davella, our senior local employee, what the problem was. He said: "They're not being paid the same salary that their counterparts in other American Consulates in Italy are being paid." We had Consulates in Turin, Genoa, Trieste, Naples, and Palermo.

Q: Did you prepare an annual wage survey?

WHITE: That was one of the factors. I looked into this. I called the Embassy Personnel Officer in Rome, whose name escapes me. She was very able. I explained the problem. Of course, our local employees at the various Consulates in Italy knew each other. Even at different Consulates, they know what their salaries were. They had their own little "underground" network. The Personnel Officer was very conscientious. She called me back a few days later and said: "Mr. White, all of your job descriptions are carefully matched against the salaries authorized, and those salaries are right for that level. However, the job descriptions haven't been amended..."

Q: For many years.

WHITE: That's right. She said: "Look at the positions." So I dropped everything for several weeks and rewrote every job description in the Consulate in Turin. I called the employees in, interviewed them, put it in the right format, and got Consul General La Rue to sign off on the memorandum to the Embassy.

Q: Were you able to raise their salaries?

WHITE: Well, I updated their job descriptions, which was supposed to be done or at least certified to have been reviewed every year.

You know, a few weeks went by and I thought, nothing will happen. Do you know what came of this effort? All of our local employees with one exception received a promotion of one grade. One of them, our Commercial Assistant, got a promotion of two grades. He

got a double promotion in the sense that he got an immediate promotion and then he was promised another grade increase in another year.

Now, American supervisors of these Consulate employees over a number of years hadn't been doing their job. The problem is that if you don't do your job, it has an impact on people. Everything is a kind of social contract. The people working for me owe me high standard work, integrity, and promptness in doing their jobs. If I want something to be done, I expect that it will be done. But there's another side to this. I have a responsibility to look after them.

Q: A reciprocal obligation.

WHITE: Absolutely. I must say that I was shocked to realize that this was the situation. And after this was my experience with the closure of the USIS office. You can't blame this on our local employees. This was the job of American supervisors, who were responsible. This failure to do their jobs had been going on over a period of years. Well, at the end of the day you have to blame the man in charge. They just weren't paying any attention. Probably a lot of junior, American officers over the years had not been properly trained, and so forth.

Anyway, there was a different situation with Consul General Parsons, who was very much an activist, as I said.

Q: But you had looked forward with enthusiasm to a transfer to the Embassy in Rome. That never happened, but at the end...

WHITE: Well, two things happened. There was an annual meeting of the Principal Officers at the various Consulates in Italy. Once a year the Principal Officers all gathered in Rome. They had such a meeting shortly after I arrived. Of course, Consul General La Rue usually represented the Consulate in Turin.

He called me in one day and said that he wasn't going to attend this meeting and that he expected me to go to represent the Consulate.

Q: Because he was feeling ill?

WHITE: I think that at that point it was more than that. I think that he had been told that he was probably going to have to retire from the Foreign Service, on grounds of disability. I think that that is what was behind this decision.

Anyway, I was sent down to Rome. I still remember that in Rome we used a huge conference room, which had a huge table in it. The Ambassador, the DCM, and all of the Embassy Section Chiefs were there.

Q: Who was the DCM?

WHITE: Frank Meloy was the DCM. Remember him?

Q: Oh, yes.

WHITE: He was a very nice chap and a very good DCM, as well as a good administrator. He was later killed in Lebanon, along with Bob Waring, an officer whom I knew. They were both gunned down together, in the same car, I think. Frank was very precise in manner, which you have to be. You know, administration requires a certain eye for detail. In fact, that's what administration is. It's the sum total of little details. Anyway, the senior officers of the Embassy were all at this meeting. I think that Homer Byington was the Consul General in Naples at that point. Tom Crain was Consul General in Milan. Steve Dorsey was the Supervisory Consul General in the Embassy. I was aware of a kind of a generation gap. All of these Consuls General were older men. There I was at the end of the table, representing the Consulate in Turin. [Laughter] Each of us had to give presentations on the situation in our respective consular districts. They went down the line, and I felt sort of out of place. Then it was my turn. I took a deep breath and plunged into my presentation about what was going on in "my" consular district.

While I was in Turin, I met a young lady over in Milan, and we got married eventually. So that's what happened to me in Turin. It was just a two year tour.

Q: You had just gone to Milan on an official trip?

WHITE: I was actually there on business. That's how I met her. And then I came back to the Department in Washington. By that time I had had three overseas posts in a row. It was time to go back to Washington.

Q: So you had a series of two-year assignments. What did you think of this series of short tours? Or would you have preferred longer tours?

WHITE: I think that for junior officers two-year tours are good. I also think that the more varied the assignments, the better.

Q: You had an excellent introduction to the Foreign Service, especially given your special interest in international business.

WHITE: There was a variety of assignments at each post. I did a number of things. Each post was very different from the others. I went from a North German port [Bremen] to the desert [Khartoum] and then to the foothills of the Alps [Turin]. Yes, it was an eventful period of seven years.

Q: Then you went into the concentrated economics course.

WHITE: That's correct for six months.

Q: That was a fairly new course at that time, I think.

WHITE: I was in the second such course at the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: A little while before that I went off to Harvard for university level training. That was such a valuable experience.

WHITE: I can imagine.

Q: I could never believe that they could concentrate that wonderful experience in the short space of several months. Do you think that your class was an adequate substitute for a longer course?

WHITE: I think that it was, and for various reasons.

Q: Who was in charge of the course?

WHITE: Warrick Elrod ran that course. He was a former FSO [Foreign Service Officer]. John Sprott was his deputy. Sprott was there in the FSI [Foreign Service Institute] until a few years ago. He later went off to be Ambassador somewhere in Africa.

I knew that it was time to get more theoretical knowledge of economics. I had never really majored in economics. The more economic work I did, the more I realized that I really lacked the theoretical foundation for this. I knew that in some areas I was out of my depth. Exchange rates, for example. I didn't really understand a lot of economic phenomena. Sure enough, the Department assigned me to that economics course.

Q: Did you apply for it?

WHITE: Yes. I heard about it, applied for it, and was assigned to it. I remember that there were 21 of us in the class. I'm just looking over some notes that I have on the course.

The economics course was very concentrated. It covered the whole gamut of economics. Warrick Elrod always said that when you finished that economics course, you had much more than a bachelor's major in economics. You almost had a master's degree in economics. It was extremely concentrated and very intense.

Q: During my university assignment, the reading requirements were overwhelming.

WHITE: It was hectic. It was not a gentlemanly course where you sit around and have bull sessions. This was a working course. It was all held in one room, up in the old FSI building. In fact, they held it in the same room until they moved over to the present FSI campus a few years ago. Then, in another room we each had a little cubicle, where we had facilities for study. That was it.

Q: Did they have professors to lecture to you?

WHITE: Oh, yes. They brought in teachers.

Q: From Georgetown and George Washington Universities?

WHITE: One of the teachers actually worked for the Federal Reserve Board. He was still on duty at the Federal Reserve. He was very good. Most of the others were teachers from universities in the Washington area.

There was a lot of reading to do. If you did all the readings, you'd be up until 5:00 AM. Some of my classmates were more eager beavers than others. In all, it was a hard grind.

The course lasted for six months. You had to work to keep up with the class. At the end of the course you received a report, which went into your permanent, personnel file. At the time I don't think that I put as much into it as I probably could have done. However, I was preparing to marry a foreign woman, and the paperwork for doing that was complicated.

Q: They did a security check on her?

WHITE: Yes. I went back to Italy that summer, and we were married.

The course was excellent, and we learned an awful lot. Undergraduates at universities have other courses they have to take. They have other preoccupations and a social life that is important. We were professional civil servants and were presumably serious minded. We were there to learn. We had no distractions, so we could concentrate totally on what we were doing.

Q: So that is what the course was all about?

WHITE: Yes. I couldn't have continued to do economic work without having that kind of foundation. I never had a year of studies at a university as a training assignment and I regret that. However, on the other hand I was never really keen on training assignments. But I knew that at that point I had to have a good, hard training assignment in economics.

As I said, there were 21 of us in the class. We came from different agencies. There were two people from AID [Agency for International Development] in the class. The rest were not all regular State Department officers, but most of us were. I'm still in touch with many of the people who were in that class. I see them quite often. For example, Clay Nettles and Bruce Hirshorn were in the class.

All of the members of the class were serious and hard working. Theresa Healy was a member of the class, by the way. She was the only woman in our group.

Q: Were there any military people in the class?

WHITE: Not as I recall.

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Q: This is Wednesday, October 1, 1997. We are beginning our third session of the interview, recapitulating your Foreign Service career. Al, I think that we just concluded your observations about your period in economics training at the FSI.

Now, after you had spent about a dozen years in the Foreign Service, in 1967 you were assigned to the Department of Commerce.

WHITE: Actually, it was after 10 years in the Foreign Service. I entered the Foreign Service in 1957, and this completed a decade of service.

Q: How did your assignment to the Department of Commerce come about, what was your feeling about it, and what did you anticipate before you went to the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: I think that there's a misconception around these days that, until the Department of Commerce got its own Foreign Service, the Department of State ran the commercial function and did it more or less on its own. In fact, as you undoubtedly know, that was not true. State had very close relationships with Commerce, as far as the commercial function was concerned.

For example, Commerce officials sat on assignment and promotion panels in the Department of State.

Q: They were concerned particularly with officers in the economic cone.

WHITE: Exactly. They dealt with the economic and commercial area. Indeed, Commerce had a great deal of influence on making decisions in that area.

Q: On assignments and promotions.

WHITE: Yes. They influenced assignments of officers who were doing commercial work.

Q: So there would have been some Commerce officers who had observed your work in Bremen, Khartoum, and Turin and had been much impressed by your work? They wanted you over in the Department of Commerce.

WHITE: I don't know how strongly they felt about that. They certainly knew me, because I had done commercial work in Germany, Sudan, and Italy. Of course, these were small posts where I was stationed. I doubt that I was exactly on page one over at the Department of Commerce. However, at that time...

Q: But you were a relatively young junior officer. There probably weren't many people

who had had 10 years experience and had done as much of the kind of dreary and specialized work which you had done.

WHITE: Perhaps that's true. The State Department had a personnel exchange program with Commerce, as it also had with other Government departments. I thought and still think that this was an excellent program. I think that we used to send a half dozen officers over to Commerce each year. So it was quite common for a State Department officer who had done commercial work to be assigned to the Department of Commerce for a two-year tour of duty.

In fact, a colleague of mine in Bremen had been assigned to the Department of Commerce for a two-year period. As I had been abroad now for about seven years, immediately before I took the economics course at the FSI, it was pretty well indicated that I would have a Washington assignment.

Q: Did you ask for an assignment to the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: No, I didn't ask to be assigned to Commerce. Frankly, I'm a little vague on what I had in mind. However, I accepted an assignment to Commerce with a little trepidation because it was not in the State Department and was not in the main stream of assignments, or so some people thought. But I accepted that. I had an interest in commercial work. I accepted both in principle and practice that it would be a very good thing to have more interchange between the various elements of the Washington bureaucracy.

Q: But you don't know any more about how this assignment came about.

WHITE: Well, of course, my personnel record showed that I had done commercial work. I was at the point where a Washington assignment was clearly in the cards, rather than going overseas again, since I had had three tours, back to back, so to speak.

In any case, I went to work at the Department of Commerce.

Q: Do you remember your initial impression, when you first arrived in the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: Very distinctly. First of all, you have to remember that in Washington, then and always, there was a pecking order. The Commerce Department, in general, during that period, did not rank very high in the Washington pecking order. This, you know, was the period after World War II, when Washington was preoccupied with foreign affairs.

Q: This was in 1967.

WHITE: Foreign affairs were stealing all of the headlines for about 15 years after World War II. The ‘60s were a rough and tumble time. When I came back to the country after being abroad, I was quite struck, not to say flabbergasted, by the change in the national

mood.

I had gone overseas in what I guess was the evening of the Eisenhower period, at the end of the 1950s, when the country was relatively tranquil. There were no great issues tearing it apart. The Korean War had been resolved by Eisenhower. The Cold War was ongoing, but on the other hand Stalin had died in the early 1950s, and there was hope in the air.

Q: But now this was late in the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson.

WHITE: Exactly. If there was one leitmotif of that period, it was the Vietnam War and the agony that the country was going through. Coming back from overseas, I was rather shocked to see this. As you know, the Vietnam War was unpopular. Well, we all know the story. It was impossible to turn on the evening television news without hearing about student demonstrations and rioting. The administration was reeling under the impact of all of this.

However, to return to my tour of duty in the Department of Commerce, the building itself revealed a lot about the Department of Commerce. It's a wonderful building. You know it, between 14th and 15th Streets south of Pennsylvania Avenue. I think that it was built in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Construction was begun perhaps when Herbert Hoover was Secretary of Commerce. He was Secretary of Commerce for eight years during the 1920s.

Of course, Hoover was really a prominent man. He gained that reputation during World War I, with his experience in war relief activities. He had been an engineer, had worked abroad, knew international commerce, and had tremendous prestige.

Q: He was a self-made millionaire.

WHITE: He was "Mr. Business." If you remember at the time, the "business of the country was business," as somebody said. Maybe it was President Harding, but, anyway...

Q: I think that it was President Coolidge that said that.

WHITE: Was it Coolidge? I stand corrected. Anyway, those were the golden years of the Department of Commerce. Andrew Mellon, of course, was Secretary of the Treasury during the 1920s. Mellon was rather reserved and a rather forbidding looking figure. He was tremendously influential.

However, the man who really stood out during this period was Herbert Hoover. I presume that it was taken for granted that he would be a presidential candidate. But when I went over to the Department of Commerce in 1967, the Commerce Department building probably hadn't been altered much since Herbert Hoover's day. There was no central air conditioning system in the building. The building was rather down at the heels and a bit grimy looking. There were air conditioning window units in the individual offices. The offices, in turn, were crowded and small. These window air conditioners droned loudly

throughout the day. They sputtered and occasionally didn't work at all. When you walked out in the corridors, it was like getting slapped in the fact by a blast of warm, moist air. The corridors weren't air conditioned. The restrooms weren't air conditioned.

In a way, that situation was symptomatic of what had happened to the Commerce Department. It was very low on the totem pole of prestige in Washington. The old timers used to say, quite bitterly, that the last Secretary of Commerce was really Herbert Hoover, as if to say that, after that, it was all downhill. In a way that was true.

Of course, even in these days, the Department of Commerce has been under some attack. You remember that a few years ago some people, including Senator Robert Dole, were calling for the abolition of the Department of Commerce.

Q: It wasn't all of that long ago. In fact, that nearly happened in 1994.

WHITE: I think that the fundamental problem of the Department of Commerce has always been that it is a hodge podge, a miscellany composed of the Census Bureau, the Patent Office, the Weather Bureau, and the part probably least known to the public, the Bureau of International Commerce. The Department of Commerce has suffered from that situation over the years.

However, in any case, when I went over to Commerce, some of my contemporaries in the State Department considered that this was equivalent to being assigned way out in left field or, perhaps, Eastern Siberia.

Q: Or the Third Circle of Hell.

WHITE: Something like that. I was assigned to the European Division of the Bureau of International Commerce. However, my colleague, who had been there before me, gave me some very good advice. He said: "You will be welcomed there as someone who has been overseas and in the Foreign Service. If you do a good job for Commerce, Commerce will be very good about looking after you."

Well, actually, one does the best one can do in any job. As I said, I was assigned to the European Division of the Bureau of International Commerce. That was organized very much like the geographical bureaus in the State Department. There were European, African, and Far Eastern Divisions, and so forth. The core of the Bureau, as in the State Department, was the country desk, which might have several officers or only one officer, depending on the size of the country, just as in State.

Q: Now, did you go straight to that office when you first went to Commerce?

WHITE: I did. I had been assigned to the German Desk, which was logical since, after all, I had been in Germany. I knew the country and the language. The German Desk was rather large, consisting of four officers. There was a senior desk officer, with three people under him: me and two civil servants. Commerce came under the Civil Service, of

course. While there were State Department officers there, most of the people had civil service status.

Q: Was your boss an old-time Commerce officer?

WHITE: My boss was a very colorful figure. The Director of the European Division was a man named Fred Strauss. I don't know whether you ever encountered Fred Strauss. Fred was a legend in his own time. He was a European, born in Germany or Austria. He spoke with a thick, Henry Kissinger-type accent. He was the terror of junior staff fresh out of college. He was an "Old World" type of man. He was strict, demanding, and gruff in manner. However, behind that exterior was a lovable old curmudgeon. I came to have great admiration and affection for Fred Strauss. He was very supportive of me during that time.

The senior German desk officer was also European-born. His name was Karl Koranyi, who was from Vienna, but was of Hungarian origin. Again, he was very much the old school type. He didn't think much of many people in the Commerce Department building, and many people had problems with Karl. Again, perhaps, because I had been in Europe and had a certain cachet for being in the Foreign Service, Karl and I got along very well. I spent about a year on the German desk.

Then a colleague of mine from the Foreign Service, Pat O'Connor, joined me on the German desk. This was a large and very busy desk. My job was, first of all, to talk with businessmen who called, and we would get calls from all over the country. Germany, of course, is a big country which attracted a lot of attention. Businessmen would come to see us. We would meet them in our offices and talk to them for as long as they wanted on the various issues of interest to them. Just as in the Department of State, we did a lot of writing and prepared briefing papers. Ambassadors, both American Ambassadors on home leave, as well as foreign Ambassadors, would call on the Secretary of Commerce or on senior officials in the Department. We wrote briefing papers very much like the ones we prepared in the Department of State.

Q: On what topics?

WHITE: Whatever the issue was. For example, the German Ambassador might be coming in to talk with the Secretary of Commerce about a particular problem an American or German company might be having. The issue would vary. If the call was not on the Secretary of Commerce, it might be on the Undersecretary or another, senior official.

Q: Who was the Secretary of Commerce at this time?

WHITE: When I went over to the Department of Commerce, I believe that the Secretary of Commerce was Andy Throwbridge, if I'm not mistaken. Actually, I don't think that he was there very long.

Q: You don't have much of a picture of him?

WHITE: I saw very little of him. He was a rather youngish looking man, but I had very little to do with him.

Q: Did you have any impression of him by reputation?

WHITE: At that time Secretaries of Commerce tended to be in office for a short time. As I said, this position was not considered to be in the front echelon of Washington positions.

Q: What about Luther Hodges during the John Kennedy administration?

WHITE: It depended very much on the individual Secretary. Now, while I was at Commerce the famous C. R. Smith, who had founded American Airlines, became Secretary of Commerce. He was a close friend of President Lyndon Johnson and was a very colorful man. Of course, he was a legendary man in the American aviation industry, as you know.

Q: Did you have any particular impression of C. R. Smith?

WHITE: I saw very little of him. At my level I simply wasn't ushered in every day to sit down with the Secretary of Commerce. Occasionally, that would happen. It happened, I remember, when Maurice Stans was Secretary of Commerce. So in that short period of two years I think that we had three different Secretaries of Commerce. Maurice Stans, if you remember, was President Nixon's first Secretary of Commerce. I remember accompanying the Italian Ambassador to see Stans.

So we wrote a lot of papers. That is what a desk officer does in either the Department of State or in Commerce. That situation hasn't changed. Sometimes these papers have to be written very hurriedly. And, of course, you have the process of clearance of these papers within the Department of Commerce or, perhaps, other departments. Then you have to have the proper background information and the proper talking points. It's a rather tedious and frantic exercise.

Q: Does any particular paper stand out in your mind?

WHITE: No, John. I wrote so many papers. We also wrote papers for publication. Commerce published something called the "International Business Weekly." As desk officers we were expected to write general articles on the state of the economy of a particular country or on specific issues.

One of the issues that comes to mind was the Value Added Tax [VAT] that Germany was considering at that period. The various European countries were moving, one after another, to adopt the Value Added Tax.

Q: I remember that. At the time I was working on GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] matters. The VAT got a lot of attention in GATT circles.

WHITE: It represented a basic shift in the tax code in these countries. Frankly, sooner or later, in my personal view, the VAT is going to come to the United States.

The entire European Economic Community [now the European Union] has adopted the Value Added Tax. But it was complicated. It meant, of course, dollars and cents to American companies. I remember frequently talking with a lot of American businessmen about the German Value Added Tax.

Q: In 1968 we considered the VAT a non-tariff barrier. In fact, in GATT there was a working group considering what we called issues of border tax adjustment. I was the U.S. Representative on that working group.

WHITE: It was a big issue. One of the things that impressed me, and again, I've mentioned this before, is how little American companies know what the U.S. Government can do for them.

I remember one day an American businessman came in to see me at the Department of Commerce. I pulled out of our files a market study which the Department of Commerce had done on his particular product area, in Germany. I think that it had been prepared in our Embassy in Bonn, probably by the Commercial Section. He looked at that study and then looked at me and said: "You know, we paid a lot of money to have a similar market study done, and it's nowhere near as good as this one." Now, that rather impressed me at the time. I've seen so many indications of that same thing over the years. In short, my unit in the Department of Commerce was a very busy and varied desk.

Q: I guess that generally you gained a new appreciation of the use made by the Department of Commerce of the reports that you had sent in from your posts overseas. That includes World Trade Directory Reports, export opportunities, and so forth.

WHITE: That's correct. Of course, the Department of Commerce was, and probably still is, a major end user of the reports prepared by the Foreign Service overseas. Particularly the comprehensive reports done under the CERP, the Comprehensive Economic Reporting Program schedule.

Q: You mentioned the CERP before. From the Department of Commerce perspective, on top of your prior experience, what was your sense of the utility of the CERP? It was much maligned. Many people in the Foreign Service complained that it required reports on such insignificant topics that it really was not worth all of the time it took up. However, others felt that the CERP really was a good way of systematizing a list of reports that would be the most useful, from the Embassy's point of view.

Describe the CERP a little and evaluate it, remembering that the people who may read this transcript may not know much about it.

WHITE: We called it the CERP. I think that this program may have another acronym now, but it used to stand for "Comprehensive Economic Reporting Program." Every Foreign Service post had a list of scheduled, economic reports.

Q: They called it the Big Black Book because it was usually contained in a black, looseleaf notebook, which had a long list of required reports.

WHITE: Right. Naturally, when you're working overseas and you have other things to do, you tend to regard these periodic, scheduled reports as kind of a burden. You ask yourself: "Is this really necessary, and do I really need to supply 15 tables? Why not two tables?"

I think that part of the problem is feedback. Too often then, and I think even now, there is too little feed back from end users of economic reports sent in to Washington. When you're out there in the field, and you spend a lot of time or supervise your local employees, who do a lot of this work, you like to get some indication of whether the report was well or ill received, or whether it was read at all.

Now, we had in Commerce an active program of end user evaluations. One of our responsibilities on the desk was to see to it that those end user reports were done. They weren't all done by desk officers. They were done by the end users, as we always called them, the people who had the major interest in a particular report.

Q: Could you say a word about that the commodity and subject specialists in the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: That's a good point. Commerce was a big organization. It had a lot of specialists, and some of them were fairly narrowly focused. Commerce had experts on just about everything that you could imagine.

Now, maybe some of the reports we sent in to Washington were overly long. Reporting requests should always be reviewed, before being sent, to make sure that there is not an excess requirement that is not really necessary. Some of the reports may have been a bit marginal. However, on the other hand the basic, annual, CERP reports dealt with pretty basic industries. As I think I mentioned previously, I wrote the annual, CERP report on the Italian automotive industry. Those reports were used.

Q: Sometimes they might be excessively long. When I was in South Africa, in the Port Elizabeth area, there were General Motors, Ford, and Studebaker plants. There was a CERP requirement for an annual report on these plants. For years my predecessors had sent in very minimal reports on them. However, I did a very comprehensive report, about 60 pages long. Some people at our Embassy in Pretoria thought that that was ridiculously long. But I got back extended and detailed appraisals, saying that this report was really splendid. I deliberately made the report UNCLASSIFIED. As a matter of fact, I checked it out with the managing directors of the plants in those countries because I

thought that it might be of interest to them.

Anyway, could you comment on that kind of thing? Is it worthwhile for individual reporting officers to prepare in-depth reports?

WHITE: I think so, but the question really is whether the need for such a report is fully justified. That's a question you always have to ask in any organization, which should constantly keep those lists of reports under review. I think that over the years, partly because of comments by inspectors and partly because of exchanges of views between people who work in the field and back in Washington, the number of CERP reports has been steadily reduced. In fact, I think that as late as a few years ago, when I was in my last job dealing with commercial matters in the State Department, we were still pressing people in Washington to review those lists of reports to determine whether they were all needed.

There was an office in the State Department which had a kind of coordinating and managerial function in connection with reports listed in the CERP. It was the job of this office to make sure that the CERP lists were reviewed, on a regular basis and that reports were either cut down in scope or reduced in number.

The main problem was that in preparing all of these CERP reports many officers felt that they didn't have enough time to do what we called "spot" reports. As you know, this meant basically reporting developments as they happened. Reporting officers preparing such reports were very much like a journalist. A lot of developments can't be anticipated as part of an annual report. So spot reporting was very important, and this was one of the things that we tried to encourage on the desk. We tried to maintain a dialogue between the end user and the officer in the field.

I can tell you that in the Department of Commerce Foreign Service Officers had very definite reputations. They were known, not as persons, but as the persons who wrote certain reports. Some of these Foreign Service Officers had excellent reputations, and some of them had not so excellent reputations.

Q: Did you interact with personnel operations dealing with assignments and so forth?

WHITE: I believe that a copy of these evaluations of reports went to Personnel.

Q: I believe that the Department of Commerce was also represented on the Selection Boards, which annually ranked officers in numerical order in terms of their effectiveness.

WHITE: Absolutely. As I say, there was a very close relationship between Commerce and State in this area.

At one point the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Commercial Affairs in the Department of State was an officer from the Department of Commerce. I thought that this was appropriate. So there were numerous institutional and personal ties between Commerce

and State.

Q: Please refresh my memory. At one point there was an office in the Department of State which prepared analytical reports, perhaps every other year, on the economic reporting from the various Embassies. However, I believe that this office was eventually abolished. Do you know anything about this?

WHITE: There may have been a unit charged with preparing reporting evaluations. However, the substantive comments would have come from the various bureaus. We still do that, as far as I know.

Q: I seem to recall that this office was abolished at some point.

WHITE: Well, if so, this function was taken over by the various bureaus. I remember that at my last post we received annual reports from the bureau which supervised our work. They were quite lengthy evaluations of our reporting, in both general and specific terms. Specific reports would be mentioned in those evaluations. These evaluations would also contain suggestions on what reporting might be de-emphasized or given greater emphasis. We were given the opportunity to comment on those evaluations. So there's always been this dialogue between Washington and our posts in the field, and there should be. In fact, there should be more of it. There was never enough of it, in my judgment.

Q: Was your work in the Department of Commerce mostly on German affairs, or did you cover other countries, too?

WHITE: I stayed on the German desk for about a year. Then the Dutch desk became open, and I was assigned to it. I was very happy about that.

Q: Was this in addition to your duties on German affairs?

WHITE: No, I was transferred to the Dutch desk. I was quite happy about that because there was only one desk officer working on Dutch affairs. In that sense it was a promotion. I went from being one of several officers assigned to Germany to being "the" Dutch desk officer. I was my own boss, in fact. I had that job for about three or four months. Then I moved to the Italian desk because the number two slot on the Italian desk came open. Of course, I had a background of working on Italian affairs, having been assigned to the Consulate in Turin for two years.

So I moved over to the Italian desk. Then, when the Italian desk officer moved on to be the Director of the Chicago Field Office of the Department of Commerce, I replaced him as the senior Italian desk officer for five or six months at the end of my two year tour in Commerce. This desk officer was a very able man. We were a very good combination because he knew Washington but hadn't served in Italy, as I had done.

So in those two years I had a great deal of variety in my assignments.

Q: Didn't you also handle Austria for a while?

WHITE: Not in the Department of Commerce, no. That came later, when I was back in the Department of State. So during those two years at the Department of Commerce I moved from the German desk to the Dutch desk to the Italian desk.

Q: Did you have some sense of how the Field Offices of the Department of Commerce interrelated with what the department itself was doing?

WHITE: I always had very strong views on the Field Offices of the Department of Commerce. There were a lot of them in various parts of the country. There were at least 25 and maybe 30 of them, both large and small. I always felt that these Field Offices were an arm of the U.S. Government that was very important, underused, and under exploited. At one point I recommended, and I was practically laughed out of the Department of State for saying this, that instead of bringing junior officers back to Washington after their first tour of duty overseas, just to be lost in the basement of the State Department, doing some relatively minor, frustrating type of job, why not send them out to those Department of Commerce Field Offices?

Q: Especially those interested in the economic field.

WHITE: Those interested in doing economic and commercial work. How much better it would be for junior Foreign Service Officers to spend two years in a Commerce Field Office, rather than doing some miserable job that they didn't like, being lost in the sheer size of the Washington bureaucracy. How much better it would have been to transfer a junior officer to a Department of Commerce Field Office in, say, St. Louis or Chicago, where he would have seen the other end of trade promotion. Where he would have been in contact with the grass roots of the economy, in contact with American companies, at the other end of this pipeline, so to speak.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to visit any of those Commerce Field Offices?

WHITE: Only the Field Office in Baltimore, as I remember. The Field Offices seemed to be underutilized for various reasons. First of all, because there was simply a lack of imagination in realizing how useful those offices could be, particularly for assigning junior officers. But of course there you get into problems with the bureaucracy. The Field Office jobs were under Civil Service, and the Foreign Service is not the Civil Service. However, I think that those obstacles could have been overcome, and I think that this would have been an excellent training vehicles for young officers.

Q: Did you just raise this matter at one point or...

WHITE: Oh, I always talked about this proposal in State and Commerce. I would tell many people about it, but they weren't interested. They thought that the idea was rather absurd. Well, I thought that it was a very good idea, and I still think so.

By the way, when I was coming to the end of my tour of duty at the Department of Commerce, the Department of Commerce was finally coming around to that conclusion. They were beginning to transfer some of their people from abroad to some of their Field Offices. I think that that is what we should have done a long, long time ago.

One of the problems was that this was one of the very politicized parts of the Commerce Department. It was uneven in quality, and people in Commerce would be the first to say that. A lot of the people assigned to the field offices were political appointees. They had connections with local politicians. I think that there was a feeling in Commerce that there was only so much that you could do with the Field Offices for that reason.

Again, the quality of the Field Offices varied. My colleague, my supervisor on the Italian desk, was outstanding, and I'm sure that he did a very good job in the Chicago Field Office. Of course, that was not a political job. He was a civil servant.

Q: Your main job at the Department of Commerce, one way or another, was helping American businessmen.

WHITE: I would say totally.

Q: Before we get to evaluating that, I might note that it's often said that it's only the small and mid-sized American businessman who gets much benefit from the Field Offices. Usually, the large corporations have their own sources and their own insights. Is that true from your experience?

WHITE: Frankly, my experience was that it was the large corporations which utilized the services that the government provided. Yes, the large companies have resources of their own. However, they also know where to go in the U.S. Government when they want help or information. Ironically, it's the smaller companies, which need more help, which don't come to us because they don't know that we're there. I think that this is still a problem.

A lot of American businesses simply do not know that the State or Commerce Departments, not to speak of other departments in the federal government, can provide help to them. I think that, over the years, the U.S. Government has done a lousy job of advertising its own services.

Q: What do you think we can and should do to spread the word?

WHITE: I think that that's essentially a public relations function. I think that the Departments of Commerce and State have both been remiss in addressing that problem.

Q: In the Department of State the people concerned with Public Affairs sort of construe their mandate on a much broader and much more political front. They see their job as explaining the Middle East and other foreign affairs problems facing the United States. Of course, the State Department as a whole, and I think that you and I would agree on

this, underestimates the importance of the Commercial Function.

WHITE: I think that the Department of State had done that in the post-war period. I think that that has been changing in recent years. Certainly, in my last job at the Department of State, there was a recognition that these things needed to be done. Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger was very keen on it and had considerable success in emphasizing the commercial function. However, the other part of it is that it is not only the responsibility of the government. It is also the responsibility of the people who lead the American business community to educate themselves on what's available, and to tell their own members, in turn, of what's available.

Q: Would the U.S. Chamber of Commerce be useful in doing this job?

WHITE: Absolutely. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, state chambers of commerce, and trade associations would all be useful in this respect.

Q: You mean that they should spread the word?

WHITE: Well, I suppose that some of them do so, with varying results. However, as I think I mentioned to you before, just a few years ago I was asked to address the annual meeting of one of the large trade associations. I spent an hour giving the basic ABC's of what you might explain to a high school class in civics about how an Embassy is organized and how it can help American businessmen. I think that there's a lot of work that still needs to be done in developing closer rapport between American businessmen and their government.

Q: Do you recall, at this point, any particular services you did for any particular American company while you were assigned to the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: Nothing stands out particularly in mind. In later periods, yes, but not in that particular period. My work at the Department of Commerce was very busy and varied. I answered a lot of questions, many of which were rather basic. A lot of them were complicated and required a lot of research. Some of them had to do with legal issues. Others had to do with something as humdrum as Customs procedures abroad. By the way the Department of Commerce had a very good office which specialized in providing foreign Customs information. So when I got inquiries into the very nitty gritty end of tariffs, I was very glad to transfer them to that office. Customs procedures can be very complicated, and you can easily mislead people. Commerce had an excellent man in charge of this particular division. The people who worked there pored over the world's tariff schedules and import regulations. This was very nitty gritty stuff, but they are the nuts and bolts of commercial work.

The Value Added Tax question was a big issue at the time. Trade barrier were always a problem. American companies were heavily investing in Europe at that time, certainly in Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. There were always problems of investment law and conflicts of that kind. There was a great deal of variety, but much of it was pretty tedious.

Q: As a matter of fact, this was at the end of the Kennedy Round of tariff negotiations, which I worked on a lot when I was assigned to Geneva. Did you have any involvement in that?

WHITE: I'm sure that we had questions about it. Our inquiries varied a great deal. This is what desk officers do.

Q: Before we conclude your period of duty at the Department of Commerce, do you have any overall evaluation of Commerce, the quality of the work, how it could be improved, or what else should be done beyond what you've already said?

WHITE: You mean in terms of the period when I was detailed to the Department of Commerce? Well, I would say that the Department of Commerce was uneven. There were brilliant people in the Commerce Department, and there were some, frankly, who probably were beyond the point where they could show much initiative. There was a lot of variety but, as I say, uneven talent. However, the ones that were good were very, very good. I certainly was very well treated there from the professional point of view. Both the Director of the European Office of the Bureau of International Commerce and his Deputy, Charley Barrett, were fine people to work with. I enjoyed working in Commerce. I had a lot of respect for those people. I retained a lot of those relationships for years.

I remember that, after I left Commerce and had been back in the Department of State for a couple of years, Charley Barrett, the Deputy Director of the Office of European Affairs at the Department of Commerce, invited me to lunch one day, somewhere near the State Department. He asked me if I'd like to go to Stockholm as a Commercial Officer. Now, obviously, he wouldn't have asked me if he had not thought that he could “swing” it. I just mention that as an example of how this relationship between State and Commerce worked.

Every time I came back to Washington, I always made it a point to visit the people in the Department of Commerce, to debrief them and to be briefed by them on what was happening in their area of work.

Q: After a couple of years at Commerce you shifted to a comparable type job at the Department of State.

WHITE: That's right.

Q: Can you tell us how that came about?

WHITE: That's rather interesting. Of course, I had a background in Italian affairs. I knew that by the summer of 1969 my two years at Commerce would be up, and I would be going somewhere else. Early in 1969 I got a phone call from the Department of State. The Country Director for Austria, Italy, and Switzerland wanted to see me.

Q: Who was that?

WHITE: That was Wells Stabler, who later became Ambassador to Spain. We had Country Directorates at that point. We no longer have them. A Country Directorate included a group of desks covering a group of countries. The Country Director in turn reported to an Assistant Secretary of State or a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State.

Q: Did we have an Office of Western European Affairs at that point?

WHITE: I think that that had been broken down into directorates. We had acronyms for these offices. "WE" consisted of France and the Benelux [Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg] countries. Spain and Portugal had one Country Director. Greece and Turkey had one.

Q: Wasn't there an office called "EE" or Office of Eastern European Affairs?

WHITE: Yes. That was a different directorate. Scandinavia and the UK were grouped together as a Country Directorate [NE]. In many ways you could question how these Country Directorates were organized. For example, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland had very little in common with each other. Italy, of course, was a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] country. Austria and Switzerland were neutral countries.

Q: But they were members of EFTA, the European Free Trade Association?

WHITE: That's right. Anyway, I was interviewed for the job of economic officer for Austria, Italy, and Switzerland, even though it wasn't going to be open for some time. The long and short of it was that I was appointed as Economic Officer for those three countries in AIS [Country Directorate for Italy, Austria, and Switzerland].

Q: And Wells Stabler was your boss?

WHITE: Actually, I never really worked for him. By the time I got around to going over to AIS, after I had completed two years in the Department of Commerce, when I reported for work on July 1, 1969, Stabler had just left the Department to become Deputy Chief of Mission [DCM] in Rome. So there was a new Country Director for AIS. He hadn't chosen me, but there I was. The new Country Director was Bob Beaudry. Bob had served in Switzerland, among other places.

Under Bob Beaudry in AIS was Chuck Johnson, a very senior Italian desk officer. He had a junior officer assistant on the Italian desk. We also had an Austrian-Swiss desk officer, Frank Trinka. My brief as Economic Officer covered all three countries. So I interfaced with all of the people in the office.

I held that job for three years. In many ways it was the most interesting and enjoyable job that I ever had in Washington. First of all, there was the sheer variety of it, which ensured that I never got bored.

Q: How would you compare that job with your job in the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: It was similar, in many ways, but also very different. The two Departments of Commerce and State, of course, are very different. I worked very closely with the Austrian, Italian, and Swiss Embassies here in Washington, much more than I had at Commerce. I also worked very closely with the three American Embassies in the respective capitals.

One of the things that I tried to do was to keep up a steady correspondence with the three Economic Counselors in our three Embassies, to supplement the flow of instructions by cable. I would send these Economic Counselors letters from time to time, maybe twice a month, giving them the background and heads up [advance warning] about what might be coming down the road or even to give them the background on some message that might have reached them out of the blue and left them wondering what it was all about. I think that that's one of the things that a desk officer should do.

Q: Let them know what is useful.

WHITE: Yes, an informal channel. Today, of course, you can do that easily by cable. I did it by letter. The material I sent them was not time sensitive, and I must say that they appreciated it. They found that kind of backstopping useful.

Q: Would you do that by E-Mail now?

WHITE: I'm sure they do, or something akin to that. Then, of course, communications were much more brief and restricted, because we didn't have the technology then which we have today.

The subjects were varied. It was on the Italian desk that I got my baptism of fire in aviation work, which loomed very large in my career after that.

Q: We can get to that later. You had some exposure to aviation matters, though.

WHITE: I remember very vividly the first issue that came up when I walked into the office to present myself to Bob Beaudry. He was very new, and I was also very new in the office. I think that it was officially his first day on the job.

Q: Was the first question, "What do you know about Alitalia?"

WHITE: He said: "You'd better read up on the civil aviation file. We're going to have talks with the Italians, and it's a very contentious issue." So I went out and spoke to one of our three secretaries in that Directorate. I said: "Can someone show me where I can find the Civil Aviation file on Italy?" One of the secretaries pointed to an entire file cabinet and said: "That's the file that you're looking for." It was a long, complicated, contentious matter.

Q: Can you briefly recapitulate what the issues were?

WHITE: Our aviation relations with Italy and other countries, unlike most other forms of business, are generally regulated by bilateral agreements. There is a long history about how that came about, but I won't get into that here. However, briefly, no airliner flew internationally, in chartered or scheduled service, without a bilateral, binding agreement which was signed, sealed, and delivered. These agreements had all of the usual features of executive agreements. They didn't have treaty status.

The aviation industry was very dynamic and was changing and growing. Problems were coming up all the time. The basic problem then, and I think even now, was that American airlines were in the private sector. They were lean and mean, they were aggressive, and were world-wide in their scope of operations. The European airlines were state-controlled. They were not as efficient as American airlines. They had very few cities that we were interested in serving. For the aviation industry France was what? Paris and Nice. Italy was Rome and Milan.

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Q: *This is Wednesday, October 1, 1997. I'm John Harter, continuing the interview of Al White for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Al, you were saying, when we broke off this interview that one of the first problems which you encountered as an International Economist in the Office of...*

WHITE: The Country Directorate of Austria, Italy, and Switzerland. We were talking about aviation affairs. By the way, traditionally, and even now, aviation is handled in Economic Sections, and not by Commercial Sections in our Embassies abroad. I have always regarded aviation affairs as 100% a commercial issue. After all, you're dealing with American companies. They are airlines, rather than aircraft manufacturers.

In this context I don't see the difference between Boeing, which makes aircraft, and American Airlines, which flies these aircraft. As far as I am concerned, aviation was and, in essence, will always remain, a commercial matter. This is a rough arena, because American airlines by no means have the same interests. They fight each other, as well as their competition abroad.

With the Italians we had a particular problem, relating to multiple designations. This is a term in aviation which simply means that one government reserves the right to appoint whichever airlines it wants to fly in a given, bilateral market. Aviation agreements between governments don't mention airlines by name. They only refer to airlines generically. For instance, it is stated that one government has the right for its airlines to do this or that, or not do this or that. As a practical matter, each European government has one airline, or did at the time we are talking about, anyway. In the case of Italy, this airline was Alitalia. In the case of France, it was Air France, and so forth. Of course, in the strict letter of these agreements, we were correct in the sense that we could designate

any airline or airlines we wanted to service a given market.

Q: Which American airlines were interested in this market?

WHITE: Normally, the service at this time was provided by Pan American World Airways and TWA [Trans World Airlines].

First of all, the Italians would have preferred to have only one American airline to service a line to Italy. This was because, in their view of things, they only had one airline and, ergo, the U.S. should also have only one airline to serve the same market, so that there was a certain symmetry to this situation.

We could never accept this view. First, politically, we could never accept it. How could the U.S. Government tell Pan Am, "Well, we're going to give this route to TWA. Sorry about that." That was simply not acceptable politically. We always jealously protected our right to make multiple designations. We felt that we could designate any airline or airlines we wished to designate. That was our business, in our view. Under the law at the time, it was up to the President of the United States to make that determination. That shows you how politicized the whole area was.

The airlines vied with each other for influence with the government. First of all, the airlines fought with the CAB [Civil Aviation Board], which still existed at that time and which regulated domestic aviation. However, the key, route awards in international aviation were made by the President. He pretty much had carte blanche. He didn't have to explain why he chose one air carrier over another. He could simply say that that was his view of the national interest. So that was a critical question.

Another issue was what we called “beyond rights.”

Q: What was that?

WHITE: "Beyond rights" simply means that if you fly from New York to Rome, you also have the right to fly "beyond" Rome, let's say, to Cairo, and from Cairo to further points, or even around the world. We insisted that our airlines had that right. Indeed, that language was in the agreement.

In some cases it wouldn't have been worthwhile for Pan Am, say, just to fly from New York to Zurich, [Switzerland], and back. To be viable, they had to fly from New York to Zurich, say, and from Zurich on to New Delhi, and so forth.

This was an area of raw commercial competition, mixed very heavily with politics. So negotiations on air rights with Italy were my baptism of fire. They had gone on for a long time.

I might add that this assignment was really my first exposure to negotiations. You hear a lot about negotiating in the Foreign Service. In fact, very few people in the Foreign

Service actually negotiate across a table. One of the things that fascinated me about aviation, apart from what we've been talking about in terms of its commercial interest, was that this was an area where you actually negotiated.

In these negotiations, each party had a delegation, headed by a Chairman. You lined up on opposite sides of the table and you went through an agenda. Behind you were the representatives of the airlines as a group. We never permitted individual airlines to sit in on formal negotiating sessions. The Air Transport Association represented the scheduled airlines as a group. Our charter airlines were represented by their own association.

Q: Who headed the U.S. delegation in these negotiations? We had the Office of Aviation...

WHITE: We had an Office of Aviation in the Bureau of Economic Affairs.

Q: Was Henry Snowden there?

WHITE: Henry Snowden was in the Office of Aviation before my time. I remember hearing of him, but he had left the State Department by the time I was in the Office of Aviation. The Director of the Office of Aviation was John Meadows, one of the most able people I ever encountered in the Foreign Service. He was a superb negotiator.

Q: Was the FAA [Federal Aviation Agency] involved, too?

WHITE: The Chairman of the delegation was always a State Department officer. We insisted on that. FAA would be represented if issues of interest to it were involved.

Q: That was John Meadows.

WHITE: That was normally John Meadows, in his capacity as the head of the Office of Aviation. Now occasionally, and for various reasons, the delegation might actually be headed by a higher level official, especially if the negotiations were particularly important abroad.

Q: Such as the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Economic Affairs?

WHITE: Exactly. Or it could even be someone higher ranking than that. However, that was very rare.

Now, sometimes negotiations were headed by the chief of the bilateral aviation division, who at that time was Mike Styles. Sometimes, the head of the multilateral aviation division [AVP] would head a bilateral negotiation, if it were a very particular type of negotiation. However, normally, the negotiations were headed by the head of the office or the head of the bilateral division.

The delegation usually included a representative of the CAB who was one of the Board

Members of the CAB. He was, of course, appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate.

Q: You say that representatives of TWA and Pan Am were sitting right behind you?

WHITE: No, not in the formal negotiations. Under our system the Air Transport Association [ATA], which is the organization for all of our scheduled airlines, represents the individual airlines. Otherwise, it would be rather chaotic, with perhaps half a dozen individuals, representing half a dozen airlines, sitting behind you. And their interests rarely coincided. You really couldn't have that displayed in front of foreign representatives across the table.

Q: Of course, we had a comparable phenomenon in Geneva with trade negotiations. Frequently, there were industry representatives looking over our shoulders.

WHITE: Of course, we met with the individual airlines, time and time again, in getting ready for these negotiations, when we were hammering out our positions. That's where the input of the individual airlines would be presented. By the way, there was nothing secret about all of these negotiations. The ATA had a representative at the table, who was skilled in taking notes in shorthand. Verbatim transcripts were prepared on those talks, which were immediately turned over to the airline representatives. So, for example, TWA knew exactly what was said at the table.

Q: So these proceedings were transparent.

WHITE: There was absolute transparency. I think that that was required under the Administrative Procedures Act. We had very strict rules on that sort of thing.

Sometimes one of the American airlines would insist it had the lion's share in a particular market. They wanted to be at the table, or at least sitting behind the table. Our answer was always, "No." We said that they were represented by the Air Transport Association, the ATA, which in turn briefed them, sometimes after each session. That was the input on the airline side.

In any case, to go back to the Italian desk, that was one of the first things that I did.

Q: Where did these negotiations take place?

WHITE: They were held alternately in the two capitals. We would have one session with the Italians in Rome, usually for about a week. Then, maybe six months later, we would have another round of talks in Washington, in one of the conference rooms at the State Department.

Q: Did you operate a shuttle service? You would go to Rome to attend those sessions?

WHITE: No, I didn't.

Q: The officer regularly assigned to aviation affairs in the Embassy in Rome would attend those sessions?

WHITE: If we negotiated overseas, the local American Embassy always had one of its officers as an official member of the American delegation. Later, when I was in the embassy in Rome, I was always on the U.S. delegation for aviation negotiations. I represented the Embassy. To return to Washington negotiations, the Bureau of European Affairs was always represented on the U.S. delegation, when we sat down either with the Italians, the Austrians, or the Swiss. That was my role. The Office of Aviation Affairs had a junior officer assigned to the delegation, who was the staff man who saw to the administrative aspects and the logistics. He saw that everyone had his or her briefing books and all of that sort of thing.

So that's when I first saw how negotiations are really conducted. I saw one of the best negotiators in action, John Meadows. These negotiations could go on for hours. They could get very dicey and even acrimonious, because we were dealing with raw, commercial interests. There was nothing abstract about this process. We were talking about dollars and cents.

Q: Do I understand that you were right in the middle of the negotiations with Alitalia when you came into this job with AIS [the Country Directorate for Austrian, Italian, and Swiss Affairs]? And these lasted for a period of months?

WHITE: Oh, they were an ongoing thing. We were always reviewing...

Q: These negotiations had been going on for years?

WHITE: Oh, yes. As I said, the record of these negotiations occupied an entire file cabinet.

Q: So were you just negotiating amendments to existing agreements?

WHITE: Or interpretations of existing agreements. Very often we had problems with interpretations of these agreements.

During my time in AIS we also negotiated with the Swiss. The Swiss had a problem with our beyond rights.

Q: Regarding the Italian agreement, was there a particular set of negotiations in process when you first arrived in AIS? Did these negotiations reach some kind of conclusion, or were they already worked out?

WHITE: There were various problems which would come up of interpretation, as well as renewing the agreements. Now, all of these agreements, of course, had termination clauses. Since one of the first matters on my agenda was aviation talks with Italy, this

meant that I had an awful lot to learn in a hurry. My boss didn't know much more about aviation affairs than I did. However, it was my job to brief him on these matters.

For the Italians the aviation negotiations were a very important issue. The Italian Embassy in Washington would weigh in very heavily on this matter. Of course, at a certain point and when the stakes were high enough, all of these foreign governments would always approach the State Department at a very high level. They would say that this or that aviation issue was critical in terms of our overall relationship.

Q: How high would they go?

WHITE: They would often go to the Secretary of State or to the Undersecretary of State. This happened all the time. However, I'm getting ahead of my story at this point. Later on, we can talk more about aviation, when I was one of the Division Chiefs in the Office of Aviation.

Q: What were the problems with the Italians?

WHITE: There were several ongoing issues. First of all, the agreement that we had with the Italians was in our favor. It had been negotiated in the years following World War II, when everything was a little special. Italy was more or less on its back, like all of the European countries. They weren't particularly interested in aviation matters at that time. They were interested in survival.

Briefly, the Italians could always threaten to denounce the aviation agreement. This would be perfectly legal. They could send us a diplomatic note, saying that under Section So and So of the agreement, "We hereby give one year's notice of termination" of the agreement. They had already done that, before I came into the Office of Aviation Affairs. So we were sort of under the gun to negotiate a new agreement.

As a matter of fact, in some cases we have had aviation relations continue in the absence of an agreement. However, that is very dicey, because neither party has any real rights. Everything is on an ad hoc, day to day basis. The two governments simply tolerate the existing status quo. It's something like the way our appropriations work in the U.S. Government. Congress may not pass an appropriations bill. It passes a continuing resolution, or something of that nature.

Anyway, I learned a lot about aviation in the course of that assignment.

Q: Did you reach any particular conclusions?

WHITE: In that particular negotiation?

Q: That is, to have a new agreement after the old one, which they had denounced.

WHITE: I'm a little vague as to whether the Italians had denounced or threatened to

denounce the old agreement. Anyway, the pressure that we were under was that the Italian Government could denounce the old agreement if they had not already denounced it.

Briefly, the Italian Government wanted limitations on these two kinds of rights which I spoke to you about: beyond rights from Rome and, above all, on multiple designations. They wanted limitations on these two rights and they wanted expanded access to the American market. Aviation was already getting beyond the point where everybody had to fly into New York when they flew across the Atlantic. Other cities were looming as possible destinations of flights. For example, San Francisco, Chicago, Los Angeles, and, even further down the road, Atlanta and other, internal points within the U.S.

However, the negotiations usually didn't settle everything at one time. We would reach a modus vivendi. We would initial an agreement that said that we would meet again in six months' time. Meanwhile, we would agree to this or that on a temporary basis.

I must say that John Meadows, the Director of the Office of Aviation, was very good on this. He was very resourceful. He used to say that when negotiations were stymied, the only way out was suddenly to get very imaginative and resourceful, because neither government wanted this firecracker to explode in our faces. Frankly, at a certain point both governments were looking for something that would quiet the issue and satisfy their respective needs. John was very good at coming up with an imaginative or resourceful solution. It would not necessarily be a permanent solution but at least it would get us over the problem and on to the next difficulty or the next negotiation.

Q: Now, you say that you had a comparable negotiation with Switzerland. Did this involve Swissair?

WHITE: Of course. The Swiss airline was Swissair. The Swiss were very tough negotiators. They wanted additional landing rights in the United States. It was the old story. They had New York. All of the airlines had New York. However, the Swiss also wanted landing rights in Boston and Chicago. What was their leverage on the United States? Well, the leverage which they used with us was beyond rights. They claimed that the U.S. didn't have unlimited beyond rights. That is, beyond Zurich or Geneva.

Indeed, the American airlines were prepared to give ground on that. By the way, I might mention that negotiating across the table with other governments is the relatively easy part. When you're negotiating, you're negotiating in three directions. You're negotiating with the government on the other side of the table, you're negotiating with people from other U.S. government agencies on either side of you, and you're negotiating with the guy behind your back, who has a kind of long, sharp knife in his hand.

This process is extremely complicated. It is fascinating, and in later years I did a lot of it when I chaired delegations. The process is time consuming, and it's exhausting. It's like getting several, thoroughbred horses to work together and to go in the same direction. It can be a very difficult, frustrating, and exhausting experience.

Q: So when you first took up your duties in AIS, this was your biggest job. After that...

WHITE: Of course, of the three countries, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland, Italy loomed the largest. Any problem with Italy tended to be a more important problem. I would say that, in terms of importance, next in line was Switzerland, with which we had some serious difficulties. Third in line was Austria. Let me start with Austria first.

Our relations with Austria were excellent. We had very few issues outstanding with Austria. Austria was grateful to the United States for what we had done for them after World War II. As a country we were very popular in Austria, and Americans were well liked there. The Austrian Ambassador to the United States, by the way, was a former Foreign Minister. He was not a career Ambassador.

Q: What was his name?

WHITE: Ambassador Gruber. He had been Foreign Minister after World War II. He was a very interesting man with a very interesting style of operating. The Italian Ambassador during this period was one of the best that I've ever seen in action anywhere. His name was Egidio Ortona. Ambassador Ortona had spent practically his entire career in the United States, either in Washington or at the UN in New York.

Ambassador Ortona was the classic diplomat. He looked the part. If you were a Hollywood talent agent casting an Ambassador, Ortona was the man you would select. He was enormously well-connected. He knew everybody in Washington. He was immensely skillful. He dealt only at the level of Assistant Secretary of State or above. I don't recall ever seeing him walk into the office of a Country Director.

At the other end of that spectrum was Ambassador Gruber of Austria. Gruber was a very intelligent and realistic man. He knew that Austria was a small country. He did not deal with the Secretary of State all the time. He husbanded his access in the Department of State. He didn't always insist on going to the Assistant Secretary or the Under Secretary either.

Every week Ambassador Gruber came to call on the Country Director. He brought his DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] with him. They would talk privately with Bob Beaudry, the AIS Country Director, probably for about 20 minutes. Then Bob would ask the Austrian Desk Officer and me to join in the meeting. We would then sit around and discuss Austrian-U.S. relations. Sometimes, the discussion would be rather narrow, on bilateral issues. Very often, the discussion would be broader. Ambassador Gruber wanted to know what the U.S. Government was thinking on a much broader basis, because it all, of course, impacted, one way or another, on Austrian interests.

Bob Beaudry was very well informed. He would present a tour d'horizon after we had discussed specific issues. I always thought that that was a very intelligent approach to take with the representative of a smaller country, in particular. Ambassador Gruber knew

perfectly well that, at the end of the day, if he wanted to see the Secretary of State or the Undersecretary of State, they would see him, as a matter of courtesy. However, he knew perfectly well whom these senior officials would ask about a given issue before such a meeting. He knew who sent a briefing paper to the Secretary or the Undersecretary and who briefed them on the U.S. position. Obviously, it would be the Country Director. Ambassador Gruber knew that. I always thought that he was very intelligent in using that approach.

Ambassador Gruber also meticulously informed us whenever he called on an official of another agency of the U.S. Government. He told us this ahead of time. So we had a very well coordinated understanding with Ambassador Gruber. I think that that's why our relations with Austria during those years remained very good, very brisk, businesslike, and professional.

In fact, we had very few problems with Austria. The Austrians had a cheese quota which, to them, was very important. The livelihood of cheese producers in the Tyrolean region and other mountainous parts of Austria was involved.

I remember that we had a problem with insurance. For some reason Austria didn't allow foreign insurance companies to operate in Austria. Well, one of our big insurance companies wanted access to the Austrian market.

Q: Was it AIT [American International Insurance Underwriters]?

WHITE: I can't swear to that but I believe that it may have been. We worked on that problem and we got access to the Austrian market for them.

The Swiss were tough to deal with. Our major problem with the Swiss had to do with banking secrecy. That question was really handled by my colleague, the Austrian Desk Officer. That was not seen as a commercial matter but rather in a broader context. Criminal elements were taking advantage of Swiss banking secrecy. That was our concern at the time. I followed these negotiations, but I wasn't involved directly in them. My colleague on the Austrian desk chaired the talks. People in the Treasury and Justice Departments were involved.

We finally had to get very tough with the Swiss. Ultimately, I think that they gave us a lot of what we wanted at that time in the way of a treaty.

Q: They have an intensive focus on it. You see this all over Switzerland. If you try to bargain with them, they are very tough.

WHITE: They also had a cheese quota about which they were concerned.

Q: This involved premium Swiss cheese and Emmenthal.

WHITE: Exactly. This was a job in which I found out how lucrative the Washington legal

profession is. The Austrians and the Swiss had lawyers here in Washington who protected their interests in this area.

Q: People often do not realize that international trade employs more lawyers in Washington than any other lobbying group. This is why, when a trade bill goes up to Congress, it gets very difficult, because they are not only expensive but very effective lawyers involved.

WHITE: They are very high priced, and foreign governments pay enormous retainers to them. I think that the law requires that representatives of foreign governments have to declare what their retainer fees are. I remember seeing a list and was staggered at how much these lawyers received.

Q: Annual retainers in the six figure area?

WHITE: Oh, yes, huge amounts of money. Of course, many of these foreign governments are babes in the woods. They have no idea how things are done in Washington. A lot of these issues involve legal presentations. They have to hire lawyers.

Q: These are both legal and political presentations.

WHITE: Yes.

Q: But the presentations have to be made in legal terminology.

WHITE: That's exactly right. For example, I know that on the cheese quotas these foreign governments had to have lawyers who would appear before the Department of Agriculture, the International Trade Commission, and things like that. Formal, legal presentations were required.

My funniest experience with the Swiss involved a question regarding the Swiss Constitution. The Swiss were always quoting the Swiss Constitution to us. They were terribly worried about infringement on their sovereignty.

Now, as you know, in international trade today governments reserve the right to inspect the quality of the product which is being imported into the country. We insisted on the right to inspect the facilities where their medical drugs were made and where their agricultural products were turned out. Every other government accepted this, but the Swiss claimed that they couldn't have foreign officials performing official acts on Swiss territory. They said that this would be a violation of the Swiss Constitution.

At one point this issue came up in a bizarre way. The Swiss had a very good market for bull semen, which they proposed to bring into the U.S. to impregnate cattle here and so improve the quality of the cattle herds.

Q: Was it refrigerated?

WHITE: Yes. However, in any case we insisted that our inspectors had to go to Switzerland to see the facilities in which the bull semen was produced and stored at that end. The Swiss claimed that this would violate the Swiss Constitution. They always referred to some article of the Swiss Constitution.

We tried to make sure that their position was properly represented before the U.S. Government. We thought that that was our responsibility. Not to be the advocate of the Swiss, but at least to make sure that they had the opportunity to present or to explain their case, as we put it.

In this area we really reached an impasse. Finally, we told the Swiss that there was a very simple solution to this problem. We said: "If you don't want to accept our inspectors, you simply will not be able to send this product to the United States. That's fine with us, if that's the way you want it."

One day I looked up from my desk, and there was the Swiss Economic Counselor standing in my doorway. I knew him well. He was looking rather embarrassed. He said that he had new instructions. Basically, he said that the problem of the Swiss Constitution had disappeared. There would no longer be a problem with our inspectors. Why? It turned out that the Swiss had concluded that our inspectors were not really inspectors but were, rather, consultants. In other words, they had found a semantic solution to their problem.

The Swiss were satisfied, and we were satisfied. We called them inspectors, and the Swiss called them consultants or technical advisers or something like that.

Our major problems were with Italy, of course, in terms of the magnitude of the country and so forth. We had a very complicated and diversified relationship with Italy. Our companies had some problems with Italy.

Q: What kinds of problems were these?

WHITE: First of all, Bell Helicopter had given a license to Augusta, the Italian helicopter manufacturer, to produce the Bell helicopter. They called this the Augusta-Bell helicopter. What I found out was that American companies often competed with themselves. Not only with each other but with themselves. Bell in the United States was offering to sell the same kind of helicopter which Augusta-Bell was offering. However, Augusta-Bell was producing this helicopter under license from Bell in the United States.

So here were two companies, joined together by a licensing agreement, fighting like cats and dogs to sell the same model of helicopter. One of these helicopters, of course, was made in the U.S. and one was made in Italy. They were competing with each other all over the world and hurling accusations at each other. At one point we said: "Why don't you break up this 'marriage'? All you're doing is fighting with each other and dragging the two governments involved into it."

The two companies said: "Well, it's an unhappy marriage but still it has its advantages." This is an interesting insight into how multinational companies work. At one level they were allied, while on another level they were fighting like cats and dogs. We had lots of problems in the defense area.

Q: For example?

WHITE: I don't want to get too far into the specifics, because some of this probably still involves classified information. The U.S. was supplying certain kinds of equipment for the Italian military. The Italians were producing some of this under license. This involved certain problems which required some high level intervention by both the Italian and the U.S. Governments. The problem was defense oriented and quite complicated.

What else? Well, there were the usual run of the mill problems, but nothing really shattering. We had a visit by the Italian Prime Minister to Washington while I was on the Italian desk. William Rogers was the Secretary of State at the time. I had a highly varied three years of experience in this job.

Q: But for the most part you didn't have so much interaction with American businessmen as such. That was more the job of the Department of Commerce. You were more involved in dealing with foreign embassies in Washington and our embassies in the host countries.

WHITE: I would say so, although we dealt with American businessmen, too. We often had businessmen come into the office, but less so than at Commerce. The American business community would go first to the Department of Commerce for the nuts and bolts of problems that they were dealing with. We dealt with commercial problems, too, but generally in a broader context and not company specific as a general rule.

Q: Could you say anything more about how the economic function interacted with the rest of the State Department?

WHITE: Of course, the Bureau of Economic Affairs in the State Department loomed very large at that time. I, of course, had to deal with the Bureau of Economic Affairs [EB] all the time. In fact, I dealt more with that Bureau than I did with some other parts of EUR [the Bureau of European Affairs]. Every problem that I dealt with ultimately involved some part of EB.

Q: What was your sense of EB at the time? Who was the Assistant Secretary of Economic Affairs at the time?

WHITE: Phil Trezise was the Assistant Secretary. It was a good bureau, and Trezise was a wonderful man to work with and for. I was often in his office. In fact, I spent more time dealing with my colleagues in EB than I spent with some of my colleagues in EUR. That's not unusual, come to think of it. My colleague on the UK desk in EUR was doing the same thing. My major interface [point of contact] within the Department of State was

with EB, and that's how I learned my way around EB.

Going back to Phil Trezise, one thing that I always remember about him was the visit of Italian Prime Minister Colombo to Washington. We had a large, very high level meeting at Blair House [across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House], with cabinet officers participating, including the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the Treasury who, at the time, was John Connally. Do you remember John Connally? He was an incredible man. He had a tremendous presence, by the way.

I was organizing the meeting of course and I had a lot to watch and look after. There were a lot of administrative details involved, like ensuring that the simultaneous translation process worked correctly. Periodically, I was called out of the meeting, which probably lasted for two hours, to attend to this or that administrative matter. However, at the end of the day I was charged with writing the reporting cable on the meeting. Well, it was a complicated meeting involving the Italian Prime Minister and some of his cabinet ministers, as well as several members of the U.S. cabinet.

Of course, I wasn't present at the meeting for part of the time. Later, I was sitting at my desk, back in the State Department, wondering how I was going to deal with this problem. At the end of the day a young man appeared at my door. He was a staff aide to Assistant Secretary Phil Trezise. He said: "Mr. Trezise thought that you might find these notes useful." He handed me a sheaf of notes. Trezise had taken notes on that meeting. The notes were beautifully organized, very complete, and were written in very clear handwriting. So my cable was practically written and my problem was solved. I always remember that about Phil Trezise. How thoughtful he was to do that.

Q: Was Jules Katz there?

WHITE: Katz was there, but I don't think that he was the senior Deputy at the time.

In any case, Phil Trezise was the Assistant Secretary. We had a lot of problems in the export control area. There were many, many headaches in the field of export controls. You know that whole problem. I guess that it is fading now, but it was very much of a major issue in those days.

Q: Could you say just a few words about it?

WHITE: Well, we had controls on the export of what were regarded as strategic goods. We dealt with COCOM in Paris, the Coordinating Committee. This was a multilateral forum in which these issues were sorted out. However, the Italians were very good businessmen and were traditionally very strong in the export field. They wanted to export all sorts of things, as did other European Governments. Exports of certain of these commodities sometimes ran afoul of our export control regulations.

We had an Office of Export Controls in EB.

WHITE: Often I brought in people from the Italian Embassy in Washington to call on Assistant Secretary Trezise. He always received them and was always very patient.

Q: Treasury was really involved in export controls.

WHITE: Treasury was involved.

That's one thing I should mention. As a desk officer in EUR, I not only dealt with the Department of State, but also, and necessarily, with people in the Department of Commerce and also with people in the International Division of the Treasury Department. I had a lot of dealings with those people. I also dealt with people in the Department of Defense, because of export control issues. I dealt with the Department of Agriculture because of agricultural issues and so forth.

One of the things that we organized was a meeting which we held about once a month to which we invited in representatives of virtually every agency in Washington which had someone looking after Italian affairs. They would meet with us in the Country Director's office. I found those meetings a very useful way to keep in touch with those people, on a personal as well as at a professional level.

Treasury had a lot going on in Rome. Of course, they had a Treasury Attache in Rome. In dealing with the Italians we were dealing with a NATO country and a European Common Market country. So I spent a lot of time dealing with my counterparts in EUR on Common Market issues. A lot of our activities involved other agencies of the U.S. Government as well. This was a very good platform for learning how those agencies work as well.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary in EUR at that point?

WHITE: Martin Hillenbrand.

Q: Did you have much interaction with him?

WHITE: Not really very much. Of course, I would bring people in to see him, but I didn't really interface with him directly. I dealt with him occasionally.

Q: What was your impression of him?

WHITE: He was a very fine, outstanding man. One of his Deputy Assistant Secretaries [DASs] was a woman whom we called "Tibbie." Her name was Margaret Joy Tibbetts. She had been ambassador to Norway. She was the DAS I dealt with normally and also was a first rate person. She had a very good sense of humor.

Q: How about the rest of the Department of State? This was during the Nixon administration. Did you have any particular impression of the State Department as a whole, from a worm's eye point of view?

WHITE: It has to be said that it became fairly evident, early on, that President Nixon was not going to rely on the State Department as his primary instrument in foreign policy. He relied on Henry Kissinger, his National Security Adviser, who of course headed the NSC [National Security Council] staff at that time. William Rogers, who was the Secretary of State, had been a very close friend of President Nixon during the Eisenhower administration. Nixon makes this very clear in his memoirs. Rogers had been Attorney General during the Eisenhower administration when Nixon was Vice President. He had been Nixon's confidant. In one of Nixon's books, I think the one called "Six Crises," he makes it clear that when he was in a really difficult situation, he would talk to his friend, Bill Rogers.

Secretary of State Rogers was a very impressive and courtly man. He was very well mannered, very polite, very approachable. However, it was pretty clear early on that Henry Kissinger was Nixon's principal adviser. This was not the fault of anyone in particular. It's just that President Nixon, like so many Presidents such as Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, for whatever complex reasons, chose to rely, not on their own Secretaries of State whom they had appointed, but on someone else. In Wilson's case, it was Colonel House. In Roosevelt's case, it was Harry Hopkins, and in Nixon's case, it was Henry Kissinger.

Q: Since 1947 the National Security Council has been loaded up heavily with the military and intelligence functions.

WHITE: I could see the process from my position in the State Department. The Secretary of State was being challenged, if that's the term. Although Secretary Rogers was a personal friend of the President, he appeared to accept this situation with equanimity. That was President Nixon's style. Of course, later on, after this period, Henry Kissinger became Secretary of State, and Nixon may have looked at things differently. However, at that time it was pretty clear that that was the way things were in the State Department.

Q: When you were in the Department of Commerce or the Department of State were there any CIA people in jobs which had any impact on your own work?

WHITE: Certainly not in the Department of Commerce. The kind of work I did in Commerce was purely commercial and nuts and bolts work and so was essentially open and unclassified. I rarely got into sensitive policy issues at my level.

In Commerce the desk I worked on provided service to the American business community. That's pretty much what it was, pure and simple.

In the Department of State, of course, we dealt with more sensitive issues. I alluded to some of those earlier on. In my own particular work I don't recall any direct involvement with the CIA, although I'm sure that I saw some of their reporting, from time to time. Of course, I saw an enormous amount of reporting from our embassies and other sources.

We also dealt with the White House. White House personnel were sometimes on the phone to us.

Q: Were these people on the NSC staff

WHITE: NSC people and also President Nixon's own staff.

Q: Do you remember anything about who it was or...

WHITE: Occasionally, we would receive a phone call from the White House staff. But these calls were not from people who later became well known.

Q: Any further comment, Al, regarding this period of your career in Washington, before you went overseas again?

WHITE: Well, the back drop was interesting. Things were kind of topsy turvy. We spoke earlier about the Vietnam period. In 1968, for example, when I was still in the Department of Commerce. We had the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. I don't know if you were in Washington at the time.

Q: Oh, yes. 1968, and then Bobby Kennedy was killed. There was the convention of the Democratic Party in Chicago. I was in Geneva but I was very conscious of it.

WHITE: Of course, I was in Washington at the time. You really have to be in the United States to experience these things fully. When you're overseas, you can read about everything that's going on, but it's not the same thing. Anyway, it was a time of trouble.

Q: My wife and I were intensely concerned about the Vietnam War. Fortunately, our two sons were much too young to be of military age at that time. However, since then I have learned more about the tremendous tragedy that took place in Southeast Asia. I don't know what I would have done if my kids had been of draft age during the Vietnam War.

WHITE: It was a very emotional time. We saw riots here in Washington. I remember coming to work one day, and my bus was stopped by some students who had erupted out of Rock Creek Park. They slammed a big branch under the bus. When I was walking through the campus at George Washington University, I could see a lot of the activity going on.

You mentioned the Democratic Party Convention during the summer of 1968 in Chicago. I watched that debacle on television. After the assassination of Martin Luther King- (end of tape)

We were talking about the mood in Washington in 1968. It is very difficult to reconstruct it today, but it was a very sad and unpleasant time. The U.S. was going through a very difficult period. We felt, at times, that the country was really coming apart at the seams with all of this going on. I remember the riots which broke out when Dr. Martin Luther

King was assassinated. I was right here at the time and recall the sight of black smoke, billowing up along 14th St.

Q: Of course, there were riots in Washington, DC.

WHITE: That's what I'm telling you about. They were right here in Washington.

Q: Seventh St. was all burned out.

WHITE: Yes, you could see black smoke billowing up. That happened on a Friday, by the way. I think that Dr. King was killed on April 4, [1968], if I'm not mistaken. I was working at the Department of Commerce. The morning was uneventful. I went to lunch with some colleagues and came back to the Department of Commerce at around 1:00 or 2:00 PM. The first inkling that I had that something was wrong was that the elevators in the main lobby were opening up, and people were rushing out. It was just as if it was 5:30 PM. I thought that this was strange, as it was only 2:00 PM.

Then I found out why. These people had all heard bits and pieces of reports on the various incidents happening in Washington. They wanted to get home. Some of these people were young, black secretaries who had children in day nurseries or at home. They wanted to get home to look after their families.

Of course, martial law was then declared, and we had troops patrolling Washington streets. We had a curfew. I remember the vehicle coming around with a loudspeaker out in the Northwest section of Washington, where we lived, announcing the curfew. That was Washington, DC, in April, 1968.

Q: I was in Geneva at that time. We returned to the U.S. on home leave in 1969. We were shocked to see that, when night fell and it grew dark, everything closed up, and nobody was out on the streets. All of the restaurants and other public facilities closed up. I was not prepared for that.

WHITE: It took Washington a long time to get over that. Indeed, some of the parts of Washington which were damaged have still not been fully repaired from the damage caused during the riots which took place.

Let's see. I was talking about my job in the Bureau of Economic Affairs in the Department of State, where I spent three years...

Q: What was happening to your family during this time? The last time we spoke of that you said that you met your wife in Milan and were married just after you left Turin.

WHITE: That's right. We were married in August, 1967, just after I was assigned to the Department of Commerce. The first thing that I did in Commerce was to apply for three weeks' leave to go to Italy and be married. We had our first child in the summer of 1968. We had a little girl, Helen. We chose a house, which we still live in, by the way, in

Northwest Washington. In July, 1969, I returned to the State Department from the assignment to the Department of Commerce.

Q: You were living in Northwest Washington?

WHITE: Yes, in American University Park. We've added on to that house but we still have it.

Professionally, as well as socially, my assignment to the Bureau of European Affairs was a very interesting job. We dealt regularly with the Austrian, Italian, and Swiss Embassies in Washington and we were often invited out to social events of one kind or another. I remember that the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra came to Washington. Ambassador Gruber had us in his box at the opera. It was very much a Viennese evening. There was a supper afterwards at the Ambassador's residence. Of course, the Italian Embassy was always entertaining, so we had a very active social life during those three years.

Q: That is relatively rare for people on Washington assignments.

WHITE: But when you dealt with three countries, as I did, we were invited out fairly often. We would often go out several nights a week. That was very enjoyable in terms of professional life. Indeed, years later in Rome, I found myself working with some of those same Italian officials again whom I had met in Washington.

Q: Anything else we should cover now? I think we might review your assignment to the Embassy in Vienna next time.

WHITE: If you wish. Vienna was a logical assignment to follow on my experience in Austrian affairs in the Department of State. The number two job in the Economic Section in Vienna came open. Meanwhile, we had a new Ambassador assigned to Vienna, John Humes.

Q: We might go into that during our next session.

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This is Tuesday, October 7, 1997. I'm John Harter and I'm interviewing Al White on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Al, I think that at the conclusion of our last session you were on your way to Austria. Tell us about that.

WHITE: That's right. I had finished a three-year assignment in the Department, during which I was responsible for handling economic affairs on the Austrian desk. Of course, since I had served in Germany, I could speak German, and this seemed a logical assignment and one which I welcomed. It was a very easy transition, since I knew most of the "players," both in Washington and in Vienna.

For these three years I had dealt with Tony Gebor, the Economic Counselor at the

Austrian Embassy. I don't know whether you knew Tony. Just before I left Washington to go to Vienna, we had a change of Ambassadors. Douglas MacArthur II had been our Ambassador in Vienna. You've heard of him, of course. He was a nephew of General MacArthur.

Q: From what I've heard of him, I guess that it was just as well that he wasn't there when you arrived in Vienna. I hear that he was kind of rough.

WHITE: Actually, you never know about people. Some people have certain reputations. Sometimes they live up to these reputations and sometimes not. In my case I enjoyed my association with Ambassador MacArthur. Of course, I was on the Austrian desk when he was in Vienna. However, he would come back to Washington for consultations.

I recall the first time when he came back during the time when I was on the Austrian desk. I was of course very junior on the desk. He walked into my office one day, introduced himself, and sat down. He immediately called me by my first name, right off the bat. He put his feet up on my desk and made himself at home.

Then he said: "Al, let me tell you how I see things in Austria." Then he gave a brilliant presentation to an audience of one, myself. I didn't have much to say. I was quite content to listen to this exposition. He was forceful and cordial. He ran through the issues as he saw them.

I remember one thing in particular that he told me, apart from the many issues then current. We were talking about an American insurance company that wanted to enter the Austrian market. I think that I mentioned this during our last interview. The Austrians had somehow managed to prevent many foreign insurance companies from entering that market. Ambassador MacArthur said: "You know, in pressing an issue like that, you have to find a domestic constituency in the country that you're talking about. In this case, Austria." He said that there were groups in Austria which would welcome more competition in the insurance sector. Like any consumers of insurance services, they do better when there is a competitive situation, and insurance rates are lower.

He continued: "Rather than just browbeating the Austrian Government on this issue, I have made it my business to alert those groups within Austria which would welcome foreign competition." I thought that that was a very savvy observation. It was common sense, if you stop to think about it. However, I'm not sure that we often think of that, when we press an issue in which an American firm is interested. Almost always there is some local interest in the foreign country involved which actually shares that particular point of view. That is one thing that I remember Ambassador MacArthur saying.

My relationship with Ambassador MacArthur was always a very good one.

Q: Who replaced him?

WHITE: John Humes replaced him. John Humes was a wealthy New York attorney who

had contributed to the reelection of President Nixon. He was a political appointee, of course. I had gone up to New York with him to make the rounds of calls on members of the Business Council on International Understanding, the BCIU. I had a lot of dealings with them.

I remember flying up to New York one evening. Ambassador John Humes had an estate on Long Island and a beautiful apartment on 5th Avenue. He asked me to stay at his apartment, which I did. The next morning we made the rounds at the BCIU, making calls on companies in New York which had interests in Austria and wanted to talk to the new ambassador. The BCIU made the arrangements and still does with Ambassadors going out to a new assignment. Of course, the Ambassador was eager to talk to these companies.

I think that we had lunch with General Motors officials in their beautiful building up there on 5th Avenue. I think that we had dinner at the Union League Club that evening. One of the New York banks hosted the dinner. One of the things that struck me was that John Humes knew most of the people we called on. He knew them socially.

Q: What was his business?

WHITE: He was a lawyer. I think that he had inherited wealth. His wife was an interesting woman in here own right. She was a surgeon. By the way, John Humes died some years ago. However, I recall seeing Mrs. Humes in Washington during the past year at a Sunday afternoon concert at DACOR House [Diplomatic and Consular Officers, Retired].

This was my first experience with the New York establishment. There IS an establishment in New York, like it or not, take it or leave it. However, it exists, and meeting some of its members was rather interesting. It consists of people who know each other professionally and socially.

In due course John Humes went to Vienna as American Ambassador, about the time I was looking for an overseas assignment. Of course, I knew Ambassador Humes by this time, having participated in most of his briefings.

Q: So you think that he recommended you for an assignment to the Embassy in Vienna?

WHITE: Well, I think that he certainly supported my assignment. He was very gracious about that and very supportive. Of course, he knew me. You might say that I was a known quantity to him.

So in the summer of 1972 my wife, Gabriela, and I went off to Europe. Gabriela stayed in her family's home in northern Italy for the summer. We were expecting a second child, who was born that fall in Vienna. During that summer I had a lovely bachelor apartment in what was called the "Rathaus Apartments," right behind the Rathaus [City Hall], on the Ringstrasse in Vienna.

I had a whole summer to get used to working in the Embassy. Tony Gebor was leaving Vienna that summer. His number two man was Carroll Brown. I don't know whether you know Carroll Brown.

Q: I know him, yes.

WHITE: Carroll had moved up from the slot that I took over and became Economic Counselor for one year. I was the number two officer in the Economic Section. We had a combined Economic and Commercial Section. There was the Economic Counselor, followed by me on the economic side. On the other side we had a Commercial Attache. We had Joe Eblen first, who was then followed by Joe Lill. There was one other officer in the section, a junior officer. He did what junior officers usually do. That is, whatever needed to be done.

Q: What was your impression of the Embassy in Vienna when you first got there?

WHITE: I had previously visited Vienna, since I had already served in Europe. Vienna, of course, was a capital in search of an empire. It had been the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, one of the greatest in history, I suppose.

Q: It was also known as the Habsburg Empire.

WHITE: The Habsburg Empire indeed. Overnight, it seemed, this great, capital city, instead of being the capital of an empire, which had probably covered roughly about one-fourth of Europe, became the capital of a rump state. In the 1930s, it was not regarded as viable. I must tell you that the name of President Woodrow Wilson is not revered in Vienna, and I think that you can figure out the reason why. The Austrians really don't see him the way many people do, as a kind of enlightened savior.

Q: I think that President Wilson's reputation has slid downhill a good bit since the end of World War I.

WHITE: I think that it has.

Q: In retrospect, the great tragedies in the settlement reached at Versailles after World War I really led directly to all of the problems which were involved in World War II.

WHITE: I think that the moral in the tragedy of Woodrow Wilson is that it's one thing to take something apart. However, if you do that, you'd better have something ready to take its place.

Q: Of course, my own sense is that, aside from his arrogance, one of his worst failings was a lack of understanding of economic factors in international relations.

WHITE: Well, he didn't understand Europe, for starters. He was a great leader during

World War I and a man of considerable vision. There's no doubt about that. However, one of his cardinal mistakes, which a head of government should never make, was to go off and get involved in the nitty gritty details of negotiating the settlement of World War I at the Versailles Conference. I don't think that there's any doubt about that. I think that it's generally recognized. That was a fatal mistake.

In short, Wilson should never have gone to the negotiations which led to the Treaty of Versailles. He should have remained in Washington and, at a distance, his prestige would have remained intact. As it was, he became fatally associated with the winners, as distinct from the losers in World War I. He walked into a hornet's nest of recriminations. Of course, you know the story of the Treaty of Versailles which emerged from the negotiations. The United States initialed but never signed the Treaty of Versailles, which turned out a complete failure. It was seen to be such at the time. This was not hindsight. There were people at Versailles who saw this at the time. For example, John Maynard Keynes, who was in the British Delegation, saw this.

Q: He wrote a book about that.

WHITE: Yes, "The Economic Consequences of the Peace." Herbert Hoover, who was attached to the American Delegation, saw this. Many people at the negotiations at Versailles knew this at the time. It may have been Herbert Hoover, who said: "This is not a peace. This will be an armistice for 20 years." Of course, that's exactly what it was. It was an armistice in a 30-year war.

Q: But Austria in particular was a victim.

WHITE: Austria was a victim, and the sad thing was that the countries which were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and were so eager to get their independence were also victims. This particularly applied to the Czechs.

Austria-Hungary was called the "Dual Monarchy." Bear in mind that the Emperor of Austria was also the King of Hungary. The Dual Monarchy was a kind of condominium in which both parties were essentially equal. That could have evolved into a "Triple Monarchy," with a Czech state acquiring equal status with Austria and Hungary.

However, the Czechs wanted their independence. Well, they got it. But what did they get with it? Some 20 years later came the tragedy of Munich and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs would have been far better off to have remained in some loose confederation with what was, in fact, an economically viable entity in the Danube Valley. You know, an empire like Austria-Hungary just doesn't grow accidentally. There were very sound reasons why these states were grouped together under the Hapsburgs. The Vienna where I served was a gracious, dowager Empress in a sense.

Q: When I think of Austria and Vienna in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, before you were there, the Orson Welles' movie, "The Third Man," comes to mind.

WHITE: Exactly.

Q: Things were very dark and gloomy at that time. Of course, by the time you were there, there was considerable improvement. Things were developing well.

WHITE: They were, indeed. Austria had basically recovered economically. The kickoff for Austrian recovery, if you will, was the Austrian State Treaty, which was signed in 1955. There are people who still argue about why the Russians actually withdrew from Austria. However, they voluntarily got out of Austria. Everyone always assumed that, wherever the Russian Army went, it would stay, until it was forced out. For whatever reason the Soviet leader, Khrushchev, agreed to the neutralization of Austria in 1955. Until that time, if you'll remember, there were zones of occupation. Vienna, like Berlin, was under Four-Power Occupation. There were British, French, American, and Russian Zones. The Russian Zone was in the East and was economically very backward.

All of that structure changed very rapidly after the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 was approved. It was signed by Secretary of State Dulles for the U.S.; Harold Macmillan, I believe, for Britain; and I forget who signed for France and for the Soviet Union. However, this treaty really involved the recreation of post-war Austria, after a 10-year period of occupation.

Q: So what was the political situation in Austria when you were there?

WHITE: Politically, Austria was quiet. The country was prosperous. The Austrian Chancellor [Prime Minister] was Bruno Kreisky, a very colorful, and in my mind, a very able man. Kreisky was a Socialist, but not the old, pre-war type of European, Marxist Socialist. He was very much a Socialist after the model of the British Socialists. That is, of the British Labour Party.

Bear in mind that between World Wars I and II Austria was a scene of unrelieved gloom. The country had split, very much as Germany did, between extremists of the Right and Left. There was street fighting. The Socialists were militant. The Opposition was equally militant. Those are some of the factors that made it so easy for the Germans simply to walk into Austria in March 1938.

However, Austria was back on its feet in 1972, and it was again prosperous. It had a very viable, two-party political system. There were two major parties: the Socialist Party, a very temperate kind of Socialism, not like the pre-World War II, ideological Socialism. The Opposition party was the Austrian People's Party, which actually was something of a misnomer. It was actually a Conservative Party. It was the traditional, Conservative Party of Austria, the party supported by the farmers. It was comparable to the Christian Democratic Party in Germany.

There was a third party, the Free Democratic Party. It was more to the Right than the Austrian People's Party, but not to the extreme Right.

Bruno Kreisky was an interesting man. First of all, he was Jewish in a country which, as you know, had a rather traditional, anti-Semitic bias. Some Austrians tried to belittle this, but it was, in fact, there. However, Kreisky was an immensely popular figure. He was an extremely gifted politician and a very good speaker. He spoke English fluently. I often saw him speak. I remember in particular that I once saw him speak to the American Chamber of Commerce in Vienna. He spoke without any prepared text and did so very forcefully and very effectively. His theme was, "We need American capital and know-how. It's in our interest that you come, and we will do everything possible to make Austria an attractive country for American investment." I don't doubt that he was sincere in that respect, and his policies demonstrated that.

He supported a pragmatic policy. It was very much like the Democratic Party in the United States. The "Old Guard" of the Austrian Socialist Party had been pretty much shoved aside by the war, by death, and by the changing times. The Austrians had finally buried the hatchet among themselves, bearing in mind that between World Wars I and II the Right and the Left were fighting against each other. They had learned lessons from that.

Q: They had a rough time in the 1930s.

WHITE: Terrible. Well, even in the 1920s. The country at that time was simply not viable. That's why many Austrians, who were otherwise patriotic Austrians, maintained that, without its historic connections, the country had no recourse but to come to some economic terms with Germany. In the end, that is what Austria did. However, this was in the context of postwar, multilateral economic development.

The Austrians had a problem. They could not join the European Common Market. They could not do this because they believed that it would violate their neutrality. Now, neutrality was really the price that the Russians exacted for permitting Austria to become unified in 1955, though they did not say so in so many words. The Austrians were always very sensible about this. You could argue that neutrality was imposed by the State Treaty. However, the Austrians always said: "Yes, we have to be neutral, but we are the ones who determine what neutrality shall mean." I don't think that they ever admitted that the Russians had the right to prevent Austria from joining the European Common Market. Austrians are very realistic people, and they weren't about to test how far they could go. So it was accepted, and we accepted, that the Austrians could not join the European Community. However they established various ways of doing this, in a sort of de facto movement toward membership in the European Community which was nonetheless short of full membership.

Q: Of course, Austria joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

WHITE: That's exactly right. That was kind of a halfway house. American prestige stood very high in Austria, and Americans were well liked. The Austrians still appreciated what we had done, and they had a very realistic sense that, without the American commitment to Europe, their own independence would have been in jeopardy.

Bear in mind that the word "Austria" in German is "Oesterreich," which means the "Eastern Realm" or territory. Austria has always been a border land. Of course, geographically, it still is. It is the traditional borderland between the East and the West, in a European context. Metternich was the great Austrian statesman at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. He used to say: "The East begins at the 'Rennweg.'" The Rennweg is a major street in Vienna.

What was happening when I arrived in Vienna was summed up in one word: "Detente." Nixon was President of the U.S., and Kissinger was his National Security Adviser. Nixon had embraced detente with the Russians.

Q: That was in 1972. All of this was a recent development.

WHITE: Exactly. Detente was the name of the game, and the Russians, for their own reasons, were also great champions of detente. Now, both sides saw this concept in different ways, but both accepted it and both touted it.

In that context Vienna assumed an importance which it hadn't had even a few years before. It was a natural meeting place between East and West. Remember that we not only had an Embassy in Vienna, but it was also the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency, to which we had a Mission. It also was the headquarters of UNIDO, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, where we also had a Mission.

Q: When was UNIDO established? It wasn't much before then.

WHITE: I think that it was a relatively recent creation. [It became an autonomous organization within the UN Secretariat in 1966, replacing the Centre for Industrial Development.] By the way, the U.S. wasn't all that fond of UNIDO. We joined it, but not enthusiastically. In any case, we had three diplomatic Mission in Vienna. That tells you something of the flavor of Vienna.

Q: Each U.S. Mission was headed by an Ambassador...

WHITE: An Ambassador or a Minister. We had three Chiefs of Mission in Vienna. We also had something else. We had the MBFR negotiations. It stood for "Mutual, Balanced Force Reductions." This was part of detente. This was an endless, virtually a perpetual meeting.

Q: When was CSCE [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe] established?

WHITE: That came a little later. The MBFR negotiations had a narrow, military context: ground forces. Of course, all of our NATO allies were members of the MBFR negotiations.

The MBFR negotiations did not involve an organization. It was an ongoing series of negotiations in which each side presented lengthy papers. Frankly, I don't think that the MBFR negotiations ever really accomplished anything. I'm not sure that it was ever really intended to accomplish anything. However, it was a sign of an attempt to come to some accommodation on the ground, by limiting the size and equipment of ground forces in Europe.

We even had a separate Mission, in effect, to the MBFR talks. I recall that a colleague of mine was in our Mission, to the MBFR Talks, however we defined it. This Mission had its own communications equipment, for example.

Vienna was also the venue for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks [SALT].

Q: Were the SALT talks going on while you were there in Vienna?

WHITE: They were intermittent. I think that the major aspects of those talks were over by that time. In fact, right around the corner from our Embassy in Vienna was the building in which the SALT talks were held.

We had all of these activities going on in Vienna. Before I left the Austrian desk the Department of Commerce, looking at this process from afar, came up with the idea of establishing a Trade Center in Vienna and calling it the "East-West Trade Center." This seemed to be an idea whose hour had come. I recall that when I was still on the Austrian desk in the Department of State (not when I was in the Department of Commerce), this idea suddenly emerged. It was controversial and was being pushed by a political appointee in Commerce, one of those hard-charging fellows who come into government service, determined to do something different.

Q: Do you remember his name?

WHITE: I don't recall his name, it was so long ago. Anyway, he latched onto this idea. There was opposition to it in the Department of Commerce. Not the concept, but whether it was feasible at that particular time and under those circumstances. I remember that we looked at this idea in State, and we concluded that it was a nice idea but it was premature. However, Commerce insisted on going ahead with it. Bear in mind that Maurice Stans was Secretary of Commerce at the time.

Q: He was close to President Nixon and had raised a lot of money for his campaign. So much so that it became something of a scandal.

WHITE: Stans was certainly influential. He backed this concept and, during my first year in Vienna, this was very much an issue, Indeed, the "East-West Trade Center" was established. You know, we never do anything in half-way terms. We always go whole hog. Commerce found a prime location for this center, just off the Ringstrasse. This was a storefront kind of Trade Center. It was very impressive. It had been agreed that the Director would be a State Department officer. It was Doug Martin. I still see him

occasionally. Doug was the first and, as it turned out, the only Director of the East-West Trade Center.

Doug Martin's deputy was a Commerce officer, a very competent man who was very skilled in the techniques of building exhibits and that sort of thing.

The East-West Trade Center was launched with great fanfare. Of course, in the context of detente, the Nixon administration seized on this concept as a kind of concrete example of what might be done. I remember that the President of Austria was there for the opening of the Center. It was launched with great hopes for its success. The staff consisted of the Director, the Deputy Director, and two of our Economic Section local employees, who were top notch people.

So the East-West Trade Center was launched, and they had a series of trade exhibitions.

Q: Did it accomplish much?

WHITE: The concept was that as detente emerged, trade between East and West would naturally grow. However, bear in mind that even when we had detente, there was still an iron curtain across Europe. Not much had been done to relieve the rigidities of that separation. For example, it was still extremely difficult for anyone in the Embassy to travel to Eastern Europe, even as tourists. The process was complicated. We managed to go to Budapest once while we were in Vienna. Detente was in the air, but the Cold War hadn't been magically whisked away. It was still very much with us.

The concept was that Eastern European governments could send their representatives to Vienna and use Vienna as sort of a meeting place with representatives of American companies. After all, it seemed that almost everybody else was meeting in Vienna at that time. So why not have a meeting place for American businessmen and the various business interests in Eastern Europe? Of course, we're talking about government business interests in Eastern Europe.

However, it didn't really work out that way. First of all, businessmen like to deal directly with their customers. In this case the customers were essentially Eastern European governments. The Eastern European governments also preferred to deal directly with American businessmen. They didn't see the point in going to Vienna to do this. They felt that they didn't have to do that. I think that our own Embassies in Eastern Europe weren't all that keen on the East-West Trade Center in Vienna.

In any case, the center was launched, very professionally. A lot of good exhibits were staged. Of course, we always had receptions to open these exhibits. However, after a while we found an interesting pattern. We found that our Soviet colleagues went to the Center, in force, all the time. We began to get the impression that maybe they were there, less for reasons of commerce, and more for reasons of doing what we always assumed that they did in those days.

Q: For intelligence purposes?

WHITE: Exactly. By the way, my assignment to Vienna provided me with my first, real opportunity to see the Russians in action as diplomats.

The Russians still had the old Czarist Embassy building. It was a palace, a real "palazzo," as the Italians say. It had huge, gleaming marble columns. It was vast, impressive, and imposing. It glittered with Czarist opulence, shall we say. They would often invite us to their Embassy. You see, detente was the name of the game, and we would see them often, both socially and professionally.

It was very amusing. Every now and then we would compare notes in the Embassy. We would find out that each of several officers in our Embassy had been invited to lunch, suddenly and in the same time frame, by different officers in the Soviet Embassy. We were always amused by this because when we compared notes after lunch, we would find out that the Soviets had all said the same thing. We always assumed that a telegram had come from Moscow, saying: "You will invite the Americans this week and you will make the following points." And that is what they did.

The East-West Trade Center didn't last, because new people in Commerce looked at it and didn't really see the utility of it.

Q: He was presumably given an outline of the costs involved.

WHITE: That's right, the costs. They were extremely high. As I mentioned, the location was just off the Ringstrasse in the high rent district in Vienna. The Ringstrasse is like the Champs Elysees in Paris. I think that the Center may have been open for about two years. Then, different winds blew in the Commerce Department, and it was decided to phase out the Center.

Detente was the mood of the time. Now, just before I left Washington for assignment to the Embassy in Vienna, I had read in the newspapers a bizarre little item about a break-in at the headquarters of the Democratic Party at the Watergate complex in Washington. Of course, this thing grew...

Q: The break-in took place in June, 1972.

WHITE: It continued to grow.

Q: Contrary to everyone's predictions.

WHITE: Yes. While Vienna was a very pleasant place to live, professionally this cloud of the Watergate Affair got larger and larger. However this incident may have been looked at in the United States, diplomats abroad represent their country. In our case we represented the President. It was not a pleasant time for American diplomats serving abroad, because we were always being asked about the Watergate Affair, about which we

knew very little. The Soviets were fascinated by this event. They simply could not understand or believe that any American President like Nixon, and by the way they saw Nixon as a strong President, could be toppled from power. This couldn't have happened in the Soviet system...

Q: I don't think that any Americans perceived this event, either contemporaneously or retrospectively, as really possible, either.

WHITE: Exactly. In addition to detente we also had this growing cloud of the Watergate Affair over our heads. This came to a head while I was still in Vienna. President Nixon was forced to resign in August of 1974.

Q: On August 9, 1974.

WHITE: I remained in Vienna for another year after that. Not only the Russians, but other Europeans couldn't understand this either. The Europeans have a longer tradition than we do, and perhaps a more cynical tradition. Their attitude was: "Fun and games? Tricks? This is what all politicians do all the time. So what's the problem?"

Q: It was like an onion. You peel it back, and there are so many layers. The initial break-in was utterly inconceivable. Here were these five former employees of the CIA who had been much involved in anti-Castro activities. What were they doing in the office of Larry O'Brien, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee? That was never adequately explained.

Then, beyond that, this seemed to be an operation of the plumbers based on the White House, trying to stop leaks in the White House. This activity appeared to have been overseen by the most senior officials of the Nixon reelection campaign. Then, once people began peeling back that aspect, many other things seemed to be lumped under the umbrella term of "Watergate." All of this seemed utterly inconceivable.

WHITE: It certainly did from a European standpoint. I don't think that the Europeans understood then and I don't think that they understand now why it was enough to bring down a President.

Q: Did you understand it?

WHITE: Not really. I think that we lost a lot of prestige as a result of this. Perhaps if I had been back in the U.S. at that time, I might have perceived it differently. However, I was abroad, representing the U.S. Government, and the American President was regarded as a man of great strength. Remember Nixon's trip to China. Nixon's reputation stood very high in Europe.

Q: Nixon's reputation stood very high in Europe, partly because of the opening to China and partly because he had won the election of 1972. So here was a huge mandate for a second term of Nixon as President. However, it all came tumbling down.

WHITE: Exactly. I always felt sorry for Ambassador Humes in Vienna. He was a wonderful man, a great gentleman, and he owed his job to President Nixon.

Q: So what were your responsibilities in Vienna?

WHITE: I was the number two officer in the Economic Section of the Embassy. I was responsible for most of the reporting done in the economic area. We had the CERP [Combined Economic Reporting Program] reports to prepare and submit to Washington. We had quite a heavy schedule of CERP reports at that time.

Among our local employees, we had an Agricultural Unit which, curiously enough, reported to me, because the Agricultural Attache position in the Embassy had been abolished. However, the Department of Agriculture wanted to keep a reporting program going in Vienna. This agricultural unit had two excellent local employees. At first the Department of Agriculture was going to close down the whole operation. However, I think that cooler heads prevailed. All of this happened just before I arrived in Vienna. I think that when people in the Embassy explained to the Department of Agriculture that there were two good, local employees in the Embassy who could essentially keep the reporting program going and that an American Embassy officer could be assigned to oversee their activity, Agriculture changed its mind. The Department of Agriculture had an Agricultural Attache resident in Bern, Switzerland.

Q: You don't often think of Austria as an agricultural country.

WHITE: I'm sure that the Agricultural Attache in Vienna was also accredited to Eastern European countries. That was probably the rationale for this assignment. In any case, the Department of Agriculture reorganized its services. It gave up the attache position in Vienna. The Agricultural Attache in Bern would visit Vienna about two or three times a year to oversee the operation. But, as I said, the local employees in the agricultural unit reported to me.

By the way, that happened again to me later on in Turkey. The Agricultural Attache position in Ankara was abolished, and, in effect, I wound up as a kind of de facto Agricultural Attache.

Q: Do you think that it makes sense to have agriculture covered in countries like Austria and Turkey? There is so much published material on those places. The FAO [Food and Agricultural Organization, a specialized agency of the UN] puts out an enormous

quantity of published material.

WHITE: Remember that the Department of Agriculture is very active in the field of foreign reporting. It has its own Foreign Service and a very active export promotion program.

Q: That is more intended to promote American agricultural exports than to report on agricultural developments.

WHITE: Basically, the agricultural reporting program was export driven, although the Department of Agriculture always had a very good and very thorough program of reporting on world agricultural conditions. Because that, in turn, impacts on American agricultural prospects.

One of the things that happened while I was in Vienna was that the Department of Agriculture, believe it or not, imposed an embargo on U.S. exports of soybeans. This did the American farmers no good because if you don't have a reliable supplier, importing countries go to another source of supply.

This was a very foolish move. What it did, of course, was to stimulate the production of soybeans elsewhere in the world. This was one of those measures dictated by short-term, political considerations. This boomeranged badly, I think, in terms of our reputation for reliability of producing soybeans and meeting export requirements.

Monetary reporting was also my responsibility, as well as all of the usual bilateral issues on the economic side. We had a very competent woman, a Foreign Service National, who did a lot of the monetary reporting. She really knew the banking system.

Civil aviation was another of my responsibilities. Pan American was the principal, scheduled airline servicing Vienna. While I was in Vienna, Pan Am gave up the Austrian market, for some reason, and TWA took over service to Vienna.

Problems would come up with Austria from time to time. As I say, we had excellent relations with Austria, and there were no serious difficulties outstanding. There were no "consuming" issues on the front burner with Austria.

Q: Would you recall any specific event as representing the proudest moment of your service in Austria?

WHITE: We had two presidential visits to Austria while I was there. President Nixon came in 1974 and President Ford a year later.

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Q: This is Tuesday, October 7, 1997, at about 2:40 PM. I am John Harter interviewing Al White on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Before we resumed this interview, you were discussing the visit of President Nixon to Austria in June, 1974. You were responsible for...

WHITE: I was responsible for the State Department contingent accompanying the President. Henry Kissinger, of course, was Secretary of State at that point, but also still, I believe, the National Security Adviser to the President.

If I had to designate any one or two events as the highlights of my three years in Austria, the first would certainly be the visit of President Nixon in June of 1974, followed by that of President Ford a year later. Of the two, the former was the more dramatic because of the Watergate crisis that was fast coming to a head. In both cases the President stayed at Schloss Klessheim just outside Salzburg as the official guest of the Austrian Government. In both cases the President stayed only a day or so in Austria. In both cases, my job was essentially the same, to back-stop the Department of State's traveling Secretariat and the several senior Department officers in the President's entourage. In both cases, we set up shop in a basement room of the Schloss, which was normally used as a class room for an Austrian tourism school. On the grounds of the castle was a large building which served as a hotel training school, where most of the Presidential parties and Embassy staff, including myself, had rooms.

President Nixon was already in deep trouble at the time of his visit to Salzburg. He was en route to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Israel in a trip which he no doubt hoped would recoup his fortunes. We expected of course that the visit would entail a lot of work, but I don't think any of us were prepared tor the enormous logistical task that the visit became. Salzburg was a long way from Vienna and the Embassy; by the time of the visit most of our Embassy personnel and vehicles were in Salzburg. There were the inevitable advance men, young for the most part, and often arrogant and demanding. Then there were the hangers on who came with or before the actual Presidential visit, many of whom had no connection with the visit as far as we could tell. This was the heyday of the Imperial Presidency and it was painfully clear that the trappings surrounding Presidential travel had reached ridiculous proportions. In Salzburg, a medium size city, the number of Americans swarming all over town for the visit was so conspicuous that it became a joke among the Austrians.

The Schloss itself was a magnificent building in the grand Imperial manner of the Hapsburgs. It sat in a spacious park just outside the city. Hence security could be more easily provided, which may have been one reason why the Schloss was selected for these visits. Not only guards but dogs as well were used to patrol the grounds. From the main entrance of the building one entered into a huge, imposing salon that soared several stories, with cream and gold walls and glittering crystal chandeliers. Directly ahead was an imposing stairway. To the right and left, at the far ends of this salon were large double doors that lead to the two main wings of the building.

I did not see the President and Mrs. Nixon on their arrival. They were given the wing to the right of the main entrance, which provided a private suit. Secretary Kissinger had a room upstairs that was spacious and regal with an enormous ornate bed. Adjoining it was another smaller room converted into an office for his chief aide, who guarded like a hawk access to the inner chamber. Coming and going in my own duties, I often passed through the grand salon and I often looked at those doors behind which the President and his wife stayed for two nights and a day. It soon became apparent that they did not want to be disturbed, nor did they ever emerge during the visit to mingle with their large entourage. Nor do I recall seeing anyone other than a Filipino house boy enter or leave the

Presidential quarters. I began to realize why the President was considered a loner.

Only once did I see him he appear prior to his departure. He came out to greet Chancellor Kreisky, his host, who came for a very brief courtesy call. I was taken aback by the President's appearance. I had read that he was having bouts of phlebitis which caused him Io limp slightly at times. On this occasion the limp was very noticeable. He had a haggard, grey, drawn, exhausted look and seemed in pain. The agony of his situation was plainly evident. He seemed a bent and broken man in those ghastly few minutes. His Presidency was crashing down around him, and it showed.

In happier days, in May, 1972, President Nixon had stayed at Schloss Klessheim en route to Moscow. He was still basking then in the glory of his February 1972 visit to China. Now, two years later, the atmosphere in the great castle was funereal. Officials from Washington moved about in hushed tones. The tension of impending doom was heavy in the air. I saw Secretary Kissinger at one point coming down the stairs with some aides. He looked somber, angry and made no pretense of smiling. Reports on the political situation back in Washington were coming in by cable, and their contents (to which I was not privy) only seemed to deepen the gloom.

I did not fully grasp the reason for Kissinger's anger at the time. Busy in my own duties, I heard that he gave a press conference during the visit, but only years later when I read his memoirs did I realize how desperate for a time his own situation was. The feeding frenzy of the media, roused by the Watergate scandal, had turned at last on him. Nasty charges had surfaced that Kissinger had lied about wiretaps. In his Salzburg press conference held June 11, he threatened to resign if he was not cleared of the charges. Kissinger's account of this incident and of the Nixon visit to Austria and the Middle East makes chilling reading.

When it was time for the Presidential party to leave for the airport, the entire staff of the Schloss, including maids, cooks, bus boys, etc, in all about 25 people stood in a semicircle in the great hall. The President and his wife emerged from their suite, and I saw a transformed Nixon. He and Mrs. Nixon, beautifully dressed, were all smiles and relaxed affability as they moved along, stopping for a few words and a hand shake with each member of the staff, giving mementos to each: pins to the women and tie clasps or similar items to the men, with the Presidential seal mounted on each. Completely gone was the limp and the haggard look I had seen on the President's face a short time before. Courage has been defined as grace under pressure. By that definition, Mrs. Nixon was a very courageous woman. Her face betrayed nothing of the ordeal she must have been suffering. They were every inch the politician and his supportive wife, working the crowd to the end. They then disappeared through the main entrance doors to their waiting limousine, I never saw them again.

I had seen Nixon only once before his stop-over in Austria. During the Eisenhower years, ! had stood at the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue while a motorcade swept by on its way to the White House, with a smiling Nixon, then Vice President, sitting beside the President, both waiving back at the crowd. Nixon had just returned from

a disastrous riot in Caracas, Venezuela where a mob had almost killed him. The President had gone out to the airport to greet him. That had been years earlier, in happier times. "How the mighty have fallen."

On August 9th of that year the long agony of Watergate came to its crisis and Nixon was forced out of office in disgrace. I heard of his resignation when we were on vacation in San Martino. I was not among those who reveled in his fall. I see nothing to cheer in the fall of any human being. Nixon had played hard ball in politics, giving no quarter. His enemies played hard ball as well and gave him no quarter. Some would say it was rough justice. My own view was and has remained that his punishment was far out of proportion to his misdeeds. Nor do I think the country was well served by his ouster. Europeans were appalled at the treatment meted out to a man they regarded as a strong and able President. They did not understand how it could happen, for what they regarded as the usual tricks of the political trade, and they were deeply unsettled and scared I think by the spectacle. I felt sorry for our Ambassador, a Nixon appointee. It must have been painful for him to endure the long night of Watergate, but he never let it show and carried on with great dignity through it all.

Schloss Klessheim Revisited: the Ford-Sadat Summit

A year later, June 1 and 2, 1975, as my tour was coming to an end, President Ford came to Schloss Klessheim where he met with Egyptian President Sadat for the first time. I have a vivid memory of them standing off in a corner of the great central hall of the castle, talking earnestly by themselves, Sadat puffing professorially, thoughtfully on his pipe. The mood was in striking contrast with the Nixon visit of the year before. President Ford was relaxed and affable, and his mood infused the entire atmosphere. He went off at one point to do some golfing. The senior officials from the Department with whom I had close contact were similarly relaxed and chatted amiably among themselves. Secretary Kissinger never appeared in the basement room where we had set up shop and his top aides gathered. Occasionally he would send for one of them, and the official summoned would go upstairs to see him, return, and be followed by another. Perhaps because we were literally housed in a school room I had the impression that I was watching these very senior officials being summoned like school boys by the Principal. They took it all in good humor.

A half dozen years later I would hear one evening in the Ambassador's Residence in Ankara that Sadat had been assassinated. For making peace with Israel he payed the supreme price. Ten years later an Israeli leader, Rabin, would be assassinated for making peace with the Arabs. Nixon had made peace with the Chinese. Leaders with a vision are so often ill starred. As the old saying goes, a prophet is without honor in his own country.

Q: Kissinger was still Secretary of State?

WHITE: Yes. He was appointed in August 1973. I was transferred from Austria in the summer of 1975.

It had been a very varied three years. On the personal side our second daughter was born in Vienna. Our Ambassador had an opera box. Of course, with his private income he could certainly afford it.

Q: The opera is a very big thing in Vienna.

WHITE: Very big thing, indeed, and we had an awful lot of congressional visits to Vienna, as you could well imagine.

Q: That's surprising.

WHITE: The Ambassador, John Humes, knew how to entertain. He had taken his box at the opera for the whole season. He had program notes with the ambassadorial seal and a synopsis of each opera. One night I sat in the opera box with former Vice President Hubert Humphrey. A lot of celebrities came to Vienna at that time. Of course, there was a lot going on at that time.

Q: Hubert Humphrey was in pretty bad shape by that time, wasn't he? He had cancer. I think that it was visible by that time.

WHITE: That's not my recollection. He looked very hale and hearty.

Q: By some time in the mid-1970s he seemed to be showing his illness.

WHITE: He was well enough to be there and to go to the opera. His son was with him, if I recall correctly. Was it Hubert Humphrey, Jr.? Well, it was one of his sons.

During intermission at the Vienna Opera House you promenade around between acts. Humphrey was doing that and, of course, ever the politician, he was shaking hands with people who would come up to greet him. He seemed to be enjoying it all, so that night he appeared to be in very good condition. He was very humorous. For some reason I remember that the opera was "La Traviata." Humphrey was joking about the plot with his son in the Ambassador's box.

We saw a lot of opera in Vienna. The Ambassador had a very interesting system for his opera box. Of course, professional use always came first, to entertain visiting Congressmen and visiting VIPs. The Ambassador's secretary had a system whereby anybody on the Embassy staff could request seats for the opera, including local employees of the Embassy. Every seat in the Ambassador's box was always occupied by someone.

We traveled a great deal when we were in Austria.

Q: That's a very efficient use of Ambassadorial time and resources, too, to cultivate relationships.

WHITE: The Ambassador was a lawyer. I would often go with him on his calls. I remember going once with him to call on the Austrian Minister of Trade. We had a trade problem of some sort with Austria. The Ambassador had mastered the brief and carried it off beautifully. He didn't need any assistance from me. He had done his homework and studied the briefing papers. He made it a point to visit every provincial capital in Austria. In every one of them he would host a big reception. He spoke German. I think that when he was growing up, he had a German governess. He was an extremely conspicuous and effective representative of the United States.

I know that there is a tradition of disdain among some of my colleagues about political Ambassadors. However, I have to say that the political Ambassadors that I have served with, and maybe I have been lucky, have brought a dimension to the Foreign Service which, frankly, career Ambassadors often do not have.

Q: I served under two outstanding political Ambassadors. I also served under a couple of very mediocre, career Ambassadors. The best of the political Ambassadors are often better than many career Ambassadors.

WHITE: Well, to jump ahead, when I was in Rome, we had Ambassador Raab. He was a personal friend of President Reagan. You know, the Italians know how to add and subtract when it comes to calculating who's important and who isn't. They knew that in Ambassador Raab they had someone who could pick up a telephone and call President Ronald Reagan directly.

Q: Is there anything else that you would want to say about Austria, Al, before we go on?

WHITE: I think that we've pretty well covered the waterfront.

Q: Did you have any particular impression of Kurt Waldheim [former President of Austria and Secretary General of the UN], any insights into his character?

WHITE: Not really. He wasn't on the scene in Vienna in those days.

Q: Was he Secretary General of the UN at that time?

WHITE: I think so.

Q: You didn't have any contact with him?

WHITE: No, I had no dealings with him. He later became President of Austria, but he was not President of Austria when I was in Vienna. The President was Kirschlager, a very fine man.

I should mention that OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries] was also headquartered in Vienna. While I was in Vienna, something very important happened.

Q: That's right. This was the period when we were having trouble with oil at the beginning of 1973.

WHITE: When I went to Vienna, OPEC had its headquarters there. The headquarters were in a building which I often passed, right down near the Ringstrasse. But OPEC was not considered any great or terribly important force in the world in 1972.

Q: At the time it wasn't.

WHITE: It wasn't. If you'll remember, war broke out in the Middle East, in the fall of 1973.

Q: Wasn't it in October, 1973?

WHITE: I think you're right. Suddenly, we had an explosion of interest in the whole question of oil. There was an Arab boycott of oil exports to the U.S. and a rapid rise in the price of oil.

Henry Bardach was the Economic Counselor of the Embassy in Vienna. Caroll Brown had served in Vienna as Economic Counselor for one year and was replaced by Henry Bardach in 1973. He and I made many a trip across Vienna to the Austrian Ministry of Energy, because cables regarding oil were flying across the Atlantic. The U.S. Government was trying to line up support for the creation of the International Energy Agency in Paris. You remember those days?

Q: Very well.

WHITE: It was kind of a scary time. All of a sudden, interest in OPEC, which had seemed to be zero in Washington, shot up to the point where we were besieged with phone calls every time that OPEC met. We'd get nervous calls from the Operations Center in the Department asking what had happened. We'd say: "They're meeting behind closed doors." They'd ask: "What's going on?" Well, it's easier to ask that than to get to someone who was attending the meeting.

Within the Embassy staff we had Joe Lill covering OPEC developments. Joe had come from a previous assignment in the Arab world, in Baghdad, I believe. He had a good sense for Arab relationships and had developed very good contacts among the Arab OPEC delegates. He would go down to the Imperial Hotel and sit out there, along with all of the journalists covering OPEC, and wait for bulletins on what was going on in OPEC. So, all of a sudden, OPEC became very important. It seemed that everyone in Washington had developed an intense interest in OPEC.

There also was a very nasty terrorist incident there. Some terrorists came to Vienna and seized up some of the people in OPEC. That got ugly and put Chancellor Kreisky on the spot. I think that he cooked up some deal that allowed the terrorists to leave the country. It was a situation you could second guess if you wanted to. Anyway, Kreisky was the

man who had to handle this matter.

In summary, my tour in Vienna was a good three years. Professionally, I was ready to move on.

Q: Did you leave Vienna with something of a heavy heart?

WHITE: We had enjoyed this period of time, but it was time to move on. By that time I had come to a fork in the road and unfortunately you can't just do what Yogi Berra said: "If you come to a fork in the road, take it." You have to make a choice.

I was offered a very interesting job in Indonesia, out of the blue.

Q: Oh, really?

WHITE: Yes. However, we had an infant daughter, and for that particular reason as well as others we turned this offer down. I was also offered a job in Washington which was very hard to turn down. That was a job in the Office of Aviation.

Q: How did you learn about that?

WHITE: You know how that goes. I had been talking with my Personnel Officer, back and forth, over a period of some months. The job in Indonesia was mine if I wanted it. However, in the Office of Aviation John Meadows, the Office Director, had retired, and Mike Styles, who had been the Director of the Division dealing with bilateral aviation affairs, had moved up to be Office Director. Mike knew me because of my time back in EUR [Bureau of European Affairs] as a desk officer. As I mentioned earlier, aviation was a major issue with the Italians and also with the Swiss. So I guess that Mike heard that I was coming up for reassignment. In some way I expressed interest in aviation affairs. We got together.

Q: That is the kind of job which, in a bygone day, was a civil service job. Right?

WHITE: There were a few civil service people in the Office of Aviation, but most of the people were Foreign Service Officers. John Meadows, for example, was a Foreign Service Officer. Mike Styles had also been a Foreign Service Officer. I think that Mike had served in Japan at one time. Virtually all of the officers on the staff of the Office of Aviation were Foreign Service Officers. One person was a civil service officer. That was Joan Gravatt, who was our in house expert on ICAO [International Civil Aviation Organization].

Q: She was in the Office of Aviation a long time.

WHITE: A year or so ago she was still there. Maybe she is at this time. She was civil service. I'm getting ahead of the story, but she provided a lot of continuity in the office.

So I had to make a choice. I made it. There are always pros and cons in decisions of that kind.

Q: What was the job?

WHITE: As I recall it, Mike Styles said that there were two Division Chief jobs coming open in the Office of Aviation. The whole office was undergoing a degree of rapid change. There was a new Director, Mike Styles, so his previous job was vacant.

One division was what we called "AN," which dealt with Aviation Negotiations. That's the bilateral side of things, with one government negotiating with another government over which airlines will have which points of access in the other country and how many flights will be permitted between City A and City B. Those are the nitty gritty aspects of negotiating aviation agreements.

The other division was called "AVP," or Aviation Policy and Programs. That's the division which I ended up heading. So I returned to Washington in the summer of 1975 to take over that division. Now, why did I do that? Well, it's a rather specialized field. However, I liked the issues...

Q: You had previously touched on aviation issues, especially in AIS.

WHITE: Right. Frankly, I thought at that point that it was always wise to have an alternative. The Foreign Service is not the most secure of careers. I thought that it was time to specialize in something and that I might as well do it in something that I liked and knew something about. But, of course, I was hardly an expert on aviation affairs.

Q: In the back of your mind did you have the thought that maybe you would eventually go into the civil aviation field?

WHITE: That was a possibility. It was an option. Had I stayed in the regular, traditional type of Foreign Service jobs, it would not have been available. As it turned out at the end, I didn't take that option, but still, it's always good to have options. I enjoyed that job. I thought that the work was interesting. Remember, aviation was an expanding field and had a lot of excitement attached to it.

Q: So what was involved in this job?

WHITE: I think I could have had either one of those two jobs, in AN or AVP. I ultimately chose the job in AVP (policies and programs) because I thought that it provided more variety, rather than the nitty gritty of how many times Alitalia could fly to New York or how many times it could fly to Boston. That was very important, but the job in AVP [Division of International Aviation Policies and Programs] covered a much broader field.

First of all, all of the multilateral aspects of aviation were covered by that division

[AVP]. We had a Permanent Mission to ICAO in Montreal, but that was only one aspect of the work. It was a bit difficult, at times, to decide where a given issue belonged. However, generally, anything that was not concerned with route rights was in my area of responsibility [AVP]. That included issues that were covered thematically across the board. For example, air fares. You might think: "What did we have to do with air fares?" Under the Aviation Act we were very much involved in air fares because they were regulated. We also handled user charges, or the charges which airlines paid for using an airport. This was a very important and sensitive issue for the airlines and a major element in their expenses.

Other subjects included were all sorts of environmental issues, such as the noise which airplanes make, aviation security...

Q: Hijacking?

WHITE: Hijacking, and therein hangs a tale which we can get into later on.

The issue that was hot on the first day I arrived in that office was the Concorde aircraft. Remember the Concorde, the SST [Super Sonic Transport]? As it turned out, the Concorde was my number one priority for two of the four years that I served in that office. During the first two years, I did many things, but the most conspicuous issue I had to deal with was the Concorde.

Q: What kind of issues were involved?

WHITE: The basic issue was a very simple one. The British and the French were flying the Concorde, which is a supersonic aircraft. The U.S., for reasons which I never understood, had canceled development of what was to be a U.S. built, Supersonic Transport aircraft. Normally, you think of the U.S. as in the vanguard in technological matters and certainly in aviation. As I said, we had had a program of research on the development of SST aircraft. Congress for some reason killed it. That happened long before my time in AVP. So here was this tremendous innovation in aviation, the supersonic transport, a plane that could fly, say, from Paris to New York in three and one-half hours. And the U.S. was not involved in developing it.

Under their bilateral agreements with the United States, the British and the French had the right to fly to New York or any of the other American cities in their schedule which we had agreed upon.

Q: Of course, what that meant was that you could have breakfast in New York, do a day's business in Europe, and still get home to New York that same evening.

WHITE: Exactly. Unfortunately, there was a tremendous amount of opposition by environmentalists to supersonic transport. And I must say that these claims were extremely exaggerated. I can understand their interest in this issue, up to a certain point. However, certain movements in the U.S. get kind of way out there.

Q: What specifically did you do about the Concorde?

WHITE: I was the State Department's point man on the Concorde. There were two governments, the British and the French, which claimed that they had the right to fly that airplane to the United States, under our bilateral agreements with those two countries. We had a lot of people in the U.S. Congress who said: "How dare you allow that plane to land in the U.S.? It's not safe, it's an environmental hazard. It rattles dishes and may have all sorts of deleterious and perhaps yet unknown effects on human health."

Q: Was the flight of the Concorde covered in the aviation agreements with Britain and France?

WHITE: Frankly, in my own view, there never was any ambiguity. In my view the British and the French had the right to fly that plane to the United States, because they had certified it as airworthy. Under our agreements, we never attempted to tell a foreign government what its definition should be of "airworthiness." The British and the French had very sophisticated and perfectly competent aviation authorities and technicians. As far as they were concerned, the Concorde was "airworthy." Which, of course, it was, and still is.

No one ever claimed that the plane was not airworthy. In spite of that, elements in the U.S. claimed that the plane did not meet sufficient safety standards. Therein lay the debate, which went on for two full years.

Q: Was there congressional concern about this?

WHITE: There was intense congressional concern, and you can almost guess where it came from. It was particularly the New York delegation which was up in arms about this issue.

Q: Who took this view? Was Senator Moynihan involved? Who were the New York Senators at the time?

WHITE: Oh, not Senator Moynihan. Well, Senator Javits [Republican, New York] was one of the Senators who was concerned. I forget the names of the others. The most vociferous opposition came from certain Congressmen, including one gentleman who later became Mayor of New York, Ed Koch.

The New York congressional delegation got onto this issue. They were convinced that this was an issue about which their constituents cared very deeply. We were in the middle of this issue, of course. The Department of State is always in the middle. There was an ambiguity in a sense, in that the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] had the power to establish rules governing aviation safety, as distinct from the rights of different airlines to fly to the United States.

This issue led to a tremendous amount of lobbying activity in Washington and a lot of hype. I don't know how much the British and French Governments spent on legal talent and lobbyists, but there was an awful lot of money spent on it, to be sure. The issue got very public, very nasty, and it dragged on and on.

Finally, a decision was made by the Secretary of Transportation at that time, Bill Coleman. He was a man whom I much admired. He was very savvy, Black American. I believe that now he is a prominent lawyer in Pennsylvania. I think that he later served on the Board of Directors of Pan American Airways. He understood both the politics and the aviation aspects of the issue.

He did something which, I thought, was a stroke of genius. He held a public hearing in a huge government auditorium on the Mall.

Q: It was probably in the Department of Commerce.

WHITE: No, it wasn't in the Department of Commerce. It was farther East of that. Anyway, he held an all-day hearing, which I attended. Anyone who wished to do so could express his or her views in writing or be included in the schedule of speakers. Well, you know the procedures under which these things are handled. He allowed everyone who wished to do so to get his or her views out in the open. Finally, after the meeting and after considering all of the data, he issued a finding that the Concorde could land at Dulles Airport in Washington, DC, because this was a federally controlled airport. As the Secretary of Transportation, he could make a decision on that issue.

In May of 1976 the Concorde was allowed to land in Washington, but not in New York. Well, Washington was not a large enough market for the plane. The Port Authority of New York insisted that it had the authority to keep that plane out of Kennedy Airport. Now, I think that the Federal Government could have exerted overriding control over the issue, but it was politically very sensitive. There was a lot of discussion about it.

I remember getting telephone calls from a reporter with the "Washington Post," who was always writing articles about this issue. Finally, the atmosphere surrounding this issue got so nasty that we were told in the State Department that we were going to be brought before a congressional committee. We would have to explain why we were “selling out the American people.” It was that kind of a nasty situation.

We were resigned to appearing before a congressional committee. We figured that we would go up there and be pilloried and blasted from one end of the hearing room to the other. Meanwhile, of course, lots of legal maneuvering was going on. Finally, the Port Authority of New York ran out of means, methods, or techniques to delay the entry of the plane. This process built to a tremendous climax.

There were reports that there were housewives in Brooklyn who were going to prostrate themselves on the runway when the Concorde landed at Kennedy Airport in New York. As I said, that was the context in which we were told that we were going to be hauled up

before a congressional committee. And, of course, the State Department was accused of selling out American interests, and this and that.

By the way, the absurdity of this, in my mind, was that, while the Concorde can fly at supersonic speed, it was always obliged to slow down to subsonic speeds before it reached U.S. air space. There was never any question of this. So it couldn't zoom in to Kennedy Airport at supersonic speed. Way out over the Atlantic Ocean it had to cut back to subsonic speed. Well, this was never enough to satisfy what we might call the hyperenvironmentalists.

Anyway, the day came, and there was much anxiety and concern that we might have disorder and might have people running out on the runways. For some reason it wasn't British Airways. But Air France that was going to land the first Concorde in the United States. The press was all hyped up. Big things were going to happen and so forth.

Well, the first landing of the Concorde in the U.S. turned out to be one of the great non events of our time. No housewives appeared, no housewives prostrated themselves on the runway. There was no disorder. The media interviewed people living around the New York area. I remember that they interviewed one woman. You know how the press gets very dramatic. They asked this woman: "Tell us your reactions as the plane neared Kennedy Airport." The woman said in kind of a flat voice: "Well, you know, I think that planes land there every two minutes or so. I couldn't tell the difference. There are so many planes."

The remarkable thing about the landing of the Concorde in New York was that the day after the plane landed, when it was obvious that there was no public reaction whatsoever, the politicians involved dropped the issue [snap of the fingers] just like that and walked away from it. I don't think that we even got a letter informing us that the hearing of the congressional committee to which we were to be summoned had been canceled.

To me there was a lot to learn from that incident. Everyone assumes that professional politicians really have the pulse beat of the people and that they know what the people, their constituents, are thinking. They go back home every weekend to see what the people are thinking. They apparently were convinced that this issue of the Concorde landing in the U.S. was a big issue. It wasn't. Around New York the professional politicians got way out ahead of the people. Having done that, I have to say that if it had been a matter of conviction with them, they wouldn't have just walked away from the issue. But they did walk away from it. And suddenly the curtain came down on this issue. From that day on I never heard a word about the grave damage which the Concorde was going to do to people's eardrums, or the windows of their houses, or anything else. I think that there's a moral in this incident. I think that there is a tendency to think, and strangely enough by politicians, who normally, one would suppose, are sophisticated enough to know better, that the public is terribly agitated about a given issue. In fact, it often turns out that the public's reaction is like the story of the little kid who says, "The emperor isn't wearing any clothes." In other words, the little kid's reaction was to state what was commonplace.

So that issue was resolved after dragging on for two years. For two years I was bedeviled by the Concorde flap, which is what it was. Finally, that Air France Concorde landed in October, 1977 in New York. It's been landing ever since, flown both by British Airways and Air France.

Q: And without making waves.

WHITE: I don't think that the press ever wrote another article highlighting the issue. Not that I'm aware of.

Q: Any other major issues you dealt with?

WHITE: We had lots of other issues facing us in that office. It was a very busy time and a very demanding job. Those four years included the hardest work I've ever done. On the ICAO front...

Q: Tell us something about ICAO.

WHITE: We had two major conferences in ICAO. Of course, that was my bailiwick.

Q: ICAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations, the International Civil Aviation Organization.

WHITE: Right. As you say, it is a specialized agency of the UN which is based in Montreal. Nobody ever hears much about these specialized agencies, but the work they do is incredibly important.

Q: Of course, other specialized agencies of the UN include the Universal Postal Union, the International Telecommunications Union, IMCO, the International Maritime Consultative Organization...

WHITE: There are lots of them. They operate day in and day out and make the world work.

Take aviation. What could be more international than aviation? How do you divide up the airways so that a French plane, for example, doesn't run into an American plane?

Q: There is also the International Telecommunications Union, which allocates the air waves and frequencies for international use. They are not well known.

WHITE: Exactly. They do yeoman work, and, frankly, that's the way we like it. We don't want these specialized organizations to be politicized. In fact, one of our standing briefs was that we wanted these organizations to do only the technical work that they were created to do.

Q: And the political issues should be shipped off to the General Assembly of the UN.

WHITE: Exactly. Now, in dealing with the ICAO we worked very closely with IO, the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. IO watched the political aspects of ICAO, and we dealt with the technical aspects. That was the rough division of labor.

There is always a tendency to politicize these organizations. Various countries have various agendas. For example...

Well, you know how pervasive ideology is. You can have a meeting in ICAO to discuss something nondescript like the frequency on which weather reports will be broadcast. When I was working on ICAO matters, the representative of some communist country would take the floor and put on an ideological show that had nothing to do with weather stations.

Also, in the housekeeping sense, for bureaucratic reasons the budget for our Permanent Mission to ICAO was included in the IO budget.

During my assignment to backstopping our Mission to the ICAO, we had a special international air transport conference in 1977, the first of its kind to be held since the Chicago Convention in 1944, which established ICAO, or its forerunner. This Convention is always referred to in civil aviation circles as the "Chicago Convention." Everybody in aviation circles knows this. That Convention established ICAO as we know it today. Since then there had never been another international conference to deal with the economics of the civil air transport industry, until the conference in 1977.

The purpose of the 1977 conference was not to deal with technical issues but rather the economics of the air transport industry. That was a big meeting. As I say, it was the first of its kind since 1944. We were a little concerned about that conference because we assumed, and I'm sure that we had reason to believe this, that various countries would attempt to inject more state control into commercial aviation. Of course, we opposed this. We were always the champion of free enterprise in the air. We didn't want any attempts by governments to get more involved in the economics of the industry.

You can imagine the preparations we made for a conference like that, which was to last two or three weeks. We sent a huge delegation up to Montreal. I was the vice chairman of our delegation.

Q: Who was the Chairman?

WHITE: The Chairman was Joel Biller. He was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Economic Affairs, in charge of aviation affairs in the Department.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary in EB [Bureau of Economic Affairs] at that point?

WHITE: Joe Greenwald was there, at least for a time. Jules Katz replaced him.

There was a lot of interesting activity in connection with that conference. Of course, we were not the only U.S. Government agency involved at a major, international organization meeting of this kind. There was also the CAB, the Civil Aeronautics Board, which obviously played a big role. The Department of Transportation also played a big role. FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] played a big role. And, of course, the air transport industry was always represented at a conference like this.

The Montreal conference ended up pretty much the way we wanted it to. We saw this as a damage control operation. While we didn't like some of the final resolutions, we were able to live with the conference results.

Q: What were the main results?

WHITE: The main result, I think, was that we prevented any serious, governmental interference in the commercial side of aviation. Now we're talking about air fares, air routes, and all of that sort of thing. The whole economic side of civil air transport. We were generally satisfied that we had headed off any major encroachment by governments into the economics of the air transport industry, particularly in terms of privately owned airlines, because our airlines were privately owned. Remember that most other airlines in that period were not privately owned. Most countries had one single airline, which was heavily subsidized and practically an arm of the government. For example, Air France was and still is in that category. Lufthansa was, although it has been considerably privatized since then. Of course, British Airways has been completely privatized.

We had a second aviation conference in Montreal in 1978. ICAO had to decide on a new, world system for the instrument landing of aircraft. The old, ILS system, as it was called, was becoming obsolete.

Here we stumbled into a nasty brawl with our British allies, of all people. This was because the U.S. Government espoused one instrument landing system, called “TRSB,” and the British advocated the adoption of another one, a Doppler system. Of course, the commercial stakes in this area were big. We're talking about something which, at that time, was probably worth over $1.0 billion in contracts, in terms of 1978 dollars.

FAA, of course, took the lead on that. The Department of State was not the lead agency. This was a technical issue, and we deferred, and quite rightly, to FAA. FAA backed the U.S. sponsored landing system. This, in turn, was backed by various and sundry U.S. and foreign companies, which stood to gain if that system were adopted as the international standard. Again, you see, aviation is very international. You can't have different airports around the world using different technical landing systems. They all have to be compatible, so you have to have one standard. That's what ICAO does. ICAO sets all of these international standards.

My own view is that we didn't handle that issue very well. We had to defer to our technical experts, obviously. I don't know that anyone in the Department of State even understood fully the real, technical complexities of the issue, so we supported the FAA

position. We conducted a worldwide campaign. My office was sending out cables to our Embassies all over the world, with instructions to go to the governments to which they were accredited and represent the U.S. system as a superior technical system, etc. And the British were doing the same thing with their Embassies. So we had to have an ICAO conference to sort all of this out. It lasted three weeks.

We won, and the British lost.

Q: Did we ask our Embassies to approach governments?

WHITE: Absolutely. We did a lot of that. In the end, as I say, we won, but at the cost of a nasty, public fight with the British. I always thought that we would have done better to avoid that, if we could have done so, but it was an issue where we essentially deferred to the technical people.

Ironically, years later I ran into an FAA official who told me that, while the U.S. system was chosen, it had all kinds of bugs and problems. And even at the outset, there were people in the U.S. who considered that the British Doppler system was actually a better system. Anyway, this gives you a flavor of some of the things that we did.

Q: Were there other ICAO issues that you were involved in?

WHITE: Yes. The issue which, I would say, tormented everybody in aviation was terrorism. When I came back to Washington in 1975, I quickly learned that the Department of State really was not paying much attention to this issue. For a long time we had no apparatus in the Department to deal with it. I was seized with it, of course, because we were dealing with aviation security, which was part of my brief, so to speak.

ICAO rules and regulations appear in what are called "annexes." Technically, they are annexes to the Chicago Convention of 1944. We, of course, always send our delegates to attend all of these meetings where these things are thrashed out. This is a process which goes on all the time. At this time in particular, terrorism was getting very serious. When an aircraft would be hijacked somewhere, the Seventh Floor of the State Department [where the Secretary of State and his principal advisers have their offices] would get terribly interested. They would audibly wonder: "What's going on here?" I could give you one incident. (End of tape)

Q: Al, you were saying that the Seventh Floor gets interested in some of these hot issues.

WHITE: But only in fits and starts. I came home one Friday night in September 1976 to supervise some work that we were having done on our house. Then I got a phone call from the Operations Center. A TWA plane had been hijacked. Although I had just gotten home, I had to return to the State Department. And I didn't leave the Department until 6:00 AM the following morning.

This turned into a nightmare. The plane was hijacked from the U.S. to Canada. It then went on to Iceland and the UK. It ended up in France.

Q: Did this incident get publicity?

WHITE: Oh, a great deal of publicity at the time. During that night, of course, we were going by phone from one of our Embassies to another. We started off talking to our Embassy in Ottawa, in Canada. Then to our Embassy in Iceland. Then to our Embassy in London. Then to our Embassy in Paris. I remember during that night, during that long vigil, while we were up there in the Operations Center, we had FAA people with us, of course. Seventh Floor people would come in, some of them in tuxedos. Obviously, they had been to dinner parties in Georgetown. They were terribly interested in what was happening. They said: "This is terrible!" Well, that hijacking incident ended in Paris, when the French Police shot out the tires on the aircraft. By the way, these terrorists were Croatians who wanted their political case to be heard.

However, a week later, when the episode was over, no one in the Department was the least bit interested in this hijacking incident. In other words, the interest in terrorism was episodic.

About that time, though, the Department did establish the Office to Combat Terrorism. I always thought that it had a kind of unwieldy title, but it was badly needed. We needed full-time, senior attention to this whole area of terrorism, meaning, of course, terrorism in its broad context, and not just aviation. I was delighted that this step had been taken.

Q: Who was in charge of that office? Do you remember?

WHITE: Ambassador Doug Heck. Later, Ambassador Tony Quainton took over that job. He headed that office toward the end of my tour in aviation affairs.

I established very close relations with that office. We both established very close relations with the Security Division at FAA, which had some outstanding people in it.

Nevertheless, the terrorism problem got worse and worse. The Operations Center in the State Department had standing instructions on whom to call if a terrorist incident occurred anywhere in the world and would naturally go down the list and call the designated person on this list.

Every time there was a plane crash abroad and every time there was a hijacking, guess who got the call?

Q: Al White.

WHITE: Yours truly, day or night. I remember one Sunday afternoon when I was in bed with influenza. The phone rang, and nobody even introduced himself. I was just plugged

into a conversation between two people. I had no idea what they were talking about at first. Then, gradually, it came to me. One caller was in Madrid and the other was in Washington. Two Boeing 747s had crashed into each other at Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. Do you remember that tragedy? Almost 600 people were killed. Finally, I interjected and said: "Will someone tell me what's going on?" It was the DCM in Madrid who was on the phone to the Department's Operations Center.

So then, of course, I had to call the FAA and make all sorts of other phone calls. I could never get the Operations Center to call other people in my office. I sent them a duty roster. I thought that it was only fair that these phone calls should be spread around on weekends. But the Operations Center would never go to the staff. They'd always come to me. Well, I understood that. I was the Chief of the Division.

I'll tell you. To this day I don't like the sound of a telephone, because you never knew what has happened.

Q: Did these calls come to you often?

WHITE: Oh, I might get two or three of these calls at home per week. Then, maybe for a month, I'd only get one or two calls. I certainly got a lot of these phone calls. Of course, when I was called, I never knew what it was about. I never knew whether it was my sister calling to say "hello," or the Operations Center.

Terrorism became a very big issue. I remember going to London and Ottawa with Tony Quainton in this connection. We were working on something called the Bonn Declaration, which was a multilateral agreement on how to deal with terrorism in the air.

Then, another aspect of terrorism that everyone got interested in terrorism legislation. Senator Javits [Republican, New York] became very interested.

Q: He was kind of a bulldog.

WHITE: Perhaps this is worth talking about.

Q: I was his control officer a couple of times.

WHITE: Oh, were you?

Q: I became quite well acquainted with him. Actually, I rather liked him. He was a very interesting guy.

WHITE: I didn't see much of him, but I ended up seeing a lot of his staff.

Q: John Cornham and Dan Zabel both worked for Senator Javits.

WHITE: I forget their names. Of course, one of the things that we had to do was to write

evaluations on congressional bills. You know how that works in the State Department. A bill is introduced, and then a process begins. The bill is sent around to all of the offices in the Department that might have an interest in it. The bill would always go to the Legal Adviser's Office. If it dealt with aviation, it would come to us, and it might go to half a dozen bureaus. The views of all of those bureaus were sent to "L" [Office of the Legal Adviser of the Department of State]. Then "L" would send the coordinated views of the Department of State to "H" [Bureau of Congressional Relations], and "H" sent our views to Congress. You know this process.

That was a very time-consuming process. Of course, the memo from "H" to us, asking for our views, had red borders, which meant that we had to answer it in a given, rather short, period of time.

Well, Senator Javits had an interest in terrorism and introduced legislation to deal with it.

Q: What did Senator Javits' legislation provide for?

WHITE: It contained punitive measures that would be taken against governments that aided or abetted terrorists. That was the general focus of it.

Q: Was the Javits bill ultimately enacted in some form or another?

WHITE: Therein lies the tale. We had problems with the Javits bill because of the way it was worded. I think that "L" also had problems with the way it was worded.

The officer handling aviation affairs in "H" at the time was a very capable and competent person. The problem was that, because of the way "H" operated then, and maybe still does, it was very difficult for anyone in the Department to deal directly with Congress, or with congressional staff on the Hill. Everything had to go through "H." Well, "H" only has so many people.

Q: And they're not experts on many issues.

WHITE: Not only that. Even if they were experts on some things, you can't be an expert on everything. When you get into legislation, you know, "the devil is in the details." The nitty gritty of the language becomes important. To make a long story short, the Javits bill moved a lot faster than anyone expected, and it came to the attention of Secretary of State Vance. He was very unhappy with this bill. I believe that he was taken aback because the handling of the bill had gone so far, so quickly, before coming to his attention.

So we were instructed, in effect, to open negotiations with Senator Javits' staff. With that mandate from on high, off we went to Capitol Hill. I say "We," meaning that I represented my office, in addition to people from "L" and from some other parts of the Department of State. Tony Quainton's office was involved. At least I think that it was during his tenure as the Ambassador in charge of terrorism matters.

Q: Was there somebody from the FAA?

WHITE: Yes. We all sat down at a table across from members of Senator Javits' staff. Javits' senior staffer was a woman, but I forget her name. However, the point is that it was almost like negotiating with a foreign government. Javits' staff had their position and we had ours. However, by talking back and forth...

Q: Was there someone there to handle the translations?

WHITE: [Laughter] I don't think that it got quite that bad. We developed personal relationships. In the end we developed a bill which, I guess, everybody could live with.

However, this experience only reinforced the view which I'd had for a long time. That is, you cannot deal with Congress by doing everything through "H." Now, "H" was involved in this process. I'm sure that they had someone at the table in Javits' office. They should have had. However, "H" cannot do it all by itself. I think that the problem here was not so much bureaucratic. Maybe it involved our political masters. There was a sense that these were all sensitive issues and that we couldn't permit any Tom, Dick, or Harry to go up to Congress, because they might say the wrong thing.

Q: I think that this attitude developed in the 1960s and 1970s. I know that Loy Henderson [former Undersecretary for Political Affairs in the Department of State] actively encouraged all State Department people to deal directly with their own Congressmen. When I entered the Foreign Service, I believe that there was a requirement that when any Foreign Service Officer was on home leave or between assignments, he was expected to go up and talk to his Senators and Congressman. You were not expected to report back to the Department. You were expected to express your personal views. I think that that was the way it should be.

WHITE: Certainly, we were encouraged to contact our Congressmen and Senators, and I'm going back to the same period that you're talking about. We were not given instructions to discuss issues of state, but simply to go up and see our Congressmen. Then the Congressman or Senator could look at you and see that you don't have two heads or horns, that you're a human being, and that you're one of his constituents. By the way, I have done this over the years. I have always made it a point to go and call on my Congressman, not to discuss particular issues but to say "hello" and have a conversation.

Apart from that kind of contact, institutionally there has to be a system whereby "H" always coordinates official contacts with Congress and is always in control of official contacts. However, such a system should not inhibit the kind of relations that you have to have between the staffers and the people who are supposedly informed about the nitty, gritty details of a given subject. Legislation is a matter of detail.

Q: Especially economic issues.

WHITE: Well, any kind of issue.

Q: But it's the political issues which are particularly troublesome when they are particularly sensitive.

WHITE: You have to have a mechanism to deal with these relationships. I don't know whether they have it now. That's why this legislation had gotten away from us. There had been no real contact between the Department of State and Javits. It was all just bureaucratic paper shuffling. You couldn't expect anybody in "H" to understand the full implications of all the very obscure phraseology in bills. As you know, in this context, commas and semi-colons become important. This was a good example of that.

Q: What ultimately happened in this case?

WHITE: The bill was so bad in its original form, as I recall it, that some of our allies would have to be put on a kind of black list of countries against which we would take certain measures. The final version of that bill had not been completed at the time I left the aviation office, so I don't know the final form of that legislation. However, I know that finally a bill was put together which the administration could live with.

I don't want to address the specific contents of the bill because I don't want to rely on my own memory of it. However, the point is that we had a problem that could have been avoided with the proper kind of interface between congressional staffers and working stiffs in the State Department. There was a failure in the system, and I'm not sure whether it's been corrected even now. We should be encouraging contact between officers in the State Department and congressional staffers, always with proper coordination.

It has seemed to me that when I'm about to leave a job, some crisis comes up which throws my schedule off. The final thing I had to deal with in the Office of Aviation was safety issues. In May of 1979, there was a tragic accident when a DC-10 jet aircraft crashed in Chicago with heavy loss of life. I read this at the time and thought that this didn't involve us. This happened to a domestic airline on a domestic flight. There was nothing international about this.

However, I learned a lesson about aviation from this experience. Everything about aviation is international now. As I said, the plane was a DC-10, manufactured by McDonnell-Douglas. When the NTSB [National Transportation Safety Board] looked into the accident, the cause seemed to be the way the engines were mounted on the wings. The finding was sufficiently serious that the Director of the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] grounded all DC-10 aircraft operated by U.S. airlines in the U.S. That seemed like a perfectly proper thing to do.

Nevertheless, the Director of the FAA then realized that, while he had grounded, let's say, American Airlines DC-10s, a lot of foreign owned airlines also had DC-10s. Some of them were flying to the U.S.. So he grounded them, too. He wouldn't permit them to land at U.S. airports. Initially, the governments of these foreign owned airlines having DC-10s were sympathetic. They said: "Oh, sure, if there's a problem, we should ground our

planes." They did this, and these governments said: "Now we'll take a look at the problem."

Well, these countries did this. However, they have their own safety experts and their own version of the FAA. They looked at their planes and said: "We don't see any problem with our DC-10s. We are not going to amend the airworthiness certificates of our DC-10s. As far as we are concerned, these planes can land in New York, under the existing, bilateral agreements."

Well, politically, I can understand the bind the FAA was in. It is very hard to zap American airlines but permit foreign-owned airlines to fly their DC-10s into the U.S. Here, again, as with the Concorde, we had a problem. There were international rules and regulations involved, to which we were a party. We normally did not look behind an air certification by a country as advanced as England or France, for example. As it happened, many of the planes of the European airlines were then DC-10s.

Do you remember Freddie Laker of Laker Airways, a low-cost air carrier between London and New York? His entire fleet was composed of DC-10s. In the case of Swissair, the bulk of their fleet was DC-10s.

So, in a word, all hell broke loose. At this point, because of personnel changes, Mike Styles had just retired, so we had no sitting Director of the Office of Aviation Affairs in the State Department. The DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State] responsible for aviation affairs was traveling. Jules Katz was the Assistant Secretary of Economic Affairs at the time. I remember calling Jules Katz at home during this mess. In a word, the Europeans were furious. Here we were, interfering with what they regarded as their legal rights. So, what to do?

We had to put together a delegation and fly to Paris. I was selected to chair this delegation. Normally, the Assistant Secretary or the Office Director would have headed the delegation, given the importance of this matter. However, in their absence, I was the one chosen to head the American delegation.

We walked into a lion's den. The European civil air authorities had a European civil aviation coordinating group. We went there with our delegation...

Q: Was this to Brussels?

WHITE: No, to Paris. Our delegation included lawyers from the State Department and the FAA, but our case was very, very weak, and we knew it. We had our delegation lined up on one side of the table and, on the opposite side of the table, were the European delegations, headed by a Swiss, whose name was Werner Guldimann, whom we knew very well. He was one of the grand old men of international aviation. In a crunch, he was usually on our side on international aviation issues, but he was tough as nails and truly formidable. Sitting next to him on either side were representatives of all of the European civil aviation authorities.

They just blasted us from dawn till dusk. I remember that we were all ducking out through side entrances to avoid the press.

We had a political problem but we also had a legal problem. There was no easy solution here. I remember that I let our chief lawyer from the State Department do most of the talking, because it was a highly legalistic discussion. Of course, we had to engage in this discussion because the European airlines couldn't appear to their own publics not to be doing something. Many negotiations are determined, not by the thought that they're going to resolve anything, but rather, for various reasons, both sides feel a compulsion to talk. So we talked all day. However, at the end of the day, the Swiss chairman came around the end of the table to me, and we had a little private conversation. He said: "Look, we know that you've got a political problem. Legal arguments notwithstanding, let's set that aside and solve the problem so that the planes can get back in the air." In other words, he was saying, "Solve your political problem, and then the other problem will disappear."

I remember going back to our Embassy in Paris with our delegation. The embassy was closed, but I knew that we had to send a message back to Washington. They had to have a report by the opening of business in the State Department the next morning. You know how delegations are. They quibble over language. Each agency represented argues about adding or taking out a certain phrase. I knew we didn't have time for that.

At this point we were using the office of the Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs of the Embassy in Paris. His secretary was still in the office at this point in the evening. She was very good. I didn't want to prepare a draft telegram. I knew that if I did this, the other members of the delegation would all nitpick it to death. It was late by this time, and we were all exhausted. All any of us wanted was to go out and have dinner and then go to bed. So I started to dictate a cable, rapid fire.

The Minister Counselor said to me: "You mean that you're not going to do it in draft and circulate it?" This was a typical, Foreign Service reaction. I said: "We don't have time. Now, if any of you have any problems, stop me while I'm dictating." So I just dictated a cable to the secretary. None of the other members of the U.S. delegation said a word! And it worked! I never got an important message cleared faster. They all sat there, they all listened, they all nodded, but they weren't given a piece of paper to fiddle with. If I had given these bureaucrats a piece of paper, they would feel honor bound to fiddle with it and change it. So the cable went off IMMEDIATE to Washington.

A lot of the message consisted of paraphrasing the legal positions. However, the main message at the end was: "We have to solve the problem by getting the planes back in the air." In other words, the technical people had to come up with a solution so that our planes could be allowed to fly again. Then, of course, the European planes could be allowed to fly.

This negotiation was the last major thing that I did in that office. That was at the end of my tour, four very crowded and eventful years.

Q: Weren't you also responsible for overseas sales of aircraft?

WHITE: I was about to mention that next. That was also part of my brief, which I took seriously.

Now, I should have mentioned at the outset the organization of the division, or AVP, as it was known. I was the head of the office. I had a deputy, a very able fellow.

Q: What was his name?

WHITE: Sam Keiter. Did you know Sam?

Q: Yes.

WHITE: Sam was our expert on a very arcane but very important field, covering fares and user charges. I alluded to that earlier. It was a very complex field. He was extremely good at that. I was very thankful that I had him on my staff because it was not an area where, frankly, I had either the time or the inclination to get too deeply involved. Then we had Joan Gravatt, who handled ICAO matters and everything multilateral. Of course, she had wonderful, background knowledge of ICAO as an institution. She provided continuity in the office. Then we had a junior or middle grade officer. That depended on the circumstances, and his rank varied from time to time. He was the low man on the totem pole.

First of all, he did what every low man on the totem pole does. He did whatever needed to be done. We also had two secretaries in the office. I assigned responsibility for the commercial part of our operation to this junior or middle grade officer. I didn't mention this previously, but at the time we had full-time Civil Aviation Attaches: in London and Paris. A position which we had had in Rome had recently been abolished. In Beirut we also had a Civil Aviation Attache. His name was Len Dwor.

Len Dwor's position was different from the others. The other Civil Aviation Attaches handled everything, including the normal route right questions. Len's job involved almost entirely aircraft sales. Of course he was stationed in Beirut because the Near East was where a lot of the big contracts to purchase airplanes were being finalized. The Arabs had money, and all of the Arab governments were buying aircraft. He more or less reported to me, in the sense that he had a Washington base of operations. We moved Len to Rome when Beirut became too unstable and unsafe.

I took the commercial side very seriously.

Let me say a few words about the Airbus family of aircraft. Airbus, of course, is a European airplane built by a consortium. It is mainly German and French but also includes much smaller participation by British and Spanish governmental units. The plane was heavily subsidized. The Europeans had made up their minds that they were not

going to accept an American monopoly in large aircraft manufacturing. And that was understandable. Our problem wasn't with that. Our problem was with the way this plane was heavily subsidized. The Airbus company was such that it wasn't very transparent. Many of its internal, financial arrangements were still secret.

Q: The Europeans, of course, could never have produced that kind of aircraft without heavy government subsidies.

WHITE: Probably, that is true. Still, there are rules and regulations in this field...

Q: Right.

WHITE: And considerations of international trade. We really leaned pretty heavily on the Europeans...

Q: Given the economic period, this was a difficult problem because Boeing Aircraft is such an overwhelming presence in the area. It's not good to have a single supplier, a monopolistic...

WHITE: At that time we didn't have a single supplier. Boeing, of course, was huge, but we also had McDonnell-Douglas and we had Lockheed, which made the Lockheed 1011, if you'll remember. It was a very good aircraft, but it had some bad luck.

Airbus had a very good sales team in the U.S., headed by a very prestigious American. The Airbus team came around to see us in the Department of State with their dog and pony show, with slides and all of that. They showed us that about one-third of the value of Airbus airplane components were made in the United States, particularly the avionics. I don't think that anyone ever questioned this fact. Perhaps we can get into that later, in another discussion. We can get into the whole area of what constitutes an American company and what constitutes an American product. It's getting very, very ambiguous.

We were always watching Airbus. Our concern was that in selling their airplane they were mixing apples and oranges, quite apart from the subsidy issue. They were offering all kinds of things that really had nothing to do with aviation.

That's one aspect that we watched very, very carefully, as well as aircraft sales generally. There was always big competition in selling aircraft around the world. In this connection we did our best to help American companies, although we didn't have much staff to do it. The American companies came to see us, and we tried to play an active role.

When we dealt with the subject of air landing rights, one of the repeated questions which came up was that other governments would say: "Well, we buy our aircraft from you, so you should give us better route rights." We always maintained, I think a bit hypocritically, that route rights have nothing to do with the sale of aircraft. We said that where a foreign carrier buys its aircraft is its business. Whether it gets landing rights in Chicago has nothing to do with where it buys its airplanes.

I don't think that the Europeans play the game that way and didn't play it that way at that time. We regarded this as an unconscionable mixing of apples and oranges. Of course, we had our own, vested interests which we were also protecting. It wasn't in our interest to establish any relationship between commercial sales and route rights. So we always resisted that kind of linkage.

What else was of interest in the aviation office? Oh, yes, I had an interesting trip to Cuba in the midst of all of this.

Q: Really?

WHITE: Again, it was during the last, crowded months of that last year [1979] I spent in the Office of Aviation Affairs. In a quiet way we were trying to achieve an accommodation of sorts with Cuba. We had...

Q: I don't remember that.

WHITE: It was nothing big or important, but we did permit Americans of Cuban origin to fly from the United States to Cuba. That is, Cubans who had fled to the United States. We allowed them to return to Cuba for visits. Cuba lies under many of the main air routes between North and South America, so Cuba is inevitably a player in the field of international aviation. Anything about aviation is international, and we couldn't ignore Cuba.

There was the question of overflights, American planes flying over Cuba. We had this question of legitimate travel by people of Cuban origin to go back to Cuba and see their families, from time to time. Remember, too, that a lot of planes had been hijacked to Cuba during that period.

However, in connection with hijackings of planes to Cuba, for whatever reason, Castro tried to cooperate, up to a point, in getting these hijacked planes and passengers back to U.S. air space.

Anyway, we had purely technical issues with Cuba which we couldn't ignore. This reached the point where we felt that we had to discuss these issues with the Cubans. We sent a delegation to Havana, which I headed, although the issues were heavily technical. We always insisted that U.S. delegations had to be headed by a State Department officer. Our delegation included lawyers from the State Department and FAA, as well as technical experts.

Q: This would have been around 1978?

WHITE: This was in May, 1979. The U.S. had an "Interests Section" in Havana, as you know. In fact, our old Embassy was still functioning in Havana as the U.S. Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy. It was headed by a Foreign Service Officer who had a

small staff. One of the junior officers from this staff went out to the airport in Havana to meet us. We had flown down to Havana on an FAA plane. We spent about five days in Havana. We had a wonderful time.

You know, the Cubans are such charming people. This effort which Castro undertook to make communists out of them couldn't work.

Q: What was your impression of Cuba at that point?

WHITE: It was very odd. We were housed in a hotel which, before Castro, had been a very modernistic hotel.

Q: In Havana?

WHITE: Right on the main drag in Havana, [the Malecon]. It was tacky and run down. You had the sense of getting into a time machine in 1979 and then getting out of it in 1959. Everything was in the style of 1959, when Castro took over Cuba.

Some members of our delegation, some of our FAA colleagues, knew Cuba very well from the old days, either when they were in Havana on official visits or as tourists during the years before Castro. On the plane to Havana, someone told us that the Cubans were getting ready for an international communist shindig in Havana. When we got to Havana, it was just like Central Europe, like something you might see in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 1950. There were huge pictures of Castro and Soviet bigwigs, 10 stories high, with all of this elaborate paraphernalia and propaganda. In preparation for this conference, we were told every toilet seat in Havana had been removed to be repainted. [Laughter] We were amused by this.

We checked into our hotel and then went up to our rooms. We gathered later in the lobby to go to the American Embassy or, I should say, to the "U.S. Interests Section." We compared notes, and the story was true. Every toilet seat had been removed! They were repainting them. Cuba was a bizarre world. It had a lot of the paraphernalia of communism. Yet, when you talked to the Cuban people, they were charming. They were very correct. We negotiated in a very ample and very well provided conference room. Off the conference room a little buffet had been set up. Between sessions we would go over and have hors d'oeuvres and coffee.

The Cuban delegation for this meeting was rather interesting. The head of their delegation was obviously a kind of political commissar, a youngish, gloomy looking fellow who didn't seem to know much about aviation. He was there to watch the operation. However, the real leader of the Cuban delegation was a woman lawyer, who was extremely good. Our lawyers admired her very much for her competence. She spoke flawless English. Obviously, she came from a very good background. She was probably in her 40s or 50s and extremely distinguished and cultured. According to our lawyers, she knew her aviation law, backwards and forwards.

The Cubans wined us and dined us. They gave us a little bus and told us that we could take the bus anywhere we wanted to go. Of course, we knew that the driver was the intelligence agent, so of course they knew where we were going. One day we went to one of the beaches on the North coast, not far from Havana. It was absolutely beautiful, with pine trees fringing the beach. It was empty. Nobody there. And that's when I realized what Castro had done to his country.

Cuba, for these past 40 years, could have been one of the wealthiest countries in the Western Hemisphere on a per capita basis. If Castro had a hangup with the "Yankees," the "Gringos," he could have had planes landing there every day, coming from Europe, Boeing 747 aircraft loaded with European tourists, to use those beaches. Just think of the national income that Cuba would have been getting. It was sad to see how much had been thrown away by the Castro regime.

Q: Presumably, such resources as they had went into education, health, and the Cuban military forces.

WHITE: I presume so. But the country looked shabby and run down. We visited Old Havana, which is a lovely city. Of course, that goes back to Spanish colonial days. It's a very beautiful, charming old place. However, the island of Cuba obviously suffered from a bizarre kind of government. Again, it was very much like Russia. Cuba had an elite which had everything. We were taken one day to a special store where you could buy Cuban cigars, champagne, the best imported whisky, and the best imported gourmet cheeses. There was all of this stuff, which was only for the Cuban leadership. We were permitted to go in there because we were state guests.

But on a personal basis the Cubans were an exceedingly charming people. As I said, when we arrived in Havana, we were met by a junior officer from our "Interests Section." He was a very capable young man who spoke very good Spanish. He had us to dinner at his home one of the nights that we were there. He was a junior officer, as I say. You wouldn't expect that he had a very "posh" establishment. In fact, he had a huge villa, with a beautiful swimming pool and a staff of servants running all over the place. I was kidding him. I said: "How come a junior officer like you rates this establishment?" He said: "Oh, it's very simple. Whenever a diplomat arrives in Havana, someone from the Office of Protocol meets him and shows him about half a dozen villas. All confiscated, of course, from their rightful owners. You just pick a villa. And the Protocol people say: 'Okay, that's your villa.'"

It was a fascinating experience. I came away with the thought that so much had been wasted there. Cuba could have been booming with prosperity for many decades, were it not for this regime which was foisted on them. And it's totally foreign to their temperament. The Cubans are Latins who have that bubbly kind of personality. I remember one night when we were being wined and dined at the Hotel Nacional, which always was, even many years ago, the number one hotel.

After a fabulous dinner we were walking out. They showed us, on the floor of the lobby,

a map of Cuba, inlaid in marble. We were admiring this map of Cuba on the floor. It was a map of the whole island. I was thinking my own thoughts. One of the Cubans came up to me and whispered to me, moving his toe to a certain point on the map. He said: "That's the Bay of Pigs!"

When I was later in Venezuela, I saw a lot of Cubans and learned a lot more about Cuba and what had been going on there. Tourism alone could put that country at the top of the heap in Latin America in terms of per capita income. Well, Cuba is now getting tourists from Europe.

Q: But presumably, whenever Castro finally dies, we will reestablish trade relationships, abandon our trade embargo, and all kinds of things will happen.

WHITE: Well, presumably. I'm sure that's what the Cuban community is waiting for down in Miami.

Q: Anything more about your experience in aviation affairs?

WHITE: I think I've covered it. It was a very interesting and crowded period of four years. I learned a lot about aviation. As it turned out, I never went back to the aviation field, although during all of my assignments after that I handled aviation issues.

From the office of aviation affairs I went to the NATO Defense College.

Q: How did that come about?

WHITE: Well, I was at that point again in terms of an ongoing assignment. I was generally in that zone where people are expected to go off for advanced training or to one of the war colleges. Actually, I think that I had a choice.

Q: Could you have been assigned to the Senior Seminar in Foreign Policy in the State Department?

WHITE: I don't know whether the Senior Seminar was an option, but I remember that several of the military colleges were. Maybe the National War College or one of the service colleges was...

Q: How did you think that that kind of assignment compared with, say, the Senior Seminar or the National War College?

WHITE: It's hard to say, because I didn't have that kind of experience. I chose the NATO Defense College in Rome, because NATO interested me. I had served in NATO countries, after all. NATO was part of my interest in Western Europe. So I went to the NATO Defense College.

The NATO Defense College had one disadvantage. It only lasted for six months.

Actually, it lasted for just less than six months. Not a full year.

Q: So you had to move your family there? Did you still have just two children?

WHITE: Yes, two kids. The other disadvantage was that I went there without knowing my onward assignment after the NATO Defense College was over. I don't know what the problem was with Personnel. It was assumed that assignment to the NATO Defense College was the prelude to assignment to a NATO country. However, they couldn't tell me which country it would be, so I went to the NATO Defense College blind, as it were. I didn't want to lose the opportunity to attend the NATO Defense College, so I took the assignment.

Q: Tell us about the NATO Defense College.

WHITE: The origin of the establishment of the NATO Defense College actually rested with Gen Dwight Eisenhower. In the early 1950s Eisenhower went back to Europe to command NATO as SACEUR [Supreme Allied Commander, Europe]. Of course, with a military background, his way of thinking was in terms of staff. He looked around and saw that there was no Staff College for NATO. He thought there should be one and that people being assigned to NATO, whether military or civilians, should first go to the NATO Defense College to get to know each other and study NATO structures and problems. He thought that this would equip them to serve in NATO Commands more effectively.

Of course, at the time, the NATO Defense College had, and still has, a lot of military personnel, as well as some civilians. The tradition developed that we sent about six or eight military officers and one Foreign Service Officer to the NATO Defense College. There were two sessions a year. The NATO Defense College is located just outside the center of Rome.

Q: Why did they put the NATO Defense College in Rome?

WHITE: I think that they were just divvying up NATO structures. They didn't want to have everything in Brussels or Paris. They were dividing up the pie, I suppose. Some deal was struck with the Italians. The Italians offered a beautiful site in what is called EUR, a suburb of Rome. It was probably a good deal, from the financial point of view. It has a beautiful building. The Italian military provided the support for the NATO Defense College.

Q: Was it like the National War College?

WHITE: I'm sure that it was very similar.

Q: There were two sessions a year of six months each?

WHITE: That's right.

Q: And all member countries of NATO had some officer level students assigned to the NATO Defense College?

WHITE: That's correct.

Q: Were they mid-level officers?

WHITE: Most of them were colonels or Navy captains. A few of them had been selected for promotion as general officers. The usual rank was Major to Colonel, FSO-1 level for civilians.

Q: Did you mainly have lectures on military strategy and history?

WHITE: I must say that it was better than I expected it to be. It was much broader than I expected. I thought that the course would be almost wholly military in focus and that I might be a little bit out of place there. But it wasn't that way at all.

I was the one State Department representative. By the way, the Department of State provided me with a very nice apartment within walking distance of the college. Our class also included about eight U.S. military officers from the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines.

Each NATO country had a group of students at the college, varying in size. The British probably had about 12, the Germans probably had 12 or 13, and the Turks and the Greeks probably had two each. The size of the national component depended on the size of the country.

The college was very well organized. The commandant was a British Admiral at that time. He had previously served in Washington. He was an extremely competent man. He had three Deputies. One was an American, a civilian from the Pentagon; one was an Italian General by definition because the Italians were the host government. The Italians provided the facilities. The third Deputy was a Norwegian General. There was a faculty consisting of military officers and some civilians.

Each day began with a lecture given by a prominent authority in his field. The lectures were very broad in scope. They were not purely military at all. Sample subjects included very broad economically and strategically related matters. One such lecture was entitled: "The Economic Future of NATO." The college always brought in people from the U.S. or Europe to give these lectures. They were renowned figures in their respective fields.

There would then be a coffee break, followed by an hour and a half of extensive questions. The lecture lasted for an hour. Maybe half an hour for coffee, and then an hour and a half for discussion. That took up the morning. By the way, Martin Hillenbrand [former Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs] was one of the speakers. Robert Strausz-Hupe, later U.S. ambassador in Ankara, was also one of the lecturers. The

lecturers were very high caliber people. Then, in the afternoon, we broke up into smaller groups.

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Q: This is Wednesday, October 15, 1997. I'm John Harter, interviewing Al White for the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training and discussing Al's life and career in the Foreign Service. Al, before we proceed further, is there anything else that you'd like to cover or anything that you might have missed somewhere along the line?

WHITE: John, when we talked about my four years in the Office of Aviation, I don't think that we talked about deregulation of the aviation industry.

My experience in the Office of Aviation straddled two administrations. The first, of course, was the Ford administration. Then, roughly midway through my tour, Jimmy Carter was elected President.

Q: That was a long period. Who was the head of the Civil Aviation Board [CAB]?

WHITE: Alfred Kahn was brought in as Chairman of the CAB.

President Carter decided that the time was ripe for deregulation of the aviation industry. I don't think that there's any doubt that the time had come to revamp our aviation laws. The aviation industry had been heavily regulated. That, of course, rose out of the fact that it was an infant industry. Fares and routes were regulated.

Q: It was sort of treated as a public utility.

WHITE: Exactly. It was regulated in that way. Just as the railroads were, at that point in time. It was micromanaged, actually, or microregulated. Many of those regulations were clearly obsolete.

For example, one of my jobs was to negotiate with foreign governments on air fares. I recall once negotiating with the Spanish about air fares. The Spanish chairman and I were discussing actual fare levels across the table. Such as: "How about $415 for a round trip ticket?" He would answer: "No, we want it to be $600." Of course, this was ridiculous, as I realized at the time. What on earth do bureaucrats know about air fares? I mention this just as an illustration of how heavily the aviation industry was regulated at that time.

President Carter launched a major attempt to deregulate the aviation industry. Alfred Kahn was an economist from Cornell University. He held very strong views on competition in airline service, or the lack thereof. Of course, the Department of State supported that concept, first of all, because it was the President's decision.

Q: It made sense.

WHITE: It made a lot of sense.

Q: Although there was a very difficult transition period.

WHITE: The difficulty at the outset was our international agreements. Other governments didn't believe in deregulation. We were nearly alone in believing in deregulation.

Q: We were converted.

WHITE: We saw the light and went ahead in our usual, enthusiastic manner. We had launched a great crusade for deregulation.

Q: Most other airlines were government owned.

WHITE: That's correct. Most of them were national airlines, such as Alitalia, Air France, or British Airways, and so forth. These governments weren't interested in deregulation. In fact, many of them thought that deregulation was an absolutely appalling idea. Not just the European governments, but the South Americans and the Asians as well. The time had come for deregulation in the U.S., but not elsewhere. That created very real problems for us.

Al Kahn had a group of "Young Turks" over at the CAB, whom I knew and admired. They were very bright. However, they didn't really have any understanding of our international obligations which impacted on aviation. Their view was: "Throw open the whole industry to competition." Tell that to any other government in the world that believed in tit for tat and "I get rights to Chicago and you get rights to Bombay," and so forth. To say nothing of air fares. They didn't at all like the idea of having competition in air fares, either.

The old law was so absurd that an airline couldn't even offer a free ticket without permission from the U.S. Government. That is an example of how obsolete the law had become. However, deregulation did create major problems for us, and the ensuing battle really raged for about two years. Let's say roughly during the second half of my tour in the Office of Aviation.

Q: So you were centrally involved in that?

WHITE: I was involved, as everyone in the Office of Aviation was. However, we found ourselves, as the Department of State always finds itself, in this position, which is inherent in the nature of diplomacy. We found ourselves constantly being pressed by the "true believers" in the administration and constantly having to tell them: "Yes, this is all very good and all very wonderful, but we do have international obligations and we have agreements with these other countries." We said: "We can't just tear up these agreements unilaterally." So I presume that we were probably seen, as the Department of State is often seen, as foot dragging, not with it, not sufficiently enthusiastic, and not converted to

the cause, which was not the case. However, it was our responsibility to handle the international aspects of our aviation relations.

Not to dwell too long on this, but at the end of the day, about the time, or shortly before I left the Office of Aviation, the aviation industry was deregulated by statute. The vote was very lopsided. It was something like 365 members out of the total membership of the House of Representatives in favor of the bill and something like 95 Senators out of 100 in favor of the bill. As I say, it was a lopsided vote and it was very much a bipartisan vote. The CAB was sunseted [abolished after a transition period], a term which we used at the time. Thus, a very prestigious element in the U.S. Government was phased out of existence. I forget the actual year, but there was a transition period of three or four years, after which the CAB disappeared.

I often thought that every time that Congress creates an organization, it really ought to have a sunset provision, whereby the burden would be on Congress to renew the life of an organization, so that it doesn't continue to exist ad infinitum.

The CAB was not a large organization. It was relatively small, and its staff had many outstanding people. I think that many of them ended up working for the Department of Transportation.

Deregulation was one of the major themes of the Carter administration. The problem that some of us had with deregulation, apart from what I mentioned about our international, bilateral agreements with all of these foreign governments, and which I wondered about at the time, was safety.

Now, theoretically, of course, safety is one thing, and aviation economics are another thing. The twain should not meet. The FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] handles aviation safety, and the aviation industry is given the autonomy to set fares.

Q: And the National Transportation Safety Board?

WHITE: That handles the investigation of accidents. It is the accident investigation arm of the federal government.

The question was: can you really build a fire wall between the aviation industry itself and safety? After all, if you're going to have free entry into the aviation market, you're going to have situations where people will possibly be tempted to cut corners. There's nothing dishonorable about cutting costs...

Q: Especially when competition is enhanced.

WHITE: Exactly. The question was, and in my mind this still is an issue, can you really divorce the aviation industry from safety concerns? Can you make that a neat and clear-cut separation? I don't know. I guess that the jury is still out, in my mind. However, every now and then we read about air crashes.

Q: But some people say that it is safer to travel by plane than by automobile. At least statistically.

WHITE: That may be true. However, the question is: will airlines, in a really competitive situation, always give first priority to safety? Any enterprise will cut costs. That's the name of the game. In cutting costs to meet competition, in a wide open industry, the question is, do you get to the point where safety is endangered? Maybe the jury is still out on that. The aviation industry is certainly safe. I'm not saying that it's not, but every now and then you read about a crash where...

Q: An example of this was the Valu-Jet crash in Florida.

WHITE: There seems to be some indication that there may have been some factors where some people were so driven by perfectly valid economic considerations of cost that they may have cut the margins a little thin. We'll have to wait until the official report of the NTSB is issued.

In any case deregulation went forward. We now have deregulation of the airline industry. We have certainly achieved a situation where we have lower fares, at least in some cases. However, on the other hand, some would argue that the aviation industry is as concentrated today, if not more so, as it was before deregulation. In fact, that point has been put to Al Kahn, who is now a retired professor. I believe that he has acknowledged that. His explanation is that we haven't enforced the anti-trust laws sufficiently. Well, there you are, the pro and con of deregulation.

Q: Some of the other factors are that some of the relatively smaller communities are no longer served by airlines.

WHITE: That is correct. Not only that, but we have this hub operation. I don't know whether you've taken many flights through hubs, but when I was in my last job in commercial affairs in the Department, I often traveled to make speeches or go to conferences. I remember once going from Washington, DC, to Knoxville, Tennessee. Now Knoxville is not a particularly small city. It's a fairly good-sized city. I ended up flying, I think, to Charlotte, North Carolina, on a regular commercial jet. From there I was put on a little plane for the segment to Knoxville. Had I known in advance that this was going to happen, I would never have taken that flight. The plane I took from Charlotte to Knoxville was one of those little puddle hoppers. The same thing happened to me once in Georgia.

Q: I think that there will be more of that in the future, but these small airlines claim to have a pretty good safety record.

WHITE: They may have, but the point is that this is not really for the convenience of the customer. The whole point of deregulation was to let the customer decide and enjoy the benefits of free competition. Is the customer really better off? Theoretically, these are

interesting questions, but in any case deregulation is an accomplished fact. It is with us and it's not going to go away. Indeed, we now seem to be in the process, and with some degree of success, of extending that system to foreign countries as well. That's all I wanted to add on aviation. It was an interesting time to work in the Office of Aviation, when all of these things were happening, where basic aviation laws were being scrapped, and when a major U.S. Government agency was abolished.

Q: I believe that at the conclusion of our last session you described briefly the NATO Defense College and your experience there. Did you have any additional comment on that?

WHITE: I think that we covered that. I was very pleasantly surprised by it. It turned out to be a much more worthwhile exercise than I thought it would be. I think the course certainly achieved what General Eisenhower had in mind when he ordered the establishment of the NATO Defense College. That is, the NATO Defense College created working and personal relationships among officers of the various NATO member countries attending it.

By the way, at the NATO Defense College we took two major trips. These were long trips. One was from Rome to North America. We went to Washington, DC, and Norfolk, Virginia, to visit naval installations. We went out West to visit a SAC [Strategic Air Command] base and the White Sands, New Mexico proving grounds. We went up to New York and visited the UN. We went to Canada and visited Canadian installations. We also visited several NATO capitals in Europe. In the course of that kind of travel, and by the way, many of the officers had their wives with them, you get to know people on a much more personal basis. I would say that the development of the personal relationships is as important as the intellectual stimulus, as well as the concentration on the kinds of issues that NATO deals with.

I was always amused by the way that the Turks and the Greeks, who are traditional enemies, got along so well. And their wives as well. Proximity tends to create friction. However, in many of these situations people have common characteristics and food. The Turks and the Greeks are very much alike in their traditions, their food, drinks, and habits. At the NATO College, they got along splendidly. The only time that they acted coldly with each other was in official situations. They evidently felt that they had to be relatively cold toward each other during working hours, so to speak, but not socially.

I thought that the NATO Defense College was an excellent experience. Of course, everyone attending it was going on to another assignment in a NATO context. The course was a preliminary step to a NATO command or staff position. Of course, I also got to know our own military. It is important for diplomats to know and understand the military mind, to the extent that such a thing exists. You can argue that diplomacy is just one side of a coin, the other side of which is the military, in terms of defending and promoting the national interest.

The military mind is different. There is no question about that. What I noted was that all

military establishments tend to think more or less along the same lines. In other words, a German officer would tend to see things very much in the same way that an American officer would see them, whereas a German diplomat would see things differently. He would tend to see things more in the way that I did, as a diplomat. So the NATO Defense College provided an interesting interface between the diplomatic and the military. Of course, I had been in the Army myself and was not a novice in terms of the military mind. It was very interesting to see the interplay between these two modes of thinking. They are very different, and yet they can and should be very complementary.

The military have the concept of being assigned a mission. They insist that that mission be properly defined. Once that mission is defined, they then propose how they can best achieve it, with the resources they are given. Of course, the big if is what kind of resources they are given.

Q: There's always a tendency to want more resources, once you get into a real crisis of some sort involving the military.

WHITE: By the way, the Commandant of the NATO Defense College. He talked about this subject at great length. He said that the scenario for a discussion between a military force and its government goes like this. The government says to its military force: "We want you to do this or that." The military people then say to the government: "Okay, if you want us to do that, this is what we need to achieve that mission." If the answer by the government is: "No, we cannot give you those resources," then the military has to say: "Then you have to narrow or alter the mission." This is a very logical approach.

The other thing that I noticed about the military was that we have this fear of the military tending to grab power. We think of Napoleon or colonels in South America. My experience with the military is that they're quite content and quite ready to take orders from their superiors.

Indeed, you could argue that one of the problems in Germany under Hitler was that the German Army should have asserted itself more than it did. When it received orders from Hitler's government, it saluted and sought to carry them out. That is what the military tradition is. They tend not to question orders. They do what they are told to do. They salute smartly, turn on their heels, and go and do what they are told to do. So, ironically enough, there might have been a better situation in Europe had the German Army overthrown a legal government. By the way, Hitler's government, at the outset, was such a legal government. It came to power in a perfectly legitimate way. The President of the German Republic asked Hitler to form a government. By the way, the same thing happened in Italy when Mussolini took over.

The German and Italian governments, under Hitler and Mussolini, were not illegitimate at the outset. The natural reaction of a soldier is to obey the orders of his superiors. We expect the military to do that. We don't expect the military to question orders. You remember the famous incident we had with President Truman and General MacArthur. MacArthur was insubordinate and he was relieved from his position.

I think that, whether it's an assignment to the NATO College or any similar setting, there is a point where, to be effective, any diplomat has to spend some time with the military. The diplomat has to work with the military. He has to understand the mental processes of his military colleagues. They, in turn, have to understand his mental processes. That doesn't happen except through contact on a day to day basis, for a fairly intense period, even if only for a short space of time.

The disadvantage of the NATO Defense College was a practical one. It was only for six months. It was not a full academic year, and this made it difficult from the point of view of the assignment process. However, it was certainly well worth it, in my view.

Q: Was this experience of the NATO Defense College useful to you in preparation for your next assignment to a NATO country?

WHITE: Very much so. First of all, on the personal level, I later dealt with some of the Turkish officers and diplomats who were at the NATO Defense College with me during a subsequent assignment in Ankara. Obviously, one of the things that we dealt with in the NATO context was the relationship between the Greeks and the Turks is a very complex relationship. I knew well the Greek and Turkish officers and had many conversations with both. So I was able at least to begin to understand both of their points of view.

In a larger context, many of the issues with which NATO dealt were matters that involved Turkey, one way or another, directly or indirectly. So I think that the preparation was excellent for my assignment to the Embassy in Ankara.

Q: Did you go directly go Ankara or did you go first to Washington?

WHITE: I was transferred directly from Rome to Ankara.

Q: Then you didn't get all of the briefings in the Department.

WHITE: No, I didn't.

Q: Was that a disadvantage to you?

WHITE: Well, something very peculiar was happening. While I was at the NATO Defense College, I kept asking Personnel about my onward assignment. I ran into a stone wall. Nobody could tell me anything about this. Now, I think that anyone has to regard that kind of reaction as rather peculiar. I would call Personnel and I would be told nothing.

Q: That might not be too surprising at the beginning of your six-month assignment to the NATO Defense College. But at the end?

WHITE: I was assigned to Ankara only at the very end of my tour at the NATO Defense

College. Then I went back to Washington for personal reasons. I went into Personnel and inquired as to what had been going on. It's an interesting reflection on the way we deal with people in the Foreign Service.

Someone else had been assigned to a position in the Embassy in Ankara. The position was Financial Officer in the Economic Section.

I was ultimately assigned as Financial Officer. We had a program, as you know, of economic and military support for Turkey, including ESF funds [Economic Support Funds]. The level of those funds was influenced by our economic calculations and by balance of payments analysis. That was my job. I was not a financial economist. I spoke no Turkish. My assumption had been that, after the NATO Defense College, I would wind up in Rome or possibly in Germany, because of my German background.

For months the matter of my assignment after the NATO War College had been under consideration. The person first selected for the Financial Officer position did not want to go to Ankara, but our Personnel people were determined that this individual was going to be assigned to Ankara. This became an issue which was ultimately referred to the Director General of the Foreign Service. Well at the end of the day that person did not go to Ankara. That is when I received a phone call one evening, out of the blue, saying that I was being assigned to Ankara.

Q: Was this when you were in Washington on personal business?

WHITE: No, I was in the last week of my assignment to the NATO Defense College. You know, it's a rather embarrassing situation when all of your colleagues were telling you that they had their orders to go here or there. Many members of the class had their orders before they even went to the College. It's a natural question for people to ask: "Well, where are you going?" Having to say: "I don't know," sounds rather silly.

Q: It certainly is from so many points of view to have advance notice of an assignment. Among other things, so that you can concentrate your reading and preparations for the assignment.

WHITE: Obviously, that is true, to say nothing of language training, or at least SOME language training.

Q: Language training would logically be in addition to other subject matter in connection with an assignment to Turkey.

WHITE: The Department could have arranged for language training, had it wanted to do so. Anyway, that's how I was assigned to Ankara. In a way, it was an assignment by default. I was not a financial economist, I had no background in Turkish affairs, and I knew practically nothing of Turkey, except that I had visited Turkey with the class at the NATO Defense College. That was the sum and substance of my knowledge of Turkey. [Laughter]

Q: You said that for personal reasons you came to Washington at the end of your course at the NATO Defense College. Did you get some briefings on Turkey?

What was your first impression when you arrived in Ankara? That is, the country, the job, and the Embassy.

WHITE: Actually, I got my first impression before I even knew that I was going to be assigned there. In December, 1979, I had gone to Ankara with the NATO Defense College group. We visited Ankara and then Istanbul. This visit covered a crowded two or three days.

Q: You didn't go to the Embassy then?

WHITE: I did. Sure. I met people at the Embassy. I met Clay Nettles, who had been a colleague of mine in FSI economic training. He was then Economic Counselor in Ankara. In fact, he hosted a cocktail party for the NATO Defense College class.

Q: Then he was later your boss when you were assigned to Ankara?

WHITE: That's right, but neither of us knew that I was going to be assigned there at the time.

At that time Turkey was in a very dismal state of affairs. Every country has its ups and downs, and the Turks were definitely having one of their down periods. I think that 10 or 12 Americans had been killed in the previous year by terrorists in Turkey. They were all military, and all or most of them were killed in Istanbul.

The Turkish Government was a democratic government, but it was virtually powerless to govern. The political parties were at each other's throats. The country was in a state of impasse. It was a time of economic and political crisis. One result of this was terrorism on a very wide scale, all around the country. Businessmen were being murdered at their desks. Students were afraid to go to school, because the campuses had become battlegrounds for ideologically extremist groups. It was a classic case of a country virtually collapsing under the pressures of extremism from both Right and Left.

There were two major political parties. They were very Western oriented and moderate. One of them was headed by Suleiman Demirel, who led what you might have called the "Right of Center" party. The "Left of Center" party was headed by Bulent Ecevit.

Ecevit and Demirel were almost like Disraeli and Gladstone [Conservative and Liberal leaders in late 19th century Britain]. One of them would form a government, which would last for a while. Then the other one would replace him. Both of these men were Prime Ministers on several occasions.

When I arrived in Turkey, the government was headed by Prime Minister Demirel. The

country was in a bad way, economically, and this, of course, aggravated the political crisis in the country. Turkey has very little petroleum. They have to import most of their oil. They didn't have the money to pay for it.

I arrived in Turkey in March of 1980 by myself, by the way. Everything about this assignment was a little off the usual arrangement. I didn't bring my family with me and I wasn't going to bring them until I could see for myself if I wanted to bring them. The security situation was very tense. There were some parts of Turkey that you could argue were not under the effective control of the central government. It was one of the worst winters in years, everyone said.

Q: When did you arrive there?

WHITE: In March, 1980. There were electric power shortages all the time. People would give parties and not know whether or when the house would be plunged into darkness or when the electric stoves would go off. It was a bizarre time. Certainly, in those days Turkey was a hardship post, no question about that. The Economic Section, where I was assigned, was headed by a Counselor. I was the second officer in the Section, along with two junior officers who did economic analysis, mainly macroeconomic work.

I was in charge of financial affairs, balance of payments reporting, and several other matters. I was Mission Narcotics Coordinator which, by the way, turned out to be a fascinating position for me. Because of the security situation, the Embassy had reduced its staffing. I already mentioned that we had lost about 12 Americans killed. People not considered absolutely essential were either sent home or their positions were not filled when they were transferred in the normal course of things. The Agricultural Attache was there in Ankara when I arrived, but he was leaving in a matter of weeks. Rather than close down the whole agricultural reporting operation, I was given that as a kind of sideline to handle.

The Commercial Section was then separate from the Economic Section. Remember the year now. We're talking about 1980. The Foreign Commercial Service had just been created, although the Commercial Attache when I arrived in Ankara was actually a Foreign Service Officer by background. However, the Commercial Section had already been split off. It functioned as a separate section. It was not even in the main Embassy building but was across the parking lot in an Annex. The Ambassador had just arrived.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

WHITE: James Spain.

Q: Oh, yes, I know him.

WHITE: Ron Spiers had been Ambassador previously. Jim Spain arrived in February, 1980, and I arrived in March, 1980. So we were practically on the same plane, so to speak, when we arrived there.

Q: What did you think of Jim Spain as your Ambassador?

WHITE: Jim Spain had a very deep knowledge of Turkey. He had been Deputy Chief of Mission in Ankara at one point, I think under Ambassador Bill Macomber. Jim Spain had also been Consul General in Istanbul. So he knew the country well.

Q: Hadn't he been an Inspector in the Foreign Service?

WHITE: He knew the Foreign Service. Whether he had been an Inspector, I don't know, but he had a solid background in Turkish affairs.

Q: He once inspected a post where I served.

WHITE: By the way, Jim Spain had written a book on one of the tribes in the Khyber Pass area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He had deep knowledge and interest in that part of the world. So he could hit the ground running, so to speak.

The situation was bad. I remember that at the first dinner by the Ambassador which I was invited to at the Embassy Residence, I arrived early, of course. FSOs are expected to do so. It was a beautiful spring evening in May. I remember that Ambassador Spain and his wife were discussing whether or not they could invite their guests to go out onto the terrace. The Ambassador's Residence in Ankara is a beautiful building with a terrace and lawn that slopes down from the main building. It is on top of a hill and has a beautiful view of the city. Ankara is in a bowl and is surrounded by hills. One of those hills, called Cankaya, is where most of the diplomats lived, including U.S. diplomats.

While they were discussing the pro's and con's of whether they could let their guests go out on the terrace and enjoy the yard and the view, we heard a rattle of machine gun fire, and that settled the issue! The guests did not go outdoors.

This was a very bleak time for Turkey. As I say, it was a bad time both economically and politically. During the first few months that I was there, Turkey was supposed to elect a new President. Turkey had one of those systems where the President was elected by Parliament. The Italians do that, too. The President was not elected by direct suffrage of the people. Even though the country was falling apart, the Parliament went through countless ballots and still couldn't elect a President. The two principal political leaders, Demirel and Ecevit, able as they were, and honorable men as well, could not or would not bury the political hatchet and form a kind of coalition government to govern the country.

The victims of this stalemate, of course, were the Turkish people. Every day we read of terrorist incidents, shootouts, and fire bombings. This went on and on. I remember vividly that most of the European diplomats had sent their wives and families back home because the winter was so bad. They didn't have heat.

On the diplomatic cocktail circuit, the Europeans were always and very impatiently asking the question: "When is General Evren going to do something?" He was the Chief of Staff of the Turkish Army. He had been appointed by Prime Minister Demirel and was a widely respected man. He was very moderate, sensible, cognizant of his responsibilities to the government which had appointed him, and a rather mild-mannered, avuncular type of figure. He was sharply criticized for not doing something to terminate this impasse, in which the country was almost literally falling apart.

In September, 1980, I joined some of the officers in the Political Section to go over and watch a session of Parliament. It was fairly near to the Embassy, only a few blocks away. So I tagged along. I had never seen the Parliament and I thought that this would be a good opportunity to do so. Three or four of us from the American Embassy attended the Parliament that day. We were shown into the diplomatic gallery. We looked down on the proceedings of the Turkish Parliament. One half of the Chamber [of the unicameral Parliament] was empty, because one of the two major political parties had gotten into a fight over something and had walked out.

As I looked down at that spectacle, it was perfectly obvious that this situation could not go on. Here was a country in crisis, and its politicians were just playing politics as usual, with the country collapsing around our heads. I walked out of Parliament and thought: "This cannot go on." After all, a country has to be governed.

While it was all being done according to Parliamentary rules, the country was effectively left without a government, despite the fact that both of the major political leaders were well known, sensible, honorable men. However, neither of them could overcome the impasse. Turkish politics can be very personal.

Q: Was there a small third party?

WHITE: There were third parties, but there was no third party which could have altered the situation as I recall.

The answer, of course, was for the two major parties, to act together. We were not talking about a situation where you had Fascists and Communists shouting at each other in Parliament. These were broad political parties, which we would call middle of the road.

Anyway, to make a long story short, my family came to Ankara during the summer of 1980.

Q: You had two children at this point?

WHITE: Yes. They had been staying in Rome.

Q: How old were your children?

WHITE: Let's see. Susi was 8 years old, and Helen was 12. They had been staying in

Rome with their mother to finish the school year. They came by ship through the Aegean Sea, and I met them in Izmir in August, 1980.

A few weeks later the phone rang at about 3:00 AM. It was the Embassy Duty Officer saying: "Don't come to work tomorrow morning. Something's happened." Well, what had happened is that finally General Evren, in what is called a bloodless coup d'etat, and it was really bloodless, simply announced that the country was not being governed. It had to be governed. He put the leaders of both major parties under house arrest and formed a government of technocrats. He also set a date for the promulgation of a new Constitution. He made it clear that the Army would be back in its barracks within two years, or whatever the time period he set.

Now if ever there was a reluctant general, General Evren was that person. The next morning I went down to the Embassy. I went a little later than usual, after I saw that there were no disturbances. Nothing was happening. I didn't take the car for some reason. I took the bus downtown. Traveling by bus is a nice way to find out what people are thinking. The sense of relief among the people was palpable. For the first time I saw Turks smiling. There is an unwritten article in the Turkish Constitution that says, in effect: "If the government isn't governing, the Army has a moral responsibility to step in and make things happen."

This is what General Evren did. He appointed a government of technocrats. He sensibly realized that the Army knew nothing other than the Army. So there wasn't a situation of colonels running ministries that they didn't understand. He brought in a man named Turgut Ozal and made him "Economic Czar." In effect, he told Ozal: "I don't know anything about the economy. They say that you do. So you run the economy."

I think that Turgut Ozal turned out to be one of the most remarkable men of our generation. I first knew Ozal as the head of an office called The State Planning Agency. It was involved in state planning in the sense of a think tank. The Agency turned out academic reports on what should and needed to be done. It was that kind of office. Actually, Prime Minister Demirel had appointed Ozal to a fairly important position. I forget whether he had cabinet rank or not, but he was pulled out of this think tank and given real power in Demirel's government.

Ozal essentially took over the economy of Turkey. This was a heavily statist country where much of industry consisted of state-controlled enterprises. They all follow the same pattern. They had bloated payrolls and, altogether, were inefficient operations. They were heavily influenced by politics and cronyism.

Q: How long was Ozal in control?

WHITE: Well, this was in September of 1980. We all knew that he was a gifted economist and technocrat. To jump ahead, two years later [in 1982] he surprised everyone by forming a political party and getting himself elected Prime Minister. He later became President of Turkey and died in office about three or four years ago.

Ozal had a very clear vision of where Turkey should go. In effect, he wanted to scrap the state enterprises, open up the economy, do away with foreign exchange controls, and in fact do away with all controls, or at least as many controls as possible. We were talking about the deregulation of our airline industry. In effect, Ozal was talking about deregulating Turkey.

For example, smuggling was a huge problem. American cigarettes were much sought after in Turkey. They couldn't be imported because the Turks had a domestic cigarette industry. The Turks produce cigarettes. In fact, all American blends of cigarette tobacco have some Turkish tobacco in them. However, Turkish cigarettes are made entirely of Turkish tobacco. They are rather strong and have an acrid odor. So everyone in Turkey who was able to do so would buy smuggled American cigarettes.

Ozal's solution for this was very simple. Let foreign cigarettes come into Turkey legally and then apply a high import duty to them. If people are willing to pay a high duty when they buy American cigarettes, let them buy them. So smuggling disappeared almost overnight.

He did that with the whole economy. The whole apparatus of import controls was swept away or drastically reduced. The Turkish economy was opened up to foreign investment. U.S. banks, which had been denied entry into Turkey for years, were suddenly welcomed. In other words, what was said to the international financial community was: "Come on into Turkey and let's do business."

This program worked fantastically well. We could see it in our own office, because one of my jobs was, of course, handling financial reporting. I saw all of the American bankers who were coming to Turkey. Turkey, of course, had been mired in debt. When I arrived in Turkey, the existing foreign debt was small in today's terms, although it increased over time. I think that the Turks owed something like $20 billion in foreign debt. Of course, American banks were among those who were owed money. American banks regularly sent representatives to Turkey.

Meanwhile, remember the time frame when all of this was going on. Jimmy Carter was still President when I went to Turkey in 1980. Remember the American hostages who were being held in Iran? The Iranian situation had shocked the U.S. I think that it is arguable that the sudden fall of the Shah and the Embassy hostage crisis are what drove Jimmy Carter out of office. All of that was going on, which only gave a heightened sense of crisis to Turkey in the view of the U.S. Government. This was a time when Turkey was on the front burner, as seen by Washington.

We could see this in the messages we were getting from Washington. They were all high priority messages. Messages from our Embassy to the State Department, which would normally go by routine priority, had immediate precedence. This was because everything going on in Turkey was considered important. We had major military bases there. We didn't want to see Turkey go the way of Iran. We had a very high stake in getting Turkey

back on its feet. We did this by providing Turkey with military and economic assistance and by providing diplomatic support.

Q: To what degree was all of this related to Turkey's NATO connection?

WHITE: Well, of course, Turkey is a NATO country. Turkey has, or had, the largest ground forces in European NATO. Turkey is a huge country, by the way. You could put most of Western Europe in Turkey. It is hard to grasp these realities, but if you superimpose Turkey on a map of Europe, you can see that it is a large country, with a huge population of more than 50 million people in the early 1980s and growing by 1.0 million per year. Turkey is the southern bastion of NATO.

Q: At one point Turkey was also one of the foundations of the Truman Doctrine, right at the beginning of the Cold War.

WHITE: You go right back to the Truman Doctrine and the visit of the USS MISSOURI, which is something engraved in the Turkish mind, even to this day. Are you familiar with that story?

Q: Was that in 1947?

WHITE: In 1947. The Turkish Ambassador had died in Washington. This was at a time when Stalin made demands on the Turks. Stalin was really in a rambunctious mood just after World War II. You remember what he was doing in Europe. He wanted Soviet rights to pass freely through the Bosporus Straits, he was talking about territorial concessions along the Turkish-Russian border in Eastern Turkey, and the Turks were thrown into a fright.

We decided to send the remains of the late Ambassador back to Turkey on the battleship USS MISSOURI. Of course, it was more than that. It was a "show of force." It was meant to be that, it was understood as that, and the Turks, to this day, have never forgotten the appearance of the USS MISSOURI in Istanbul. Remember that this is the same battleship on which General MacArthur accepted the Japanese surrender in Tokyo Bay in September, 1945. This was a classic example of diplomacy in which ships are used to project force. That's exactly what it was intended to do, and it worked!

Our relations with the Turks were excellent. We had had an aid program in Turkey for some years, but that program had been terminated by the time I arrived there. One of the things that AID [Agency for International Development] did right, and I am a critic of AID, as you know, is that it sent an awful lot of young Turks to the United States for college or graduate school work. Those young people returned to Turkey and rose rapidly to senior positions in the bureaucracy.

You may remember that our relations with Turkey, while they were good and even excellent, had been very severely strained by the embargo on arms shipments to Turkey.

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Q: You were connecting this embargo with U.S.-Greek relations?

WHITE: The Greek lobby, of course, was active then, and still is active in projecting or promoting Greek interests, particularly vis-a-vis the Turks. There is an historic rivalry there. It's a long, long story, with plenty of pros and cons on both sides. But in any case...

Q: We agreed to lower levels of imports from Turkey, following the events in Cyprus in 1974...

WHITE: Well, Greece and Turkey have almost gone to war several times. The U.S. Congress embargoed U.S. arms shipments to Turkey some time in the 1970s. Of course, the administration didn't want this, but it happened. Now, I don't know the circumstances and the in's and out's of how that happened, but it did, and, of course, it put a tremendous strain on our relations with Turkey. I am convinced that the only thing that prevented a rupture in our relations with Turkey at that time was the fact that so many senior officials of the Turkish Government were U.S. trained.

When I made my calls around the Turkish Government when I arrived in Ankara and over the next few years, I was struck by the fact that practically every conversation with senior officials such as Directors or Directors General and people at that level would begin with a little reminiscence of the time they had spent in the U.S. Very often a given official would point to a book on his bookshelf which was still in one of those college book covers, with the seal of the school on it, whether it was from the University of Virginia or what have you. The head of the Turkish Central Bank, whom I got to know very well, spoke English with a Southern accent. I think that he had attended the University of Georgia and had a Ph.D. from that university.

Q: Who were the main kinds of people that you were in contact with?

WHITE: As I said, my major job was financial reporting. That was not just an academic exercise. The U.S. Treasury Department took a really strong interest in Turkey because, of course, the Treasury had a major say in how much money we gave the Turks in terms of Economic Support Funds [ESF]. One of the ways in which they measured that need was by projections of the Turkish balance of payments.

The first thing that I was asked to do was to prepare a five-year projection of the Turkish balance of payments. Well, to begin with, I was not a financial economist. I was there in Ankara by default, in that sense. I knew very little about balance of payments reporting.

Q: This kind of thing would have to be speculative, depending on the assumptions you make. Even for real experts there is no precision about this. It's hard to do.

WHITE: That's very largely true. It certainly was a field in which I was not very comfortable. Before my family arrived in Ankara, I lived in a bachelor apartment there.

Remember that I was in Ankara by myself from March until August 1980. That's a good six months.

I went up to the USIS Library and took out textbooks on national income accounts and balance of payments reporting. I had to teach myself how to do something in which I had little or no training. I had had the economics course at the FSI [Foreign Service Institute], which was excellent, but it wasn't that technical.

I approached this job with great trepidation, as you may imagine. In my mind's eye I could just imagine the Treasury Department in Washington, with its banks of computers, ridiculing my poor attempts at prognostication. However, I soldiered on, and Clay Nettles, the Economic Counselor, was a very seasoned and able guy. Somehow, we produced these projections, which went to Washington.

Then I realized the importance of contacts. Obviously, there were people in the Turkish Government who were very knowledgeable in this area. One of them was the Director General of the Central Bank, whom I got to know very well. Again, he was U.S. educated and was a very affable fellow. I used to go and call on him. We would actually place bets on the various elements in the Turkish balance of payments. What would exports be, for example? He would say: "Oh, we'll have $8.0 billion." I would say: "Oh, no, you're not going to have more than $6.0 billion." And we would go on in this way. But in that way I would get a feel for the subject matter.

I could supplement my analysis with ongoing discussions with Turkish officials in the Ministry of Finance. I developed excellent contacts there, as well as in the Central Bank. Those were the two key sources of information in that part of our work. We never received any complaints back from Washington about our balance of payments projections. Our reporting was considered quite good. In fact, some people said that we were closer to the mark than some Washington analyses.

Q: What about the World Bank and the IMF [International Monetary Fund] people? Did they have a role?

WHITE: They had a big role to play. Of course, in a sense they were out in front. We kept in very close touch with the IMF and the World Bank. Officials of these two institutions would often come to Turkey and visit Ankara.

Q: They usually are excellent people.

WHITE: They had very good people. We would always talk with them. We didn't do this openly or publicly. We didn't do this secretly, either, but we did it discreetly. We would usually get together for lunch and compare notes.

Q: How about the UNDP [UN Development Program]?

WHITE: The UNDP was active in Ankara. It was headed by a German, a good friend of

mine.

Q: He was the Resident Representative of the UNDP in Ankara?

WHITE: Yes, the Resident Representative. The UNDP, by the way, was part of my bailiwick.

Q: Was the UNDP a useful operation in this connection?

WHITE: Yes, it did useful things in Turkey.

Q: I assume that the U.S. Export-Import Bank had an interest in Turkey.

WHITE: It did. Well, all of the agencies in the U.S. Government dealing with economic issues sooner or later had an involvement in Turkey. The Export-Import Bank was also heavily engaged in Turkey. Of course, private U.S. banks were watching Turkey closely.

Q: Did they have people permanently stationed in Turkey?

WHITE: At first they had very few people. In fact, at first I'm not sure that they had any people permanently stationed in Turkey.

Q: Their numbers increased while you were there.

WHITE: Oh, yes, very dramatically. In fact, we had a visit by David Rockefeller [former Chief Executive Officer of the Chase Manhattan Bank] when I was in Turkey. He came to Istanbul to open their branch. CITICORP was there. I forget which others now, but I guess that by the end of my tour in Turkey there were four or five major U.S. banks with offices in Istanbul.

Q: Well, private U.S. banks were very knowledgeable and ready to interact with us.

WHITE: Oh, very much so. I think that some of my best conversations were with American bankers. They had their own sources of information. I recall talking to one of them one day. He came by to see me and wanted to know what was going on. They would fly in, you know, from Istanbul and New York. They always came to see us, and we always had excellent conversations with them.

One day we were talking about Turgut Ozal. I was giving my impressions of Ozal. The banker was being very receptive, listening to what I was saying. Turgut Ozal had a heart problem which, every now and then, took him to Houston, Texas. Maybe it was in that context that I said: "I haven't seen Ozal in the last few weeks. I don't know how he is," referring to his medical problem. This banker said to me: "He looked fine when I saw him this morning." They had their own access to sources of information. We had our access, and we had mutually beneficial exchanges.

Q: I gather, Al, that when you got to Turkey, you didn't have a very clear picture as to how the international financial community works in a particular country. However, you became deeply involved in this and came out with a much clearer picture of how that functions.

WHITE: Very definitely. The roles of the World Bank and of the IMF were very strong there. Of course, there were also commercial aspects to this.

There were huge projects under development in Turkey which were World Bank financed. We had people from the World Bank, just as we had people from the IMF coming to Ankara all the time.

Q: Do you remember what were two or three of these projects?

WHITE: There were big, infrastructure projects down in southern Turkey, including irrigation and coal mining projects. Turkey has extensive lignite reserves.

A little later in my tour in Turkey a major project was undertaken in Turkey to control the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This involved the construction of numerous big dams and the expenditure of large amounts of money. Of course, the World Bank was heavily engaged in that.

Q: Construction of dams on the Tigris and Euphrates has been going on since about 8000 BC. This involved the first flowering of human life. The archeologists have pretty well confirmed that.

WHITE: In fact, there's a town in southeast Turkey called Urfa, which was known to the Crusaders as Edessa. That is considered to be the town where Abraham, the Old Testament prophet, was born. There are all sorts of traditions about this.

Q: I thought that Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees.

WHITE: I'm talking about traditions now. Who knows how valid these traditions were? Who knows where Abraham was born? Anyway, there is one tradition that he was born in southeast Turkey.

Under Ozal Turkey was turned around. His economic policies paid off dramatically, and far sooner than anyone expected. Meanwhile, the Turkish Government had formed a Constitutional Council to draft a new Constitution and to return the country to civilian rule. This happened during the first two years I spent in Ankara.

Q: Then your job changed. You were promoted.

WHITE: That's right, to economic counselor. That couldn't have happened without the support of certain key people, including the Economic Counselor, the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], and the ambassador.

Q: Who was the DCM?

WHITE: Dick Boehm was the DCM. Later on, he was Ambassador to Cyprus and to Oman. He retired a few years ago.

Q: Was Jim Spain still in Turkey as Ambassador?

WHITE: Jim Spain had left Turkey by this time. Remember that there was a change in administration. President Carter was defeated in the election of 1980. Of course, in 1981 President Reagan came into office. I think that Jim Spain was Ambassador to Turkey for about 18 months. He was replaced by Robert Strausz-Hupe as Ambassador.

Q: Strausz-Hupe was a real, hard-line anti-communist guy. He was pretty old by that time, eh?

WHITE: He was 80 and a remarkable man.

Q: He wrote the classic textbooks on international relations just after World War II.

WHITE: That's right. When I was an undergraduate in college, I saw his name very often. In fact, I used to tell him that I met him before he met me! By this I meant of course that I had read some of his books.

Well, he was from the Right Wing, but in no sense a fanatic. He was a very moderate, balanced and fascinating man. He was originally from Vienna. His mother may have been French, and his father was Austrian.

Q: The textbooks to which I refer were written by Robert Strausz-Hupe and Stefan Possnya.

WHITE: They collaborated in writing some of these books. You're right. Strausz-Hupe taught at the University of Pennsylvania. He retired there as a full professor.

He supported my promotion and after two years I moved up to be Economic Counselor for the last two years of my tour in Ankara.

Q: So how did your job change?

WHITE: I now had the responsibility for running the Economic Section. Of course, the economic stabilization program introduced by Ozal was a fascinating thing to watch. It required a lot of reporting.

While I was Economic Counselor, George Knowles came in as the FCS [Foreign Commercial Service] officer. We had an excellent relationship. I was determined that the Commercial Section and the Economic Section were going to work well together and

very closely. I think that they did. Of course, that depends on the people involved and how well they want the Commercial and Economic Sections to work together. George certainly wanted them to work together, just as I did, and we got on very well together. In fact, if he was out of town, I would pick up some of his work.

In fact, I remember that once we had to complain because we thought that a contract hadn't been awarded fairly. We thought that an American company had the inside track, but the American company didn't get the contract at the last minute. It was one of those last minute things that can happen in commercial affairs. I remember that George and I went over together to lean on the Turkish Government official involved. That worked out very well. The bidding was reopened.

Of course, the staff of the Commercial Section had all worked in a combined Economic and Commercial Section for years. We had no real sense of separation between the two sections. For all practical purposes we worked as one section, even though the Commercial Section was across the courtyard from the Economic Section and in another building.

One of the things that I watched very closely was aviation relations. Turkish Airlines, which is a fairly big airline, had major routes to Europe and was about to buy a new fleet of airplanes. Boeing was the American contender in this transaction. You mentioned the Export-Import Bank. While I was there, a Vice President of the Export-Import Bank came to town. He stopped off in Istanbul and then came down to Ankara to see me. We were chatting about this purchase of new aircraft by Turkish Airlines. This involved a very big contract. He was very confident about it. He said: "I think that Boeing will get the contract. It's an open and shut case." He was quite sure of this, as he had just taken some soundings.

I said: "Look, don't be too sure." Airbus Industrie, a European consortium, was the other contender. I said: "When you're talking about Airbus, you're talking about what basically is a Franco-German consortium." In this connection Airbus played its cards very well. French relations with Turkey at this point were very poor. I won't go into the reasons for that, but they were very poor. The relationships between the French and Turkish Governments were practically down and out, really.

By contrast, Germany had excellent relations with Turkey. Bear in mind that Germany has always loomed large in Turkey. Remember, during World War I the Turkish Army was practically commanded by German officers. Remember the Berlin to Baghdad Railway and Kaiser Wilhelm's interest in that part of the world? Germany loomed very large in Turkish eyes, and has always done so. It wasn't the French who took the lead in the negotiations in selling Airbus aircraft in Turkey. It was the Germans, with the French as silent partner. If the French had been in the lead, it would have been a disaster.

I said to this official from the Export-Import Bank, whose name escapes me now: "Look, one of the things that the Turks want badly is something that we cannot give them. We can't even influence the decision. They want to join the European Common Market. Only

the French and the Germans can give them that." I said: "I'm sure that they will do any kind of bargaining, and it won't be confined just to aviation issues. The Turks want an awful lot from Europe. They want to draw close to Europe. Most of their foreign trade is with Europe. So don't be too sure that Boeing has the advantage."

I think that on that very same day I took this Export-Import Bank official out to the airport to take a plane back to Washington. As I walked back through the terminal at the airport, whom did I run into but the German Ambassador, whom I knew. He nodded to me and he had a visitor in tow. I also knew who the visitor was.

Q: An Airbus representative.

WHITE: You're right. He was Franz-Josef Strauss, former Minister of Defense in the German Government and a heavyweight in German politics. At that point he was the German Chairman of Airbus. The visit had not been announced. Now, that's very strange. Someone of that prominence who comes to Ankara without any public announcement?

I saw the two of them scurrying out to a private airplane. It didn't take much to figure out what was going on. The first thing I did was to send a cable back to Washington, marked IMMEDIATE and for the Export-Import Bank, pointing out that Franz-Josef Strauss had just made an unannounced visit to Ankara that we only learned about accidentally. I had nearly bumped into him at the airport! At the end of the day, Boeing did not get that Turkish Airlines contract. That's an interesting example of how things work in the real world.

Of course, the Airbus family of aircraft are wonderful airplanes. Nothing that I am saying here is intended to downgrade that. However, the French and the Germans were in a position to do a lot, or to withhold a lot, from Turkey.

There was a striking anomaly in our relationships. Turkish-U.S. relations were excellent. However, Turkey and the U.S. are a long way from each other. The Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea separate them. European relations with Turkey are, always have been, and I think still are, very ambivalent. Turkey wants in in Europe. The Europeans never said, "No," but neither did they want to say, "Yes."

The reality is that the Europeans are worried by the thought of how many Turks there are. There were about 50 million when I left Ankara, not to speak of the millions of Turks in Western Europe. Turkey really is culturally part of the Near East. They are Muslims. Their pay scales are very, very low. The Europeans want it both ways. They want the Turks to be their strong guardian on the southern flank of NATO. They want the Turkish Army to be out there on the flanks, serving as a buffer between the Near East and themselves. However, the Europeans did not want to make the kind of commitment that the Turks want from them.

Q: Part of this is the Islamic factor, in the sense of culture and politics. The Europeans are more cognizant of that these days, not only in terms of Iran and Iraq but also in terms

of the former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and all of those territories.

WHITE: Above all, Turkey is a Muslim country. However, there is a very strong tradition of secularism in modern Turkey. This goes back to Kamal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

Q: He was prominent in the 1920s. He moved in after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, which was destroyed at the conclusion of World War I. You might discuss the whole legacy of that.

WHITE: You know, before Ataturk was a figure in Turkish political life, he was a general. He's the general who defeated the British at Gallipoli. He was an obscure, infantry general then. He's the man who turned around the Gallipoli campaign, and of course you know about that and Churchill's involvement in it.

Q: That was in 1916.

WHITE: 1915. The British failure at Gallipoli led to Churchill's resignation from the British Government. It was one of the great, tragic campaigns in British history.

The Turks had made a tragic decision. They joined the Central Powers, the losing side, and they paid for it with the loss of the Turkish Empire, although this empire had been receding for a long time. Turkey itself was on the verge of partition at the end of World War I. The Greeks were in Izmir and were sending an Army half way to Ankara in 1922.

The French had carved out a sphere of Turkey along the Syrian border. The Italians had carved out a sphere along the southern coast of Turkey around Alanya. The British, of course, were in Constantinople, as Istanbul was then known and had been for centuries. You may recall that there was talk at the Conference at Versailles of creating a separate, Armenian state that would be carved out of Turkey.

Turkey was on the verge of disintegration. Ataturk was one of those remarkable figures who come along in the history of a country. He was very astute, very shrewd and very able. In a word, he saw that the only salvation for Turkey was to make it a modern country which in that context, meant removing religion from the totally dominant role which it had had in society. He attributed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in large part to the overwhelming influence of the Islamic clergy. So he secularized Turkey.

Q: How long was he in power in Turkey?

WHITE: Until just before World War II broke out.

Q: From around 1922 until...

WHITE: He consolidated his power in Turkey in 1920. He was the dominant personality in Turkey until he died in 1938.

Q: So he dominated Turkish history until the beginning of World War II.

WHITE: Totally. He put his stamp on Turkey. By the way, he was not a brutal dictator. He did this mostly by the force of his personality.

Q: He is usually described as the stereotype of the benevolent despot.

WHITE: Very much so. Remember that his country had been a despotism and knew nothing about freedom, as we understand that term. Actually, he executed a few people at certain critical points. He dealt with the Soviet Union but was merciless in suppressing communists in Turkey.

Ataturk secularized Turkey. For example, he abolished the fez [round, brimless hat, usually a shade of red]. He abolished the use of the Arabic script to write the Turkish language. Turkish is written today in Latin letters, because of Ataturk. He introduced all of these steps to push Turkey into the modern world. He felt that this could not be done in accordance with the customs of the old regime.

Turkey had fallen hopelessly behind the times. It had no modern industry worthy of the name. It had no technology.

What he did with the imams [religious scholars] was very simple. He created a Department of Religious Affairs and he put them on the public payroll. In that way he controlled them. He was determined to depoliticize the power of the Muslim clergy in Turkey.

As far as the Turkish Army was concerned, Ataturk might just as well still be alive. He still is the guardian of Turkey. Go into any office in Turkey, I don't care how remote it is from Ankara, and there is a picture of Ataturk on the wall. It is de rigueur to have a picture of him on display. He is the great father, the George Washington of modern Turkey. The basis of his policy was secularization, and that tradition remains very strong in the Turkish Army and is very strong among the Westernized, urbanized elite groups. The last thing that they want is to go the way of Iran.

The Iranian experience has traumatized the world, and there is much concern about Islamic fundamentalism. Of course, Turkey is an Islamic country, and so there is always that possibility. You asked about a third political party. Even when I was there, there was a third party, basically a Muslim party, headed by a man called Erbakan who, by the way, was recently Prime Minister of Turkey. There has been a resurgence of Islam in Turkey.

Now, how much of that resurgence is pernicious is another question. You know, we've had religious revivals in the West, too, but we don't think that they are pernicious. So it doesn't follow in my mind that a religious revival is necessarily bad in Turkey. After all, their tradition is Islamic.

I must say that in the course of the four, and nearly four and a half, years I spent in Turkey, we drove around Turkey with our two, little girls in the back seat. We never felt insecure for a moment. The Turkish people have a wonderful sense of hospitality. They are open, they are friendly, and helpful. The more remote the village that you go into, the more helpful they are.

The roads in Turkey were terrible when we were there. We had a beat up old Buick Regal that we had dragged to Turkey from Washington. We never made a trip without having a flat tire. However, the joke in my family was that we always had flat tires but never changed the tires. Your car could break down in the most remote area of Turkey. You'd look around and wouldn't see a soul for miles. Within minutes, somehow, a crowd would begin to gather, and people were changing your tire. They wouldn't let you do it. They would do it. They have this incredible, Near Eastern tradition of hospitality, and it's very genuine.

Personally, I'm not as worried about Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey as others are. First of all, there is the rampart of the Ataturk tradition, which is very strong and very powerful. Educated Turks are Westernized. They may attend services in the mosques. However, they are Western in the sense that their education and outlook are Western. Turkish women have been liberated. In fact, the Turks claimed, and I think that it's true, that on a per capita basis, they had more women as Directors General in their government than in any other government in the Western world. I dealt with several Directors General in the Turkish Government who were women. Turkish women in the cities are emancipated and also very stylish. There's no question about that.

Turkey is still two countries, in the sense that you can walk down a street in Istanbul and see two women walking together. The older one may wear a veil. With her will be a younger woman, probably her daughter, dressed in the latest Paris fashion. I cannot see Turkey lapsing back into something like what we're seeing in Iran, although I suppose some people would have said that that couldn't have happened in Iran, either.

However, there is a difference. Iran is very different from Turkey. In fact, there's a wonderful story, and I've heard it often enough that I think that it's true. When Ataturk was ruling in Ankara, he had a great admirer in the father of the Shah of Iran, whose name was Reza Shah. He came on a state visit to Ankara and saw all of the things that Ataturk was doing. He said to Ataturk: "Well, I'll have to go back and do all of this. What's the secret?" Ataturk replied that there were three things he had to do: "First of all, you have to stop calling yourself 'the Shah of Shahs.' Just call yourself 'President,' and that's it. Secondly, you have to switch to the Latin alphabet. Otherwise, your young people aren't going to get an adequate technical education. "Third, you have to control the mullahs [Muslim religious officials]." The story is that the Shah went back to Iran, and he couldn't do any one of those three things.

Q: Some people in Iran, over the last few years, say that, when we concluded in the early 1950s that Iran was becoming too dangerously leftist, we toppled the Mossedegh Government, through a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] operation. For 20 years this

was interpreted as a dramatic success in the U.S. Then the Shah was overthrown, and conditions became worse than they ever had been.

WHITE: You know, I'd like to know a lot more about Iran than I know. I've talked with many diplomats in Ankara about what was going on in Iran. My own sense is that maybe there were too many Americans around. You know, one culture can interact with another culture, but not too much, too fast.

Q: I know that Loy Henderson [former Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in the Department of State] felt that the CIA intervention in Iran in the early 1950s was tragic. He told me this in a tape-recorded interview. He said that Kermit Roosevelt [CIA officer in Iran in the early 1950s] lied to Loy Henderson about the situation in Iran. They got Loy Henderson out of town when they pulled off this coup d'etat.

WHITE: As I say, I'm not that familiar with the situation in Iran in the early 1950s.

I'm told by friends and colleagues who have been in Turkey a lot more recently than I that much of the vote which the pro-Islamic party is getting in Turkey is a protest vote. You know, it's very much like what happened with the communists in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s. Most of the vote which the communists got was not from convinced communists. This was a large protest vote. Indeed, in the old Red Belt of Italy, in the Emilia Romagna area of North Central Italy, local government affairs functioned efficiently under the communists.

Q: Before we turn again to Italy, Al, do you have any further comments about Turkey and your experience there?

WHITE: I haven't really mentioned much about the personal side there. We traveled a great deal in Turkey, which is a fascinating country to travel in.

Q: Although they do say that in any country you get much more of a feel for what it's all about outside the capital city.

WHITE: Oh, absolutely. If there's a Rule Number One for a diplomat, that has to be it. You've got to get out of the capital. No question about that.

We did. I often traveled from Ankara to Istanbul. I had to go to Istanbul on business all the time. I always took the sleeper train up to Istanbul, which was called the Anatolian Express. Often I would have to fly back to Ankara, but I always liked that train ride to Istanbul. You arrived at the Hyder Pasha Station on the Asian side of the straits. This station had been part of the old Berlin to Baghdad railway. Have you ever been in Constantinople or Istanbul?

Q: No, I haven't.

WHITE: It's like Venice, in a way. The Bosporus in Istanbul is like the Grand Canal in

Venice. Istanbul has to be one of the most beautiful cities in the world. You know, it is one of those places that was destined to be a great capital, because of its position on the Bosporus. You could see why Emperor Constantine established his capital there. The Western part of Turkey is the old, Greek part of the country. If you want to talk about ancient ruins, Italy has nothing like the ruins that you can see in Turkey. There are Roman amphitheaters and dead cities all over the place. The place is festooned with history.

Then in the Eastern part of the country, you have the Old Testament.

Q: Are Philippi and Antioch...

WHITE: Antioch is in Turkey. I would say that most of the area described in the New Testament of the Bible is particularly related to Turkey, because Turkey was not a backwater. It was the center of the classical world. St. Paul wouldn't have been wandering around in the backwaters of the empire. There were his Epistles to the Ephesians, the Galatians, the Colossians, and the Seven Churches of Asia, all near Izmir. To me the most fascinating aspect of Turkey, more so than any other country that I know, is that this country is built in historical layers, something like the Grand Canyon.

Actually, the Turks were late arrivals to Anatolia. The Turks entered Anatolia, perhaps, in the 11th century, A.D. Turkey was Christian for a over a thousand years. Before that, of course, it was part of the Roman domain and before that it was part of the Persian domain.

There are beautiful beaches and scenery in Turkey. I might make one general point about Turkey. Perhaps it's a little difficult to state, but I think that, in a way, the American presence in that part of the world has not been particularly constructive. I mentioned earlier as an anomaly that U.S.-Turkish relations were somehow stronger than European-Turkish relations. The Europeans have to come to terms with Turkey. Up to now, they have been in a situation where they could say: "Well, the Americans will take care of the Turks." I'm not sure that that's a healthy situation.

The other element here is Greek-Turkish relations. The population of Greece is about 12 million and static. As I said previously, the population of Turkey was about 50 million when I was there, and I think that it was increasing by 1.0 million a year. There is a demographic explosion taking place in Turkey. The Turks don't seem to be agitated about the Greeks. At least during the four years I was in Turkey I never sensed this. I never really heard anything critical of the Greeks.

The Turks just didn’t talk much about the Greeks, and you can see why. Turkey is so big, by comparison with Greece, both in terms of area as well as population. Turkey doesn't have to worry about Greece. The Greeks have a consciousness of history. Bear in mind that the Greeks were in Izmir [Smyrna in Greek] until 1922. The Greeks have to worry about the Turks, because the Turks loom so much larger than the Greeks do. In a way, it's kind of like Canada and the U.S. Americans don't worry about Canada, but the Canadians

think differently about the U.S. You know, the Canadians are a little bit like the little cat in a rowboat with an elephant. Even with the best of intentions, if the elephant sneezes, the boat may capsize.

The problem between the Turks and the Greeks is not so much the people as the politicians. Politicians are always looking for issues. Take Papandreou, for example, who was the firebrand Prime Minister of Greece until he died a few years ago. By the way, he taught in two American universities. His stock in trade and his rhetoric was anti-Americanism. I'm sure that he had an American passport in his desk drawer, in case he needed it in a hurry.

I think that the Turks and the Greeks would get along with each other better if our presence in the area were not so great. The Greeks and the Turks kind of dance around in a very dangerous way. When the dance reaches a certain point of intensity, what happens? An envoy arrives from Washington and straighten it all out for a while. I think that if the Turks and Greeks believed that an American envoy might not arrive to calm things down, they might play the political game a little less recklessly, because they would know that they have to live with each other.

In a way we are an extraneous force. The problem with an extraneous force is that it interferes with the local equilibrium. Ironically, I think that both Europe generally, and Greece in particular, might get along better with the Turks if the U.S. was less conspicuous there. I'm not suggesting for a moment that we should withdraw our presence from the area. That would be foolhardy. However, maybe we could be a little less overwhelming. The Turks and the Greeks might get along with each other better if they realized that there's no Seventh Cavalry that's going to arrive dramatically on the scene with a solution to a given problem, that no special envoy is going to arrive with some magical tricks to pull out of a bag.

Q: Has there been some diminution of the U.S. military presence in the area?

WHITE: There has.

I left Turkey in the summer of 1984. I returned once and briefly for a conference a few years ago. Relatively, though, we're still the big player. I'm not saying that we shouldn't be a big player. However, I'm not sure that we're playing our part in a way which is most conducive to a solution to that problem.

Look at Cyprus. You know, the Greek Cypriots are talking about buying Russian made missiles. The Turks have said that that would be a casus belli.

As long as we had overwhelming force, we could smother the fire. However, since we no longer have that same degree of overwhelming force in the area, in a relative sense, we may not be able to put out the fire. In a way, ironically enough, we might, willy-nilly, allow the situation to grow critical but not have the means to smother the flames.

Something else is happening in that part of the world, which is very interesting, in the old Soviet area along the Russian-Turkish border. The people who live in that whole area of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and all of these other territories, speak a dialect related to Turkish. In fact, they are Turkic peoples. Now they are much removed, over the centuries, from Turkey, but they are still Muslims and of Turkish stock.

There used to be a movement in Turkey called Pan-Taurism." This was a little like "Pan-Slavism," a movement to put all of the Turkic peoples under one regime. The Turks have become a real bridge leading not only to the Near East, but also to Central Asia as well. By the way, remember that the Turks ruled the Middle East, as we know it, for about 400 years. That's a long time. They know something about that part of the world.

Q: In other words, from about 1453 to 1917.

WHITE: More or less. Well, most of the Balkan Peninsula was ruled by the Turks at one time.

Q: That was the Ottoman Empire.

WHITE: I remember once meeting a distinguished old Turkish gentleman who attended one of the Ambassador's receptions. Maybe it was the reception on July 4. Somehow we got on the subject of Lebanon. I said: "You know, Lebanon is such a small country, but its politics are terribly complicated. I can't figure them out." He said: "You know, my father had the same experience when he was writing the Lebanese Constitution of 1905!"

We could go back to something that we were saying about the old Austro-Hungarian Empire and what replaced it. Nothing replaced it, nothing but war and trouble. What has happened since the Turkish Empire collapsed in the Near East and ever since then? War and trouble. It's been a powder keg. That's what always happens when a great empire collapses. Now, the Turks are not Arabs. The only thing that they really share is the Islamic religion. In fact, there are lots of problems historically between Arabs and Turks.

In the Central Asian region, where all of that oil and natural gas is, a lot of American businessmen are entering that area, often through Turkish connections, which I think is very sensible. The people of Central Asia speak Turkish-type languages. I am told that there are obvious differences, but that they can understand each other. In fact, one day the new Chinese Commercial Attache came to call on me in Ankara. Diplomats always call on each other. He walked into my office, and I expected to see someone who looked Chinese. He didn't look Chinese. He was Turkish - that is, from Chinese Turkistan.

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Q: This is Wednesday, October 17. Al, we had a good discussion of your experience in Turkey. I think that we covered most of what you would have to say about that. Around 1984 or 1985 you went back to Italy for the third assignment during your career.

WHITE: That's true, if you count my assignment to the NATO Defense College as a tour of duty in Italy.

Q: You were in Italy three different times.

WHITE: That's correct. I was assigned to the American Consulate in Turin as Vice Consul and then as Consul, which was my third post in the Foreign Service. I returned to Italy for assignment to the NATO Defense College in 1979. Then, in 1984 I returned to Italy for assignment to Rome.

Q: From the family point of view, since your wife was originally Italian, I guess that had certain advantages.

WHITE: It did indeed and I had of course an interest in Italy.

Q: By this time you spoke Italian.

WHITE: I spoke Italian quite well. My kids are bilingual.

Q: Were you at the S-3, R-3 [Speaking, useful; Reading, useful] level?

WHITE: Oh, easily. Probably 3 + in both speaking and reading, anyway. Maybe not now, since that is some time ago.

Q: Was your Italian better than your German, which was pretty good?

WHITE: Well, that's hard to say. I had spoken German many years before that. Of course, I sometimes spoke Italian at home, although generally I spoke to the kids in English, because we wanted them to learn to speak accentless English and accentless Italian.

I was direct transferred from Ankara to the Embassy in Rome. We went by ship from Izmir. We had a nice, three day cruise through the Aegean Sea. We arrived in Ancona [on the Adriatic Sea, almost due East of Florence] and drove on to the family home of my wife, Gabriela, Near Milano. Then, in late August, 1984, I reported in at the Embassy in Rome.

Here I was going from a fairly large Embassy to a very large, indeed, a huge Embassy.

Q: You were again head of the Economic Section.

WHITE: I was chief of the Economic Section, although in the Embassy in Rome we had something that I had not seen at other posts. We had an Economic Minister to whom I reported as Economic Counselor. The Economic Minister...

Q: Who was he?

WHITE: Bill Whitman, when I was in Rome. He was responsible for coordinating the various economic activities. I would have to stop and think about them to list them all. We also had a Treasury Attache, with his own office and staff. We had a Commercial Attache, with his own office and staff. We had an FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] office. We had an office representing the Bureau of Customs. In short, we had a cluster of elements within the Embassy which dealt with economic matters, in one way or another. Then we had the Economic Section, per se, which is what I headed.

The Economic Section as such was quite small, even though the whole Economic Cluster was very large. The Economic Section itself consisted of me, two Economic Officers, two Foreign Service Local employees, and one American Secretary. I was also the Deputy in the sense that, if the Economic Minister were not there, I assumed his responsibilities. Shortly after I arrived in Rome, the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] left on transfer to another post.

Q: Who was the DCM?

WHITE: That was Peter Bridges.

Q: I knew Peter Bridges well.

WHITE: Peter went on to be Ambassador to Somalia. For a long time Bill Whitman was Acting DCM, which means that for a long time I was the Acting Economic Minister. We would have meetings of all of these elements once a week, under the aegis of the Economic Minister, who would coordinate all of their activities, so that we had a unified operation going there.

Q: Who replaced Peter Bridges?

WHITE: Eventually, John Holmes replaced him, but there was an interregnum there of several months, when Bill Whitman moved up to be Acting DCM. Then John Holmes arrived in Rome, and Bill Whitman resumed his duties as Economic Minister. Then I went back to my position as Economic Counselor and head of the Economic Section, as such. We had a lot of activities going on there...

Q: Having been in Italy at three different times over a span of years, did you observe any significant evolution in the political and economic situation which you might comment on?

WHITE: I wouldn't say that there was that much change in the political situation. You know, Italian politics are a kaleidoscope. They seem to change a great deal. However, you know the French saying: "The more things change, the more they remain the same." People make much of the fact that Italy had 35 cabinets or so in the 40 years from the end of World War II to the mid-'80s. Another government recently fell, but...

Q: They're all the same.

WHITE: When the governments were reconstituted, the same people would be there. Certain names appeared and reappeared, again and again, in Italian politics, when I was there. People like Fanfani, Andreotti, Scalfaro, Craxi, and Colombo played something like a game of musical chairs. The succeeding Italian Governments were always coalitions.

Immediately after World War II the Christian Democrats were able to govern with an absolute majority of seats in Parliament, but they lost that majority rather quickly. So the governments were always coalitions. The problem with a coalition government is that, at the end of the day, the policy adopted has to be the lowest common denominator, because you have all of these various elements in the coalition. It's very hard to achieve striking departures in policy when you have this kind of government structure. A government can collapse whenever somebody wants to call for a vote of confidence or when one of the parties becomes disgruntled for whatever reason.

However, the Christian Democratic Party remained the dominant party and was the party around which all of these coalitions moved, like the planets around the sun. There was the Socialist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the Liberal Party. These parties formed moderate, Center Right, or Center Left governments.

From 1945 to about 1985 there was very little, real change in the Italian political situation. The same people tended to dominate the political scene and the government didn't change that much.

Throughout this period the Italian Communist Party was out in the cold at the national level, though not at the provincial level. As I mentioned before, the communists were considered to run fairly efficient, local administrations in some parts of Italy. The communists accounted for about one-third of the total vote, more or less, in any election. However, they were deliberately kept out of the Italian Government. They weren't considered an acceptable, political party. The communists themselves were made up of different factions. For example, they had leftist and rightist factions.

The Italian economy had developed, of course. When I was in the Consulate in Turin, Italy was going through its well known economic miracle. During this time the Italian economy prospered tremendously, very much as the German economy did in those same years.

By the time I returned to Italy in 1984, the country had taken its lumps. There had been a lot of labor trouble. FIAT had had some difficulties. However, basically the economy remained viable, although riddled with inefficiencies. Bear in mind that, like Turkey, Italy was a country with a huge state sector. Nobody ever seemed able to agree on what proportion of the Italian economy was controlled by these state-owned companies. However, people used a rough rule of the thumb that the state sector accounted for anywhere from one-third to one-half of the total economy. Of course, where you have

state-controlled companies, you have politicians. So there was this heavy, political admixture within the economic system.

However, our economic relations with the Italians were very good. In Western Europe businessmen didn't come to the Embassy so much because they didn't have to. The situation was very different from what it is in the developing countries. Economic and commercial relations went on, more or less on a purely commercial basis. Of course, we had a large and active Commercial Section. It had nowhere near the degree of direct involvement with government officials that I had found at other posts.

My own job was to concentrate on economic reporting across the board, but with particular emphasis on the European Common Market. Italy was a key player in the European Common Market [later referred to as the European Community and more lately as the European Union]. A good deal of my time was spent reporting on that particular matter. While I was there in Italy, by the way, Italy served a term as President of the European Community for six months. If you know the European Community structure, each government takes a turn serving as the head of the Community for six months at a time. During that six months, Washington was particularly interested in what the Italians were doing, because the Italians were more or less our interlocutor regarding the European Community generally.

Of course, the problems within the European Community tend to be very much the same, whichever country has the presidency. I once went to Brussels to confer with our Mission to the European Community. George Vest was our Ambassador to the European Community at the time. We kept in very close touch with our colleagues all over Europe. Almost routinely, a cable that I would draft in Rome would be repeated to all of the EC capitals, and sometimes to non-EC capitals. I was also responsible for aviation affairs.

Q: So you got somewhat involved with aviation again.

WHITE: Oh, yes, very much so.

Q: What was the issue there?

WHITE: Pretty much the usual problems that we'd always had. There were more rounds of negotiations. More interesting was the whole area of aerospace. Aerospace was actually handled in the Economic Section in the Embassy in Rome. You could have argued that it should have been handled in the Commercial Section, but, whatever the reason, it was handled in the Economic Section.

Q: What did you do with aerospace?

WHITE: The Italians value their commercial relations with the United States. But, of course, they also had commercial relations with Europe, which obviously were also valuable to them. The Italian aviation industry was closely allied to U.S. companies. In fact, Italian companies made parts for McDonnell-Douglas aircraft. That pattern is quite

general across the aviation industry today. I think that lots of Boeing parts are made in different countries, because in many cases local sourcing has to be part of the general deal of purchasing aircraft.

There was an interesting tug of war going on, because the French were very active. At least in those days the French saw themselves as meeting the American challenge head on. The French were always trying to maneuver the Italians closer to them. Of course, our interest was in maintaining nothing like exclusive relationships with us, but in developing and maintaining close relationships directly between the United States and Italy. Another area that I had to watch was the field of export controls. This was a sensitive area. In different countries you have different problems.

Q: This relates to COCOM [Coordinating Committee] and so forth?

WHITE: Exactly. Issues related to COCOM were not a major problem in Turkey, but they were a problem in Italy. The U.S. Department of Defense was very strict at that time. Richard Perle was handling export control policy at that time in the Pentagon.

Q: He was a fanatic on this matter.

WHITE: He was charming, but a hard liner.

Q: Cap Weinberger, the Secretary of Defense at that time, was very firm on this subject.

WHITE: And his staff was very hard line.

Q: There was a group of hard liners in the Departments of Commerce and State, in addition to the intelligence community. Congress kept a very close eye on all of that.

WHITE: That was the mood at that time. We ran into problems with the Italians there, because Italy is a country that exists by trading. The Italians had close ties in Europe and, let's say, they chafed under what they regarded as the long arm of the U.S. export control regulations. A company like FIAT, for example, had I don't know how many different licensing arrangements with U.S. firms. And, of course, those arrangements could be jeopardized if the Italians didn't adhere, not only to the letter, but let's say the spirit of COCOM as well. You know, there was that whole concept of controlling strategic exports.

Q: Were we directly involved in this export control operation? Can you give an example of what you did to help to enforce the COCOM principles?

WHITE: First of all, we frequently had visitors from Washington, facilitating their contacts with the Italians. Very often, our job was smoothing ruffled feathers, if you know what I mean. We had to enforce our export controls. The overall question was always, "How much is enough?" Up to a point the Italians would agree perfectly with us that certain goods should not be exported to the Soviet bloc. At the time the Soviet bloc

still existed.

Q: The so-called dual use problem was involved there.

WHITE: That was a big problem.

Q: Some of these items of equipment don't necessarily have military applications, but they could have.

WHITE: Bill Whitman and I made many a trip over to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss these problems and iron them out. Some of these issues may still be sensitive, so I don't want to get involved in a discussion of details.

The other thing that was going on involved terrorism. We had a very difficult relationship with the Italians with regard to terrorism. Do you remember the incident of the MS [Motor Ship] Achille Lauro?

Q: Oh, yes.

WHITE: That was an ugly incident in the fall of 1985. You know how we dealt with that. U.S. planes stationed at an air base in Italy were scrambled and forced an Egyptian plane down on Italian territory with some of those terrorists on board. This created some problems. It was a very difficult time. Terrorism was a real problem. The Achille Lauro was only one of the incidents that happened. We had other ugly incidents.

Aviation security was very much on my mind at that point. I remember one occasion, just before the Christmas holidays in 1985. FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] had a team arrive in Rome from Washington. The two American airlines we had flying into Rome regularly were Pan American and TWA. Just getting into the sales offices of these airlines was like getting into a fortress. Security precautions at that time were very that strict.

We went out to the airport, and the Italians showed us the whole structure of their security apparatus. They were very proud of it. We thought that it was a very good security system, to the extent that you can have real security in such a situation. Unfortunately, TWA's check-in counter was right next to the counter of El Al [Israeli state airline]. Two weeks later, I was on vacation in the Alps with my family. I picked up a newspaper. A terrorist squad had hit Fiumicino Airport, the airport for Rome. They started firing at the EL AL counter. Americans, of course, were lined up at the adjacent, TWA counter. Some of them were killed, including a little girl who was one of my daughter's classmates.

Of course, Italy was right in the middle of all of this. It's close to the Arab world and to the center of this hijacking activity. Aviation was not a very pleasant job to handle.

What I enjoyed was the reporting on the EC [European Commission]. I had a lot of

latitude there and developed a lot of good contacts in the Italian ministries. Every time the Italians would come back from a meeting of the EC, and there were numerous such meetings, they were always very gracious and very open in debriefing me, knowing full well that I would report to Washington on what was going on. The Italians saw it as in their interest to maintain very close relations with the U.S. in this whole area.

We had other, interesting issues going on in the whole area of industrial policy, which was a very important subject at that time.

Q: What do you mean by industrial policy?

WHITE: This would involve such areas as the aerospace industry. By the way, our Ambassador displayed a very keen interest in aerospace matters.

Maxwell Raab was the Ambassador. He took a keen interest in the aerospace industry itself. I used to report extensively on these activities.

Another incident that blew up and which I found rather interesting had to do with helicopter sales. A British helicopter company, Westland, was on the verge of bankruptcy and was up for sale. A firestorm broke out in the British Government led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher about how this should be resolved.

One element of the British Government was headed by Michael Heseltine [Minister of Defense at that time]. I don't know how familiar you are with British politics. He was a very prominent figure in the British Conservative Party.

Q: Oh, yes.

WHITE: He wasn't necessarily the favorite of Mrs. Thatcher.

He wanted to keep this helicopter company in European hands. This attitude did not sit well with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Briefly, an American company, wanted to buy out this British helicopter company, Sikorsky. This became a heated issue.

Now, what was the Italian involvement? The Italian involvement was very interesting. Sikorsky, very intelligently, figured out that they had better have a European partner. So, lo and behold, they picked up an Italian partner to give their bid more of a European cast. That was Fiat. There were many implications in this, and it was in the context of what I was saying earlier. That is, this larger problem of European versus American influences in Italian industrial policy.

Another case which was very revealing was in the Italian automotive industry. Alfa Romeo, of course, is a famous name among car enthusiasts. This was a state-owned company and it was going bankrupt. The Italian state wanted to unload Alfa Romeo. Ford

Motor Company saw an opportunity here, and Ford put in a bid for Alfa Romeo. Gianni Agnelli, the owner of FIAT, didn't like this at all. However, before Ford entered the picture, if I'm reconstructing this correctly now, the Italian Government had gone to Agnelli and asked him if he would buy Alfa-Romeo. The government said that keeping Alfa-Romeo going was costing too much money and that it needed to be run with more discipline. By the way, the man who was running the state enterprises - IRI - was Romano Prodi, who is now the Prime Minister of Italy.

IRI was the holding company for all or most of these state-controlled enterprises in Italy. As I recall the story, Agnelli didn't want to buy Alfa-Romeo. However, on the other hand, the Italian Government wanted to find a buyer for it. FIAT thought that they could pick up the company cheap. The story was that Agnelli said that he didn't need it, but that if the Italian Government really insisted, okay, he would buy it but he wouldn't pay much for it.

I don't know what role Prodi played in this, but at this point Ford Motor Company jumped in with a very good bid for Alfa-Romeo. Well, all hell broke loose at that point. This was a very interesting thing to watch. There was one body of opinion in Italy which said: "Look, what we need in this country is more competition. Ford is a big company, and Ford will give us competition. If FIAT gets Alfa-Romeo, FIAT will have a virtual monopoly of the whole Italian automotive industry." But, of course, FIAT had friends, and there was also a voice saying: "Italy for the Italians." Don't forget, Alfa-Romeo was a very prestigious name in Italy. It was more than the sum of the parts, in a way. There was an element of prestige involved here. It was interesting to see the way public opinion in Italy divided on this issue.

Well, at the end of the day the politicians saw to it that Ford did not get Alfa-Romeo. Agnelli got Alfa-Romeo. It's too bad and, in a way, most Italians, I think, would agree that it would have been far better for Italy had Ford won that competition and taken over Alfa-Romeo. That would have meant real competition in Agnelli's back yard. That is, in FIAT's back yard. So that's the kind of things that were going on at that time.

Q: Perhaps we should close off the discussion at this point and give you a chance to make further comments on Italy next week.

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This is Wednesday, November 5, 1997. I am John Harter, for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Al, when we halted the last session of this interview, you were concluding your comments about your assignment to the American Embassy in Rome. Do you have any further comments about that?

WHITE: I think that we have basically covered it. I mentioned one particular company, a British helicopter company, Westland, in describing a tug of war between the U.S. and the Europeans in terms of industrial activity.

Sikorsky, as I said, was making a bid for Westland with Fiat as partner with a 15% interest. Aerospatiale of France teamed up with Messerschmidt of Germany and a smaller Italian company, Augusta-Bell, to get control of Westland. It became quite a cause celebre politically in Europe and in London. Michael Heseltine, a member of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's cabinet, was very strongly in favor of a European solution to the problem of Westland. Margaret Thatcher had equally strong views that the outcome should be decided on purely commercial terms. She was not about to intervene. She didn't think that that was the way to do things. Beyond that, I think that she was less European in her feelings than Michael Heseltine was.

The Westland stockholders wanted the American (Sikorsky-United Technologies) bid to be accepted, because it was a better bid for the company and a better deal for the stockholders. So that's the way it finally went. Heseltine resigned in a huff. Anyone interested in further detail can read all about that in Margaret Thatcher's memoirs.

I think that we've covered most of the rest of my time in the Embassy in Rome. We had a lot of problems in the security area, as I mentioned. Now I'm talking about aviation security. There were some tragic, terrorist attacks that created some difficulties and ended up with our building a security fence around that beautiful American Embassy on the Via Veneto in Rome. We felt that we had no alternative to doing that, although it was done rather tastefully. The security fence hasn't marred the appearance of the building too much.

One thing I wanted to do in Italy was to develop a more coordinated program of reporting by the constituent posts. This has always been a problem. Different Embassies, in different countries handle this in different ways. Some Embassies allow their consular posts to do a lot of independent work. Other Embassies insist on controlling the process very tightly.

Q: Of course in Italy the Consulates and Consulates General tend to be quite large, and there is a number of them. So I would think that it would be more difficult to have reporting by the constituent posts orchestrated from the Embassy in Rome than it would be in a country with just three or four, small Consulates.

WHITE: It's a problem. One's natural instinct is to give the Consulates a lot of free rein to do their own thing. They know their consular districts. However, on the other hand, there has been occasional embarrassment in some countries when consular posts have reported to the Department in cables which the Embassy involved thereafter did not particularly like.

You could have coordination without stifling independent action by the constituent posts. After much discussion with the various Consulates we were able to develop a reporting program for the entire country, and not just the Embassy. This program involved the Consulates as well and gave them specific reporting assignments, tasks we wanted them to handle, or specific areas for their alert reporting. I think this program made the Consulates feel a part of an overall pattern of activity and that they weren't out there, just

struggling on their own. Or doing something and then being slapped on the wrist by the Embassy. I think that this was a good technique and approach.

I left the Embassy in Rome before we could really see the results of this program over time, but I do think that that is the way to go in terms of coordinating and getting the best out of the consular posts. Always remember that in your consular posts you have junior officers who need training and stimulation.

Q: I think that a Consulate is one of the best places to put a junior officer.

WHITE: I couldn't agree more.

Q: My first assignment was in a small Consulate. I ended up being there alone for about one year. That's the best possible introduction to the Foreign Service.

WHITE: I think so. My own first post was the Consulate in Bremen. At first I thought that I would rather have been down in Bonn, in the Embassy, where all of the major activities were taking place. When I went down to Bonn and attended a conference, I found out that, really, I was learning a lot more in Bremen. While the Embassy in Bonn was more important, the staff was so large that junior officers were quite limited in the scope of what they could do. I found that I was doing a lot more and learning a lot more at a smaller post.

Now, with regard to long term reporting, I don't think that in the Foreign Service we do enough of this. We don't sit back enough, look at a country, and try to project the future and where on earth it is going. I also don't think that Foreign Service Officers generally try their hand, as much as they should, at policy analysis. They may think, of course, that it is not their job to engage in policy, that they're there to carry out policy, particularly when they're junior or middle grade officers. On the other hand, in terms of developing their analytical capacity and of thinking in policy terms, I think that it's important.

Q: I had some interesting experience in this regard. Unfortunately, the Department of State itself does not have as much influence over the whole, foreign policy process as it should. I think that that is one of the problems. The presumption is that the President makes foreign policy, with the advice and consent of the Senate and taking into account public opinion polls and so forth. So the NSC [National Security Council], with all of its inputs from the Pentagon and the CIA, is really the place where you assume that major policy is made, and the State Department implements it. That's a broad perception. I think that it's one of the reasons that we have not had a clear and cohesive foreign policy, especially since the collapse of communism.

WHITE: Well, we do have something called Open Forum. I'm sure that you're familiar with that. At least there is a publication with that name to publish contributions of this kind. What I found out in doing that kind of writing was that it's much easier to write a policy paper than have anyone pay attention to it. [Laughter] I recall submitting a paper to Open Forum.

Q: On what subject?

WHITE: The subject was American foreign policy in general in the Mediterranean Sea area. That's a rather big subject, but I had some specific ideas on how that policy should work.

I sent this paper in to Open Forum, and they sent back a nice letter to me with a little critique, which said why they were not going to publish the paper. [Laughter] Anyway, I also wrote a paper on the U.S., Italy, and the Mediterranean, just as I'd earlier written a paper on the U.S., Turkey, and the Mediterranean. My general theme, which obviously wasn't going to find much reception in Washington, was that the U.S. was over exposed and too deeply and conspicuously engaged...

Q: You mean militarily?

WHITE: Not only that, but rather our overall presence, and with particular reference to our military presence. I even suggested that we had too many military bases in the area. Rather than being held up by foreign governments every four or five years which tended to make exorbitant demands for the privilege of being defended by our bases, my approach was that we shouldn't be held up in that manner. If these bases were not seen as being in the interest of these countries, we shouldn't have them there, anyway. I said that, moreover, we didn't need all of those bases. With the development of technology and other changes in the area, we really didn't need so enormous a base structure.

You imagine how a recommendation like that would be received in the Pentagon. In the Pentagon, of course, as you say, I'd be considered dangerous for entertaining such heretical thoughts. However, indeed, these countries were holding us up in the various base negotiations. This was going on in Turkey, Spain, and Greece, which are three countries which come to mind in this connection. It got to the point where the bases, which, after all, were supposed to be of joint benefit to both countries, were seen as means of extracting all kinds of concessions from the United States.

I also felt that these countries might have more natural relationships with each other if they didn't have that overwhelming, American presence to turn to or rely upon in dealing with each other. Anyway, that was one of the types of writing that I tried to do in Italy, but, as I say, it didn't get very far. It's easy to write papers and it's kind of fun. However, getting anyone to pay attention to them is something else.

I also wrote a paper entitled, "Italy, 2000," which was a look at where Italy was going. I reread it recently. It was very interesting. In some respects, it was pretty much on target...

Q: You finally found a reader for your paper!

WHITE: I don't know who read these papers.

Q: You did!

WHITE: The report on "Italy, 2000" was an Embassy effort. Looking back at it, it's interesting to see that the economic, sociological, and demographic portions of it came out pretty well. I wasn't the only one making these predictions. Other people were making them, too. We were putting them all on paper and coordinating them.

One thing which I had anticipated was a rise in Italian nationalism. Now, curiously enough, that didn't happen, in the sense of Italy-wide nationalism. What has developed in Italy is a kind of regional nationalism. It's happening, not only in Italy, but in France and other countries as well.

Q: You mean Florentine and other nationalism?

WHITE: Yes, more of a regional approach. There is an entire movement in Northern Italy called the Lega Lombarda, [the Lombard League]. In its more extreme form it would legally separate Northern from Southern Italy and make it an independent country. Of course, no one but crackpots believes that that's going to happen, but the thrust is toward greater autonomy in the various regions of Italy. As you may have seen in the press, just a few weeks ago, Scotland has voted for its own Parliament. Scotland has not had its own Parliament since the 18th century.

Ironically enough, in Europe, and maybe not only in Europe, we're seeing a decline of traditional nationalism as the various countries are subsumed into the European Union and other multinational organizations. However, coupled with that is a rise in a kind of what you might call regional nationalism. It's happening in Italy, it has happened in France, and it's happening now even in Scotland. I hear that even the Welsh may soon have their own Parliament. I don't know that the Welsh ever had a separate Parliament. Who knows where it will end? What we're seeing in Europe is a kind of regionalism combined with a supernationalism.

I think that this is a wholesome development. However, the point is that, as I look back at this paper, I was half right and half wrong, in the sense that I saw nationalism developing, but it didn't develop on a national scale, but on a regional scale.

Q: For somebody with your interest in history, it must have been interesting to live and work in Rome.

WHITE: Of course, it was a fascinating city to live in. It's not an easy city to live in, by the way. It's a rather chaotic place. It's a fantastic place if you like history, as you say. As a city, Rome doesn't work very well. The traffic is terrible. If you think that we have bad traffic, go to Italy. There is near total paralysis of the traffic in Rome. Municipal services don't work very well. It's an easier city to visit than to live in. However, that's true of a lot of places. It's probably true of Paris and London as well.

Q: This is certainly true of Tokyo.

WHITE: I'm not familiar with Tokyo. Of course, I've heard horrendous stories about that.

I think that, overall, what I got out of Rome in terms of personal development and personal interest was a seat from which to watch the development of the European Community. I think I mentioned before that for six months Italy had the Presidency of the European Commission. And for those six months, of course, everyone in Washington wanted to know what the Italians were up to. So, of course, we had many conversations with the Italians about their Presidency of the European Commission. Even apart from that, even when the Italian term as President of the EC was over, it was a fascinating place from which to watch the development of the European Community.

Q: I guess that you were sorry to leave after only two years in Rome.

WHITE: Actually, I was in Rome for about 2 ½ years. Professionally, I think, I was ready to move on. I think that I had gotten just about everything that I could, professionally, out of the assignment to Rome.

Q: Did you get a direct transfer to Caracas, Venezuela?

WHITE: No, I came back to Washington for several months. It took a while for that assignment to the Embassy in Caracas to shape up.

Q: What were you doing during that time?

WHITE: For a few months I was studying French, then Spanish.

Q: So it was presumed that you were going to Latin America. You'd never been there before.

WHITE: It was not clear at first that I was going there. There were several possibilities, one of which was Seoul, South Korea. The Economic Counselor job was opening in Seoul, and I was interested in that. Several jobs like that came open in Latin America. What I would have preferred to do was to go back to Europe. However, for some reason, things just didn't work out in Europe, even though I had the obvious background for such an assignment.

So for a time I worked on the Iran-Contra Task Force in the Operations Center in the State Department. I really wasn't doing anything more than monitoring TV hearings going on in Congress.

Q: Tell us a little about that.

WHITE: My role was minor. I was simply in the Operations Center to monitor the TV hearings and write up a synopsis of these hearings in the Operations Center on the Seventh Floor of the State Department. Well, you know that that period was very

dramatic, and a lot of attention was being given to those hearings. For some reason the powers that be in the Department thought that we should monitor the hearings.

Q: Well, I think that somebody should have been doing that. In my view that was a lot more important than a lot of people realized. Speaking of a lack of foreign policy and lack of control over the policy process, this was, perhaps, the most dramatic example of all of how people way out in "left field" operated. Like CIA, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North...

WHITE: Washington is never happier than when there is a big, juicy scandal. The media loves it.

Q: This whole episode made a mockery of what the State Department and the Foreign Service are all about. This was really the "Cold War" going crazy.

WHITE: In that particular period of time the situation in Central America was THE news, of course. Everybody was talking about it, and the hearings in Congress were quite spectacular. Secretary of State Shultz testified, among many other people. Anyway I spent perhaps several weeks summarizing the TV hearings. Then I went into Spanish language training.

Q: From that experience did you get any special insights into the situation? Obviously, I have my own prejudices about it, but did you have some unique sense of it that was not part of the public record?

WHITE: No, because what I was doing was simply watching the public hearings.

Q: And you were writing reports about them?

WHITE: Just synopses of the hearings.

Q: Where did these synopses go?

WHITE: I suppose that they were turned over to ARA [Bureau of Interamerican Affairs].

Q: The press, of course, was preparing exhaustive reports on the hearings. What could you write that the press didn't write about?

WHITE: All I was doing was summarizing the hearings, which apparently was of some use to some people in the Department of State. Obviously, these hearings were a rather spectacular and bizarre process. I don't know any more about that than what's in the public domain. I had no inner access to any aspect of it. This was something that people on the Seventh Floor wanted to have done, and they were looking for people to do it. I was between assignments, so that's what happened, as those things do.

Q: This was for several weeks?

WHITE: Yes, for several weeks. Then I took Spanish training, and we went down to the Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, that summer.

Q: Why did you go to Caracas? Up to that point you had no background in Latin American affairs.

WHITE: I had no background in Latin American affairs. However, I wanted a job as Economic Counselor, and I wanted such a job in a country where the U.S. had some fairly substantial interests and where the work would be interesting. (End of tape)

Q: You said that there were several openings in Latin America for which you might have been considered?

WHITE: There were several Economic Counselor jobs which just happened to be opening up. There were at least two in Latin America, Buenos Aires and Caracas. As I said, the other opening I was looking at was the job of Economic Counselor in Seoul, South Korea. This job had pro's and con's, as does any job.

In any case, the job that fell into place was in the Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela.

Q: So what did you do to prepare for that?

WHITE: The usual things. Spanish language training, to begin with. Also some area training.

Q: You were pretty fluent in both Italian and German at that point, but you'd had no prior assignment to a Spanish-speaking post.

WHITE: No. The feeling was that since I knew Italian, Spanish was a language which I would not need to spend a great deal of time studying. I think that I had two months of Spanish language training. The problem is that Italian and Spanish are so similar that you can get them mixed up. It's like listening to two radio stations at the same time. They are so similar that they tend to interfere with each other. In fact, if you speak Italian slowly and correctly, you will be understood by most people speaking Spanish. The converse is also true. When you get into dialects of Italian or Spanish, it gets a little more difficult.

Q: You went to Venezuela as Economic Counselor. This was the same job that you had had in both Rome and Ankara.

WHITE: That's right.

Q: This was quite similar to what you had been doing, in terms of basic function.

Could you say how these jobs were similar and how were they different?

WHITE: They were similar, but, of course, there are always dissimilarities as well. Venezuela itself is an interesting country of about 20 million people. If you look at it on a map of Latin America, it looks small, in a relative sense. Actually, the area of Venezuela exceeds that of France and Italy combined. Everything is relative, but Venezuela is a fairly large country. Except when you compare it with Brazil, which is a huge country.

Q: Could you say something about the economic and political situation...

WHITE: Of course, it was my first time in Latin America. You always go to a country with certain preconceptions, most of which turn out to be false. One of these preconceptions, which I had heard all of my life, was that there was an intense, anti-gringo [anti-American] sentiment. You know the slogans: "Gringo, go home," and "Yankee, go home." If you remember, when Nixon was Vice President, he visited Caracas, Venezuela, and his car and he, himself, were spat upon, and he was almost pulled out of his car. He ran into a very ugly riot that almost got out of control. In fact, I still remember that visit. So I expected to find a country deeply suspicious of the United States for historical and cultural reasons.

To my amazement, I found that Venezuelans in no sense were anti-American. As a matter of fact, they are very friendly to Americans. This feeling is very genuine. You can always tell if such feelings are genuine.

Visually, Caracas looked exactly like an American city. On every corner you would find stores like those in the U.S. There was one block near the Embassy with a Dunkin' Donuts, a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and a McDonald's, all in one block. Of course, there were American automobiles all over the place.

Q: You arrived in Caracas in 1987?

WHITE: It was actually early in September 1987 when we arrived there. The people speak Spanish, of course, but the city looks like an American city. The younger generation of Venezuelans appeared to be completely sold on things American. That is, their clothing, their music, and the films they would go to. In fact, I remember going to a film with the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] shortly after I got there. I was surprised that the film was in English. I had expected that the dialogue would be dubbed in Spanish. The films were in English, and there would often be Spanish sub-titles. I inquired about this and was told: "Of course, everyone goes to the movies mainly to learn and practice their English. They want to practice hearing English."

Venezuela's relationship with the United States is close and historic. While the politicians, apparently, from time to time feel obliged to engage in some boiler plate anti-American rhetoric, few people seemed to pay much attention to it. The first morning I went to the Embassy, I was surprised to see the long lines of people out in front of the Consular Section, getting visas and having other consular services of various kinds performed.

Everyone in Venezuela seemed to have two homes: his own and Miami. I found out in Venezuela, by the way, that, in a sense, Miami is sort of the capital of Latin America, in many ways. The Venezuelans flock to Miami. The wealthier ones have apartments or homes in Miami. Their wives go up to Miami to have their babies, and then the baby is an American citizen, which affects their own ability to enter the United States. The relationship between Venezuela and the United States is extremely close.

Well, what are American interests in Venezuela? In one word you've got it: oil.

Q: Okay, talk about oil and Venezuela.

WHITE: Well, in a nutshell, oil is almost the story of Venezuelan history.

Q: And of U.S. interests in Venezuela, the Rockefeller's...

WHITE: There are two major U.S. interests in Venezuela, I would say. The first is geographical. Venezuela, in fact, is part of what was once known as the Spanish Main. As you can see on a map, most of the southern shore of the Caribbean Sea is Venezuelan territory. A part of the southern shore is in Colombia.

In short, the Caribbean is our Mediterranean. It's impossible to overestimate the strategic importance of the Caribbean to the United States. The Caribbean is important to us just as the Mediterranean is to Italy and as it was to Rome. The Romans used to talk about "Mare Nostrum," which means, "Our Sea." Geography is one of the bases of foreign policy. In fact, proximity does create special interests. For that reason, whatever goes on in Venezuela, even if there were no oil there, is of vital interest to us, because it is the southern shore of a sea of which we have the northern shore. I'm speaking now in very simplistic terms.

Added to that, of course, is oil. There were eight people in the Economic Section of the Embassy in Caracas. I was, of course, the Economic Counselor and the chief of the section. The second-ranking officer in the section was the Petroleum Attache. Venezuela is one of the few countries where we have a Petroleum Attache.

Q: Was he a Foreign Service Officer?

WHITE: He was a Foreign Service Officer, born in Cuba. His name was Miguel De la Pena.

Q: I know him very well.

WHITE: Miguel was the Petroleum Attache. The fact that we had that position itself indicates the importance we attached to oil. Strangely enough, most Americans don't think of oil when they think of Venezuela. When they think of oil, they think of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and other countries of the Persian Gulf in the Near East. The truth is that Venezuela is the number one oil supplier to the United States. Now, in any one

month it may fall to number two or three position, but normally and increasingly Venezuela is our leading oil supplier.

We are very lucky that this is the case. We don't really have to depend on oil from far-off, dangerous, and explosive areas like the Near East. Now, what happens in the Near East affects the price of oil and, of course, it affects the world supply and demand relationship. However, most of the oil we normally need and consume we get from the U.S. itself, Mexico, Canada, and Venezuela. In fact, one of the little-known aspects of World War II is the number of our ships which were torpedoed by German submarines in the Caribbean Sea. There was active, submarine warfare going on in the Caribbean. What were the German submarines after? They were particularly interested in attacking oil tankers bringing in oil from Venezuela.

The reserves of oil in Venezuela are impressive. If you include certain categories like so-called heavy oils, they are virtually inexhaustible. In fact, heavy oil reserves in Venezuela, along the Orinoco River and in that area, rival those of Saudi Arabia. There is oil of all different kinds in Venezuela. They're finding more oil all the time and they're developing better technology and methods of producing oil from known sources.

Q: Some of this is from the Exxon Oil Company, right?

WHITE: The oil industry in Venezuela was developed by American oil companies. In the 1970s the oil industry was nationalized. All of our big oil companies were there in force and had been for a long time. I think that the production of oil in Venezuela started around the time of World War I, if I'm not mistaken.

Q: Or even earlier?

WHITE: Maybe earlier.

Q: The Rockefellers were involved in the production of oil in Venezuela.

WHITE: Oil in Venezuela was originally found in the Lake Maracaibo area. That is a vast and very shallow body of water in Northwestern Venezuela. You can see it on any map. You can see it even on this general map of South America [pointing to Venezuela]. Lake Maracaibo is where the oil in Venezuela was first found. I remember as a kid seeing pictures in geography books of the oil rigs sitting in the water of Lake Maracaibo.

Venezuela also has major, natural gas reserves. Venezuela is a country rich in other natural resources. It has coal, which it doesn't need. It can export all or most of its coal. It has massive quantities of bauxite [the raw material used to produce aluminum]. It has iron ore. It has gold. It has precious stones and rare earth minerals. We had frequent visits from an American geologist who worked in Venezuela. He told me he was absolutely astonished at the mineral wealth of Venezuela.

As I say, we Americans are very lucky to have Venezuela where it is, because it is a very

sure source of oil.

Q: And Venezuela is a member of OPEC [Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries].

WHITE: Venezuela is a founding member of OPEC. However, Venezuela was never part of the Arab embargo on shipments of oil to the United States and certain European countries associated with the United States. People tend to get these things confused in their minds.

It's amazing. We used to get a lot of congressional delegations visiting Venezuela. The first thing we had to tell them was to disabuse themselves of the notion that, somehow, the Venezuelans had teamed up against us in the Arab oil embargo [of 1973-1974]. Venezuela was never part of that oil embargo. They were members of OPEC but, like most other members of OPEC, they paid very little attention to the production quotas set by OPEC. Some of the people in the petroleum industry in Venezuela would just as soon not be in OPEC at all. Officially, they'd never say that. Effectively, membership in OPEC didn't have any real influence on Venezuelan oil production when I was there.

Unfortunately for Venezuela, the country is so totally dependent on oil that they really haven't developed their other resources the way that they should have done. During the 1970s and 1980s, of course, the price of oil was high, and Venezuela was wallowing in oil. Also unfortunately, the money that came into the country from oil exports was not well used. Corruption was massive in the country, and the currency was overvalued.

Q: Given Venezuela's massive wealth, especially in oil, how come the country has a foreign debt problem? On reflection, I guess you just answered that.

WHITE: Exactly. I've even heard Venezuelans say: "You know, we would have been better off without all of that oil money."

Q: Of course, Nigeria has another, similar problem, and even Indonesia, to a degree.

WHITE: The money was simply not well used within the country. There still are enormous disparities in wealth in Latin America. The typical Latin American country has very wealthy people living next door to a slum. There is very little sense of social consciousness of one group toward another.

In the case of Venezuela, about 90 percent of the country's available, foreign exchange comes from exports of oil. Now, although the price of oil can go up, they found, to their dismay, that it also can go down. When oil prices went down in the late 1980s and the 1990s, Venezuela, a one-commodity country, was hurting and hurting severely. That's one of the problems that we had to live with.

However, to go back to the oil industry for just a second, the industry was nationalized in the 1970s, and there were some bitter feelings left there when the international oil

companies were forced out of producing oil. But the politicians had enough sense not to politicize the oil industry. They allowed a very competent management group, most of whom were trained in the American-owned oil companies and had reached high levels in these companies, to operate on their own, and they kept them at arm's length. They didn't stack the oil industry with all kinds of political hacks, as the Mexicans did, for example, with their oil industry. The result is that PDVSA, an acronym for the Venezuelan Petroleum Company, which controls all oil production within the country...

Q: How do you spell it?

WHITE: PDVSA. It means Petroleos de Venezuela, S. A. It means the Venezuelan Petroleum Company, Inc. We, of course, had very close relationships with the management of PDVSA.

Q: I was going to ask how you and Miguel De la Pena were related to the Venezuelan oil industry, in your day to day activity.

WHITE: We had very close relations with them. Miguel was the Petroleum Attache, as I said. Of course, he had a lot of good contacts in the oil industry. We had a basic report on the oil industry which we had to prepare every year. This was Miguel's responsibility. It was a fairly massive, comprehensive report on the oil industry of Venezuela.

Of course, as the Economic Counselor, I had a lot to do with the major figures of the oil industry, and this went all the way up in the Embassy. The Ambassador had a lot to do with the President of Venezuela. We worked at different levels with the oil industry. Twice a year we had formal, bilateral talks between Venezuela and the United States on oil issues. These talks were held alternately in Washington and then in Caracas. A delegation would come down from Washington, including State Department people from the Office of Petroleum in EB [Bureau of Economic Affairs] and from the Department of Energy. We worked very closely with the Department of Energy.

The Venezuelans were very interested in our Strategic Oil Reserve.

Q: Please describe it briefly.

WHITE: This is a U.S. Government oil reserve. The U.S. Government has bought huge quantities of petroleum, which are stored down in Louisiana in underground, natural caves which are so constructed that the oil just stays there. In case of an emergency, we would be able to draw on that reserve of oil. But, of course, that reserve can also complicate international supply and demand patterns. For example, if the U.S. dumped too much of that oil on the market, this could affect prices. The Venezuelans were always very concerned about this oil reserve, although we had very close relationships with them in terms of oil policy.

Most of the equipment for the oil industry in Venezuela came from the United States. As a result, we were still doing a large amount of business with Venezuela in this sector. Just

as Caracas related very closely to Miami, Maracaibo, the center of the Venezuelan oil industry, related very closely to Houston, TX, where the head offices of many oil companies are located. While Maracaibo was the center of the Venezuelan oil industry, by now oil is found all over Venezuela or in most parts of it.

PDVSA, the Venezuelan Oil Company, had major investments in the United States. In fact, there's a whole chain of U.S. retail gasoline stations, CITGO, which is Venezuelan-owned. We have a near perfect marriage with Venezuela, in that we need their oil, but they need our market. The United States is THE market for Venezuelan oil. The oil is no good to Venezuela unless they can sell it. They sell some oil to Europe, but not all that much. That's a relationship which makes for a very tight bond between the two countries.

Oil was not really a problem for us, although it was very important. We watched the Venezuelan oil industry and we maintained very close relations with PDVSA. We had a string of congressional delegations coming down to Venezuela to visit the oil industry. PDVSA executives were very professional in their manner and always staged superb demonstrations and briefings. These delegations went all over the country. I have been in some of the most remote corners of Venezuela, visiting their oil operations.

The second big problem we had with Venezuela was the management of its foreign debt. When I was in Venezuela, the Venezuelans had managed to build up a debt to American banks of $35 billion. You remember the debt crisis in Latin America.

Q: Right.

WHITE: Well, I think that Venezuela was the third ranking debtor in Latin America.

I presume that Argentina and Brazil were probably the other two major debtors.

To go back to the organization of the Economic Section, we had the Petroleum Attache, whom I have already mentioned. We had one officer who basically looked after debt and financial matters.

Q: Who was that?

WHITE: That was Stan Speck, during most of the time that I was in Venezuela. He was a younger but very good officer. We had another officer who dealt with reporting on different and specific sectors of the Venezuelan economy other than oil. He or she also dealt with trade policy problems. Then we had a junior officer who was sort of the back up and utility officer in the Economic Section. We had one American secretary and two local employees. So that was the Economic Section of the Embassy in Caracas.

The Venezuelan foreign debt, as I say, was a big problem, a major headache. All of the U.S. money center banks had representatives permanently stationed in Venezuela. We had very close ties with them. There were many bankers who came down to Venezuela from all over the U.S., to whom the Venezuelans owed money. You know, I had that deja

vu feeling, because this is exactly the problem I had had in Turkey. The Turks also owed a lot of money to the U.S. U.S. bankers would flock into Ankara, as they flocked into Caracas, they would come and see us, nervously inquiring about the status of things. They would ask: "Could the Venezuelans pay and when would they pay?" We went through the same drill with them.

We had various debt rescheduling agreements with Venezuela which had been worked out. The Venezuelans were always sending people to Washington. We had very close relations with the U.S. Treasury Department. Someone in Treasury was on the phone to the Embassy virtually every day. That's how serious the Venezuelan debt problem was. How did this happen?

Well, frankly, the U.S. banks operating in Venezuela did what they did in Turkey. They just weren't very sound in their loan decisions. Of course, the reason was that they were competing with each other. I would say to every American banker who would come to my office: "How did you get into this situation?" The answer was exactly the same thing that I heard when I asked the same question in Ankara: "Well, our competitors were there, and we were under tremendous pressure." I remember an American banker in Caracas telling me that he had received a cable one day from his headquarters complaining indignantly that another U.S. bank had just floated a huge loan in Venezuela. They asked him why he hadn't done that. The implication was: "Go out and extend some loans, buddy, or you won't be there very long." The banks tend, lemming-like, to go over the cliff together. That has been my impression in dealing with them.

Regarding drugs, Venezuela is fortunately not a drug producing country, or it was not when I served there, anyway.

Q: Of course, it's right next door to Colombia.

WHITE: That's the problem, its geographical position. Its borders are very remote and in very wild country.

Q: Are its borders permeable?

WHITE: Yes, to say the least. Particularly, the land along the Venezuelan border with Brazil. When you're down there in the valley of the Orinoco River and along the Colombian border, it's the same thing. Those borders are in very wild and unsettled country. Policing that area is virtually impossible.

Toward the end of my stay in Venezuela the U.S. Treasury was getting concerned about possible money laundering involving Venezuela. I wouldn't say when I went to Venezuela in 1987 that was as much a problem as it gradually became during the three years that I was there.

Because of the low oil price at that time, Venezuela's economy was slowly sinking into the ground. There was a Presidential election in late 1988. A new President was elected

who took power in early 1989. To put it all in a nutshell, he found, when he entered office, that the cupboard was bare. Leading up to this election the Venezuelan Government really hadn't been very frank in telling the country where things stood, and things did not stand very well at all.

Q: So who was elected in 1988?

WHITE: The man elected was a very interesting man. His name was Carlos Andres Perez. If you were a Latin American hand, you would have heard that name. He was known as "CAP," the initial letters of his name. CAP had previously been President of Venezuela in the good old days. He was the man who had nationalized the oil industry.

Back in the 1970s, that was the time when practically all Latin American governments were doing the same thing. Import substitution was the rule. You mentioned your connection with UNCTAD [UN Conference on Trade and Development]. You know the philosophy that was prevailing at that time. The themes were: keep the foreigners out, import substitution, subsidize industries domestically to ensure that no producer from abroad could compete with them, run up huge deficits, and, in other words, spend and spend and spend. Big spending. And, of course, nationalize everything owned by the foreigners. That was the prevailing philosophy in Latin America. I'm sure you're very familiar with it.

I think that you mentioned a man called Raul Prebisch. I think that he had a lot to do with this Latin American economic model, if I'm not mistaken.

Anyway, Carlos Andres Perez turned out to be quite a President. Under the Venezuelan Constitution he could not succeed himself. So, after his term of office as President in the 1970s, he could not be reelected, although he could come back later and then run for office. And he did.

Q: He was wandering through the wilderness...

WHITE: Actually, what he was doing was building himself a reputation internationally, because he was a Vice President of the Socialist International. When he was running for President in 1988, we were watching the elections, as all Embassies do. Of course, for us it was important who ran Venezuela. It was not just a matter of academic interest. I recall that the business community didn't like him.

Q: Not surprising.

WHITE: Not surprising. In Washington he wasn't viewed very highly. Nationalization of the oil industry had left a rather bitter taste in Washington. He was regarded as something of a big-spending demagogue. I recall that when he spoke one day at the American Chamber of Commerce, I was prepared to be unimpressed. However, I came away very impressed with him, because one of the things that he said was: "Look, a leader has to change with the times. If he doesn't change, he's not a leader."

By the way, our Ambassador to Venezuela at the time was Otto Reich. You remember him?

Q: Oh, yes. He was quite young and a political appointee.

WHITE: He was very personable.

Q: He was close to Bill Brock.

WHITE: Exactly. In fact, he may be working with Bill Brock now.

Q: Yes.

WHITE: He was very personable. He had one great gift, of course. He was fluent in Spanish. He grew up in Cuba. He had excellent relationships with the Venezuelan governing class, in spite of the fact that some of them were on the Left, and he was more or less on the Right of our political spectrum.

CAP was reelected President of Venezuela. I don't think that there was any doubt about his being reelected.

Q: Who was the opposition candidate?

WHITE: The opposition candidate was a younger man named Eduardo Fernandez. Venezuela had a two-party system. AD, Accion Democratica [Democratic Action], is one party. The other is called COPEI. AD, the party of CAP, was somewhat left of center.

The opposition party, COPEI, was considered sort of right of center. They were both moderate, main stream parties.

Q: Who had been the preceding President?

WHITE: Jaime Lusinchi. He had been a physician and had practiced in New York City at one point in his life. He was very personable and very likeable. A charming man. He was of the same party as CAP, by the way, though they represented different factions of it. Maybe we're getting too much into local politics here. However, there were two groups within AD. One centered around CAP, and one centered around Jaime Lusinchi. Lusinchi, of course, could not replace himself anyway, so AD officially supported CAP, and people remembered CAP from the good old days, a big spender. So he was reelected.

As I said, CAP's opponent was a younger man, Eduardo Fernandez, who had gone to Georgetown University. He was a very impressive figure. I recall once taking a visiting U.S. Senator to call on him. He was even more impressive in private. CAP never spoke English, but Fernandez was of the younger generation who spoke English beautifully. He was very savvy and very sensible. Frankly, I don't know how his political fortunes have

fared since I left Venezuela, but he put on a very good political campaign in the election of 1988. Fernandez was considered the underdog, and I don't think that anyone really thought that he could beat CAP. And CAP, of course, was duly elected.

After his election CAP went to Washington and developed quite a relationship with President George Bush. In fact, one of the first foreign leaders that President Bush saw after his election was CAP, who was very much thrilled by that. Bear in mind here was a man, CAP, who had built up a reputation in the past as a person who had gone after Uncle Sam, pulled Uncle Sam's whiskers, nationalized the oil industry, and kicked out all of those foreigners. However, in fact, CAP developed quite a good relationship with the Bush administration. Vice President Dan Quayle came down for CAP's inauguration as President of Venezuela in early 1989.

Then, frankly, the roof fell in. Of course, it wasn't CAP's fault. The roof had been falling in during the previous few years. It just collapsed while he was President of Venezuela. Indeed, CAP had changed his views. He launched a very tough austerity program.

Q: Did this involve the IMF [International Monetary Fund]?

WHITE: Exactly, the IMF. Here was a man, CAP, who, in the old days, I'm sure, would have said that in no way would he genuflect to the IMF.

Q: But the world had changed.

WHITE: The world had changed. CAP was an astute man, and he knew that it had changed. He also knew that he needed a lot of support from the United States. He knew that the old economic model was no longer viable, if, indeed, it ever had been.

Q: I think that Raul Prebisch was dead by then.

WHITE: Yes. And lo and behold, CAP surrounded himself with a young group of economists, all U.S. educated. We used to call them the whiz kids. These were young men, very bright, U.S. educated, free market economists. The Old Guard of AD stood around, appalled, at what CAP was doing. He was cutting subsidies, letting prices run free, eliminating a lot of the import restrictions, and inviting foreign capital in. All of a sudden, he was doing all of these things that were anathema to the Old Guard of AD. But he was doing all of the right things, and we supported and applauded him. However, I think that you could argue that, in a way, he got a little ahead of his electorate. I don't think that Venezuela was quite ready for the kind of drastic medicine he was administering.

First of all, the country hadn't been told about the real state of affairs. When they reelected him, many voters thought that they were getting the old CAP, who dispensed a lot of money. Well, there wasn't any money to dispense. The good old days were over. It was the morning after the night before. All of this happened on CAP's watch.

Q: So CAP was reelected in late 1988.

WHITE: Exactly. The price of gasoline had been subsidized. It was ridiculously cheap. I remember the day when we first filled up the tank in our big, old Buick, we thought that the filling station manager had made a mistake. He filled the tank in this huge car, and the bill was $2.50, or something ridiculous like that. As the saying went, gasoline was cheaper than mineral water, which, indeed, it was. Everything was rigged in Venezuela. The whole economy had been rigged. CAP decided that he would have to raise the price of oil.

People who owned cars could probably afford a reasonable increase in gasoline prices. Unfortunately, what it did was to affect the price of public transportation. A lot of Venezuelans relied on using little buses to get to work. Suddenly, people went out one morning and, without warning, found that the fares for the buses had increased by what seemed to them a whopping amount. The result: riots in the streets. This happened within a few months of CAP being reelected President of Venezuela.

Nasty riots broke out in Caracas and, indeed, all over the country. They mainly took place in Caracas, the capital, but in other cities as well. Of course, they did not take place in the sections where our Embassy people lived, where everything was calm and normal. But the riots took place in the barrios, as they are called, the slums and poorer areas of town. We heard of some gory things happening, including shootouts. I think that the government admitted to something like 300 dead, but we were convinced that the number was far in excess of that.

However, CAP stuck to his guns and would not back down. Troops were brought in, and in a few days the unrest was put down. But it was a nasty taste of the popular reaction to his measures. As I said, I think that CAP got a little ahead of himself. I think that his sense of timing was off in this particular respect.

Q: So what happened?

WHITE: As I said, there were riots in the streets. After that, he buckled down and would not retreat. He went forward with his program of adjustments, and his whiz kids went on merrily doing their thing. One after the other, the old features of the old regime were toppling. The measure of our support for CAP was that we provided a $450 million bridge loan from the U.S. Treasury. We were the ones who sent the papers back and forth in connection with this loan, conveying the messages, and so forth. I remember that we received a very nice letter from U.S. Treasury Under Secretary Mulford.

Q: Oh, yes, David Mulford.

WHITE: You see a lot of pro forma thank you letters, but Mulford's letter was a very good one. It was a tribute to the whole staff of the Economic Section, including especially Stan Speck, who had done much of the work.

Q: David Mulford was the number two ranking man in the Treasury Department at that point?

WHITE: Yes. He was in charge of international affairs at the Treasury.

Q: Was my old friend from the Hotel Gaiz, Reinaldo Figueredo, visible at that time?

WHITE: He was the Foreign Minister under CAP.

Q: I knew him quite well. He was the Director of the Manufacturing Division of the UNCTAD Secretariat, in the early 1980s. He is very personable and very opinionated. He was a supporter of Raul Prebisch in terms of his economic philosophy.

WHITE: Yes. I remember him very well. He was a younger fellow and very personable but was considered something of a left wing ideologue. But he was CAP's Foreign Minister. Now CAP had to balance off various parts of his own party, as every politician does. My recollection was that after CAP left office the first time, he was under some investigation for corruption. I think that Figueredo had been instrumental in helping him at that time in dealing with these charges. CAP won out, however, and the matter was disposed of. This happened long before I arrived in Caracas.

Figueredo didn't stay in office long as Foreign Minister.

By the way, the CAP program was sort of deja vu for me, because Turgut Ozal in Turkey had imposed virtually the same program in there. So, in a way, both in terms of the foreign debt problem and the macroeconomic policy changes, I was seeing something that I had seen before. It was rather fascinating to note the similarities and the differences.

Q: By the way, were you involved in the negotiations on Venezuelan accession to GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] about this time?

WHITE: I was just about to mention that.

Q: That would have fit into this whole process.

WHITE: That's true. Venezuela was not a member of GATT but decided to apply for GATT membership.

Q: This was probably part of the IMF package. Part of the IMF package was always to reduce barriers to trade.

WHITE: Well, I don't think that it was put in those terms. The Venezuelans were not told: "You will join GATT." No, but it was part of Venezuelan policy, under a much changed CAP. Yes, Venezuela applied for membership in GATT, and this was another issue which went on for months and months. There was a lot of work involved in this.

Just as Treasury was calling us nearly every day, because of Venezuela's foreign debt problems and the financial crisis, USTR [United States Trade Representative] got into the act, and USTR was calling us nearly every day.

Q: Who called you from USTR?

WHITE: Different people. Different people were calling us about different aspects. Joining GATT is a complicated process.

Q: Oh, yes. I was often the U.S. Representative at the GATT Accession Negotiations.

WHITE: Then you know that the Venezuelans had to make many changes. They had a brilliant young negotiator. A very outstanding person. He was my opposite number, so to speak. I would very often go to see him on instructions and to discuss where the negotiations stood, how they were going, and so forth. You know, he had to take on a lot of vested interests in Venezuela. Naturally, the Venezuelans wanted to get into GATT for as cheap a price as they could get. We insisted, of course, that they make the changes which were mandatory for them to be GATT admissible.

Q: There is usually a transition period.

WHITE: Of course. So that kept us very busy.

Q: Did you also get involved in civil aviation again?

WHITE: We did.

Q: Do you remember what was involved?

WHITE: Let me mention that, throughout my career, I somehow was never able to escape civil aviation matters. Perhaps I mentioned this before.

We had an awkward situation involving totally separate Commercial and Economic Sections. First of all, all of our local employees had worked in a combined Economic/Commercial Section for years. When the Foreign Commercial Service was established, most of our local employees went to the Commercial Section. One of them in particular, though he was Venezuelan, was of German origin. He had been the local employee dealing with civil aviation matters and he loved the work. He knew everybody concerned with civil aviation.

However, civil aviation matters came under the Economic Section. He knew, he got the word that I had had a lot of experience in civil aviation. So I wasn't in Caracas very long when he came to see me one day. I could see that he was quite concerned. He said: "I'm in the Commercial Section and, of course, I report to the Commercial Counselor. You know, for years I was the Embassy's man on civil aviation. I would like to continue doing that. I know that you have the background on this."

I said: "Look, let's not be bureaucratic and let's not be rigid. I'll 'clear' this with your boss." I got along very well with the Commercial Counselor. I said: "When it comes to civil aviation, you will work for me." Now, any student of organizational charts would find this arrangement appalling. Of course, he had been doing this work for perhaps 30 years. He knew everybody, every story, every skeleton, and every closet where civil aviation was concerned.

So we worked it out, and it was fine. Where civil aviation matters were concerned, he worked for me. Our main problem with civil aviation was airport security. This was a very difficult nut to crack, for reasons which were more cultural than anything else. I don't want to spend too much time on this, but, as you know, the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] requires that all airports meet certain security standards. If they don't meet these standards...

Q: Our planes don't go there.

WHITE: That's right. We have drastic, legal authority, and we can zap them. We had a lot of problems, but finally we got the Caracas airport up to snuff.

Of course, we had the usual trade problems. You could probably guess the matters that were on the list yourself. It included intellectual property...

Q: Specifically intellectual property?

WHITE: Well, we were concerned about the absence of adequate legal protection for intellectual property, such as American copyrights and patents. Venezuelan citizens were stealing right and left...

Q: Pharmaceuticals?

WHITE: Mainly copyright materials, such as tapes of popular music, and even television programs.

Q: VCRs [video cassette recordings]?

WHITE: All of that stuff. Venezuela had little or no legal protection for such materials. We were trying to negotiate a science and technology agreement with Venezuela. Intellectual property became a stumbling block in the negotiations. They wanted a science and technology agreement with us. We wanted it, too.

Q: What would they get?

WHITE: They would get access to the United States scientific community. We would send people down to Venezuela for research programs. There is a fairly standard list of science and technological cooperative agreements and ventures which are sort of boiler

plate in these agreements. We wanted some control on patents and copyrights. In other words, intellectual property.

Q: They wanted to import technology, as well as entertainment.

WHITE: Of course. This is a big issue with many countries. It's a big issue with China right now.

Then there was the question of countervailing duties. As you know, we have countervailing duty laws. They can get pretty far-fetched. This had to do with aluminum products. Venezuela was very competitive in producing aluminum rods and bars. They had a major aluminum industry. An American company submitted an anti-dumping complaint to the Commerce Department. Are you familiar with this business?

Q: Oh, yes. There was the case of the UBS Bank.

WHITE: We used to hit them with punitive duties, which were very high. That was an irritant in Venezuelan-U.S. relations.

The Venezuelans had a major tuna fishing fleet, which ran afoul of our environmental laws intended to protect dolphins caught up in tuna catches. We also had some maritime problems. An American shipping company didn't feel that it was getting fair access to Venezuelan ports.

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Q: *This is Wednesday, November 7th, 1997. I'm John Harter with Al White at the Association of Diplomatic Studies. You were talking about maritime transport problems.*

WHITE: As one of the various and sundry problems we dealt with. This was not a major problem. It came up late in my tour. It wasn't solved at the time I left. I think later we came to some sort of solution on that particular problem. We had a very active business community in Venezuela. We had excellent relations with them.

Q: *I assume a prominent U.S.- Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce?*

WHITE: Yes. The American Chamber of Commerce.

Q: *They used to call them American men's clubs. Now that there are more women maybe they don't call them men's clubs anymore?*

WHITE: It was always the American Chamber of Commerce. We had very close relationships with it. One of the things the ambassador did, which was an excellent technique - I think it's probably done in one way or another elsewhere - once a month, the ambassador would invite probably about 30 American businessmen, leading American businessmen, to the residence. We'd have a cocktail, late in the afternoon, five

or something like that. Then we'd all sit down around a huge dining room table which would be expanded so that everyone could fit around it. The ambassador would speak maybe 15 minutes giving his overview of the state of relations between the two countries and he would turn to me and I would do my briefing, maybe 10 minutes. And then he would turn to the commercial counselor so he could do his briefing and then we would usually have a speaker. We would invite one of the businessmen there to make a presentation about some particular issue that may have been in the news or of some prominence at the time. Then we would throw this open to discussion. Now businessmen of course are reluctant to discuss a specific private affair with other businessmen. That we would do one on one. But it's amazing what we learned about their common problems by having these sessions.

Q: *Which were some of the major American companies that were represented there?*

WHITE: Well, most of the big banks were there.

Q: *Citibank.*

WHITE: Citibank, Chase, Manhattan was there. Chemical Bank. Manufacturers Hannover Trust, etc. Ford and General Motors and Chrysler were assembling there.

Q: *The tire companies? Goodyear, Firestone?*

WHITE: I'm not sure about whether we had some of those or not. McCormick Spices had a big regional office down there. There's always the Coca-Cola man. Owens Illinois had a representative there.

Well, there was about 30 more or less. Most of them were Americans but some were Venezuelans representing these companies. And lawyers. There were several high powered American law firms in Venezuela and they were very active in this group. This was a very useful technique for dealing with the business community and it worked very well.

Q: *Who was the DCM?*

WHITE: Jeff Davidow was the first DCM, later Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs and Deputy Assistant Secretary in AF. A very able guy. When he left, I was acting DCM for a few months or so. And chargé occasionally. Then Ken Skoug came down to be DCM and was chargé for a long time. Then at the time I was leaving, Mike Skol was appointed ambassador. He asked me to stay on for a fourth year. It's always nice to be asked but three years I thought were enough. My daughter was getting ready to go to college. It seemed a good time to make the break. So after 11 years abroad...

Q: *It was time to come back to Washington.*

WHITE: It was time to come back. Another interesting aspect for me at least, in

Venezuela, was the public relations part of diplomacy. We had an excellent public affairs officer, Guy Farmer. He had been a journalist and he was an excellent press attaché as well.

All of these irritants that I've mentioned to you and some others would cause public relations problems. Again, their focus is so totally on the United States down there, that even a little irritant, the press plays up and it gets a lot of attention. I worked very closely with our press attaché and saw how valuable a good press attaché is in an embassy.

A fascinating country, Venezuela. The Orinoco River Valley is splendid. The Coroni River comes down out of the highlands of Venezuela. A tremendous source of water power. It flows into the Rio Orinoco at Ciudad Bolivar and there's a huge complex there of aluminum smelting because of the hydroelectric power…You need a lot of power with aluminum processing as you know. The power was there. The bauxite was there. Ocean boat going vessels can come up the Orinoco that far. There was iron ore production, a lot of steel production. And of course always oil. The good news since I left Venezuela is they have opened up more and more to U.S. oil companies. In short, they're back. Technically they still can't own the means of production. They can't own the oil in the ground, but they can do just about everything else. It's immensely to the benefit of the Venezuelans. They know that.

An industry doesn't stand still. It always changes. To keep up with those changes, the oil industry in Venezuela needs more and more technology, more know how. I would say their relationship with us in that particular area is, from everything I can see, solid.

Q: *Which companies are back? Exxon?*

WHITE: Oh, I think more or less they're all back in different kinds of arrangements.

The bad news is beware of the conventional wisdom. Venezuela has had a functioning democracy for many, many years. Remember in the old days, in the 50s, a man named Perez Jimenez. He was the typical Latin American colonel. The sunglasses, visor cap, and a dictator. They got rid of him in 1958. That's when Romulo Betancourt came in and they had a viable two party system as I've described to you so far. There were always fringe parties but it was basically two moderate parties-a two party system. I told you about CAP's reforms. It was an extremely tough program of retrenchment and it hit the middle class very, very hard. In fact a lot of Venezuelans studying in American universities had to go home because they devalued the currency. The officer corps was hurting, the mid-grade officers in particular. Beware of unhappy mid-grade officers in a country. Lo and behold, after I left, in 1992, a violent coups attempt was made against CAP. The conventional wisdom had been this could never happen in Venezuela. Anywhere else in Latin America maybe, but never Venezuela. Well, it did happen in Venezuela and a lot of people got killed. It was a brutal revolt by the military.

Q: *When was this again?*

WHITE: February 1992. It was put down but it was a nasty, bloody affair. In November of the same year, a second attempt was made. It was put down but CAP was forced out of office just about six months before he would have finished his term in office. He was forced out on a corruption charge. It's unfortunate because he had done the right thing. It took political courage to do it. And he was replaced by another former president, Rafael Caldera, a man in his 80s. A very nice man. They say incorrupt. Personally I never heard anyone say he was corrupt. He became president on the platform of doing away with much of CAP's reforms. But I think gradually, he's had to backtrack in the same direction as those reforms.

Q: *In 1990, you came back to Washington.*

WHITE: We came back in 1990 to Washington.

Q: *So how did your transfer back to Washington come about?*

WHITE: Well, I had been overseas 11 years by that time. That's a long time. Also for personal reasons, as I said earlier, it seemed a good time to make the break from overseas.

During that spring, while all of this was up in the air before I had decided anything, I had a call out of the blue one day from Al Larson in EB asking if I would like to take a job in EB dealing with commercial affairs.

Q: *Tom Robinson was still in that job?*

WHITE: Yes. Al was the principal DAS.

Q: *Gene McAllister was the assistant secretary.*

WHITE: I didn't know Larson at that time.

Q: *So do you know how he got your name?*

WHITE: I don't know how he pulled my name out of a hat. But anyway, my name reached his desk. We discussed it when I was back in Washington in May and that was the first time I'd ever met him actually. We chatted for about 10 minutes.

He described the job very generally as sort of a liaison with Commerce, and looking after the commercial function in the State Department. I suppose the reason my name came up on the computer screen was that I had spent two years in Commerce years before and of course I had done a lot of commercial work. I had spent four years in EB, doing rather specialized aviation work. But it was a job in which I had a lot of exposure to corporate America, at least the aviation part of corporate America. I decided that I would take the job.

Q: *What was the job? What did Al tell you about the job?*

WHITE: The job was to run something called CLP, which was Commercial, Legislative, and Public Affairs in the EB front office. My job would consist mainly of liaison with the Department of Commerce with regard to commercial work. And also it would involve dealing within the Department of State and overseas posts on commercial issues.

Q: *You said legislative and public affairs as well?*

WHITE: That's correct. That's what CLP, that acronym stood for.

Q: *Do you know anything about the history of that office? How long it had been there?*

WHITE: Well, I can tell you something about that as it gradually evolved. First of all, "C" was intended not to mean "commercial: originally but "consumer."

Q: *I remember Joan Braden had been a consumer affairs adviser to Henry Kissinger when he was Secretary of State.*

WHITE: There was a period there when consumer affairs was on the front burner.

Q: *In the '70s.*

WHITE: In any case, before the creation of the Foreign Commercial Service, there was a considerable commercial apparatus in EB. There was a deputy assistant secretary in charge of commercial affairs. That job was often, usually held I think, by a senior commercial official from Commerce. This was part of this program that I described earlier on, a very close relationship between the two departments. They always had to have close relationships for obvious reasons. They had to work together. That whole operation in State had been dismantled essentially. When the Foreign Commercial Service was created, the State Department in effect said, "Well, that's gone. That's the end of that. Now on with other things."

Q: *That was 1981 or thereabouts?*

WHITE: The Foreign Commercial Service was created in 1979. Late 1979, I believe. So sometime in the early 80s when I was overseas this was happening.

EB had always had an officer, as I can remember from the time I was there in AVP, who dealt with public affairs issues and coordinated the Bureau's reaction to press inquiries. Somewhere along the way, and I don't know the precise history of this, that job became a kind of three part job in one individual. Somewhere along the way, the legislative function got tacked on to that job. Thirdly, consumer affairs got added on to it. So it was kind of a hybrid operation and one individual essentially was responsible for all three of these functions.

Q: *Do you happen to know anything about this? I know in the mid 1980s, I think this was before Tom Robinson was there, there was some kind of an office of business liaison headed by Jack St. John. But that office I believe was abolished.*

Your title was again when you came in…?

WHITE: As a director of CLP, which was Commercial, Legislative and Public Affairs. It consisted essentially of the office director, plus one secretary and one officer who handled the legislative part of the operation.

Q: *So did you overlap with Tom?*

WHITE: Tom had left by the time I arrived. Tom was still in the building so I often had occasion to talk with Tom even after I came on board.

Q: I think he went to the Australia desk.

WHITE: That's right.

Q: *Larson left about that time?*

WHITE: Larson had left. Dick Hechinger was in place. He had come back from Paris, where he had been DCM at OECD and Larson had gone to OECD Paris. Meanwhile, shortly before I arrived, and I can't tell you exactly when this happened, "C" became Commercial.

Q: *I would think that in EB you have all the DASs. Each segment of EB is so very complex. I mean of course you had a tremendously wide and deep background in commercial affairs, especially, but I would think it would be awfully difficult to represent EB interests in all those technical fields in relationship to Commerce Department and the media? It's sounding like a staggering job.*

WHITE: Well, it was a miscellany in a sense of these three functions. Now, from the beginning I saw my primary function far and away as the commercial part of that operation. I had an officer who handled the legislative front, Grant Burke, who had done a lot of congressional work and who knew a lot about Capitol Hill. So he reported to me, but that was his area of responsibility. He handled the "L"- the legislative part of that job.

Q: *So if you would dwell a little bit more on that now. To what degree did that office get involved in congressional affairs? Again…*

WHITE: Oh, very heavily.

Q: *Each of the DASs - I mean the Office of Trade Policy is the one that's concerned with the Congress about anything in trade policy, I assume?*

WHITE: Well, as I say, it was a coordinating kind of a job. What Grant Burke did in that job was maintain daily liaison with "H" and know and inform the Bureau about what was going on on the congressional front. For example, let's say the Bureau is following a particular piece of legislation, prospects for its passage.

Q: *Exactly.*

WHITE: I won't go into details. Grant would report to the front office, to the assistant secretary, and of course others in the Bureau, what the prospects were for that legislation passing. He would talk with his contacts in "H." He would talk with his contacts on Capitol Hill. He would provide that kind of advice to inform the principals in the bureau of the status of legislation on the Hill that was of interest to the bureau. Now to do that didn't require that you know in detail all sorts of technical details.

Q: *Right. But wouldn't the office of Aviation Affairs be kind of jealous of their prerogatives?*

WHITE: Well, remember how "H" operates now. "H" has never been in the business of allowing too much direct contact between the working stiffs in the Department and the Hill.

Q: *That is In recent years they haven't. When we were young, the Department, Loy Henderson specifically, encouraged people all over the Department…*

WHITE: That was not encouraged in my time, certainly.

Q: *Wasn't it when you were young?*

WHITE: In my jobs in the Department in the mid-'70s and again in the '90s, "H" was clearly in charge of our relations with the Hill and you worked through "H." That was the focal point for contacts on Capitol Hill.

Q: *So he'd be the intermediary between the Office of Aviation Affairs and "H?"*

WHITE: He would advise OA on legislative developments of interest to it.

Q: *That's what I was trying to get at.*

WHITE: Grant followed the process. A bill was before a committee. When would it be reported out? What was the attitude of the committee chairman toward that bill? Was it likely to come to the floor? Would it come to the floor in this session? Or would it most likely come to the floor next session? What were the prospects for its passage? Which key figures in Congress were in favor of it? Which were against it?

Q: *Right.*

WHITE: That's the sort thing that was the responsibility of that position.

Q: *I understood that. I just wanted to get rid of the congressional and the public affairs before we dwell more on your...*

WHITE: Public affairs was an important function. And one in which I took a lot of interest because it did impact one of the programs for which I was responsible, commercial outreach. We wanted to maintain contact with the wide world of American business and that involved public affairs in a large measure. But more concretely, the Bureau of Public Affairs would funnel requests from all over the country for speakers for example. Some trade association in Chicago would want a speaker from the State Department on what's going on international textile negotiations. That request would come to me. We would find out who in the Bureau would be the appropriate person, who would have the expertise to meet that specific request for a speaker. That was probably about 10 percent of my work-Public Affairs.

Q: *Somebody in EB used to prepare these publications, GIST, remember those?*

WHITE: That had been discontinued.

Another function that we had to deal with all the time was the daily press briefing at noon. This was always frantic. Something would hit the headlines. The Press Office would want guidance for the noon briefing. The noon briefing takes place promptly at noon. It isn't something that could wait. It isn't two or three in the afternoon. Those requests would come to us and I would have to stop whatever I was doing and get to the office involved within the bureau. Let's say it was aviation. I'd have to find out who in OA was handling it and they would have to prepare the guidance. It would come back to us. We would have to be sure that it was in the proper format.

Q: *And the guidance as I recall is the question that it is assumed the reporter will ask, and you prepare the answer that you think would be responsive to that question.*

WHITE: That's right.

Q: *I remember when I did this. I made the mistake initially of trying to give the kind of answer I thought should be given. That's not what they wanted. They wanted something very simple and clear that the briefer could quickly assimilate and that would be meaningful to a certain extent to the reporter, but without going into any complications or any detail.*

WHITE: Always the emphasis was on simplicity and clarity and brevity.

Q: *That was not easy. We had problems at the State Department with the public at large because we relied on the noon briefer who relies on these oversimplified questions and oversimplified answers.*

WHITE: Well, the answer there I suppose is if a journalist wants to dig deeper, he can dig deeper. The noon briefing deals with a whole series of journalists. But the point is, let's say the question was aviation. Let's say our talks just broke up with the Italians on aviation. The Italians are upset. There is a page one article in the Washington Post. You've got to have something for the noon briefing. I would not write those answers. That would be the Office of Aviation. In that we were just kind of a transmission belt. We were responsible for putting it in the right format, to see that it met the criteria, that were very exact.

Q: *Simple and clear.*

WHITE: And we had to get it up there before noon which meant we were chasing people in the bureau to come up with the guidance.

Q: *About an hour before noon as I recall because the noon briefer had to assimilate this material as much as possible...*

WHITE: That's right. But of course once it was written, if it was sensitive, it had to be cleared. It might have to be cleared by the assistant secretary or maybe a DAS could clear. You know the whole clearance process in the State Department.

Eighty percent of my time was spent on the commercial function. As I said, once the Foreign Commercial Service was created, the Department just walked away from that. People forgot that we still had something like 85 embassies around the world where there were no Foreign Commercial Service people. To say nothing of 30 or 35 Consular posts. We do commercial work in all of these posts. We had to have some liaison with Commerce in Washington on a day to day basis. That was part of my job. My job was several fold, as I saw it, and as it developed.

First, relations with Commerce. This was critical. I had to know the people who ran the Foreign Commercial Service. I had to deal with them day in and day out. Things came up literally every day, important, unimportant. Questions of providing guidance to the field on commercial matters. Questions relating to personnel. Questions relating to budget. Questions relating to specific problems that came up at an embassy, between a commercial officer and the ambassador or the DCM. It was a myriad of details as you can imagine in this kind of relationship. So liaison with Commerce was important. I had to know those people. I had to be sure that the two departments were reasonably well coordinated with each other and getting along reasonably well.

Second, we had a business outreach program, which meant that we had to maintain contact with various business organizations. The NAM, the National Association of Manufacturers, the American Chamber of Congress, the Business Council on International Understanding (BCIU).

And the Executive Council on Foreign Diplomats was another similar group. We had to maintain very close relationships with all of these organizations. To say nothing of the

trade organizations in Washington.

Thirdly, we had to deal with all those posts we have abroad where commercial work had to be done even though there was no Foreign Commercial officer there to do it. We had other problems of coordination within embassies. As I said, between commercial sections and the rest of the embassy.

Now as it happened, Larry Eagleburger, who was the deputy secretary…

Q: *Who took a very active interest…*

WHITE: At that stage of his career, he certainly did. The first thing I read when I got into that office was a speech he had made, I think to the American Foreign Service Association in November of 1989.

Q: It was the first of the AFSA conferences in November of '89, which led to a whole chain of conferences. Tell me what you know about that speech.

WHITE: I just read it. I don't know how it was generated.

Q: *More than that, what impact? Among other things Al, I understand that Larry took it to Sherman Funk, who was Inspector General, and asked Funk to carry it around with him, to have the inspectors carry it around so when they inspected the embassies, they would use this as a kind of a check off list to see if the embassies were doing what he said ought to be done. Had you heard that?*

WHITE: I hadn't heard that particular point. But the speech was important. It was popular. It had made an impact and of course it contained the famous "bill of rights" for the American business community.

Q: *Presumably that was Eagleburger himself.*

WHITE: Again, I don't know who generated the words. I know that Tom Robinson had something to do with it and maybe you did or maybe others did, but the speech did make quite a stir.

Q: *I mainly invented the conference.*

WHITE: It was well written and it was catchy. A bill of rights for American business. It said basically three things. It said we welcome and we will accept and we will consider all business input in the making of American foreign policy.

Secondly, we want a level playing field and we will do everything possible to ensure that American business has a level playing field internationally.

Thirdly, it said if we're not doing a good job, to let us know. That was sort of our point of

departure for our activities.

Q: *The main thing there, you, Mr. American businessman, have the right to be heard at your embassy and if there's a problem there, take it up with the State Department. That speech got virtually no attention in the U.S. But USIA put it on the wireless file and the State Department kept copies circulating all over...*

WHITE: Oh it got a lot of attention in the U.S. business community. By the time I arrived it certainly had.

Q: *It did?*

WHITE: Oh, yes. It had probably been sent out to these very organizations I have been telling you about. They'd probably sent it out to their membership.

Q: *Oh, yes. Yes. But my point was, Washington Post, New York Times... I mean, there was nothing in the establishment media about it, immediately after.*

WHITE: That's interesting. It did have resonance in the business community.

Q: *Right. Which continued over a period.*

WHITE: I saw evidence of that and we used that speech all the time. The very first week I was in that job I went up to see Eagleburger's staff. In a way, I reported as much to Eagleburger's office as I did to our own front office.

Q: *Who did you speak with? Mary Jean Kennedy?*

WHITE: Mary Jean Kennedy was the key staffer in commercial matters, right. She had been in Turkey so we had a certain element in common. The very first week I went up to see her and we had a long discussion and sorted out a lot of things. I ended up writing a lot of material for Eagleburger's office, for him. I drafted a lot of letters for him to CEOs and we sent a lot of briefing papers up there, action memos, information memos, etc. I used to joke that I was wearing a hole in the marble floor between our office and Eagleburger's front office. He did take a great personal interest.

Q: *Interesting.*

WHITE: And we spent a lot of time working with his staff. I say we. It was pretty much myself at the outset, to go back to the staff. There was Grant, who handled the legislative front, and there was myself and we had a secretary and one junior civil service person. He was working his way through college, I think, and came in on a part time basis. That was our staff. Later, we got a full-time young officer, Jeff Donald, who was excellent.

Q: *To what degree was McAllister following in these matters? He was your boss. He and Dick Hechinger.*

WHITE: Mainly I dealt with Dick Hechinger. Dick understood what I was trying to do and he was very sympathetic and supportive.

Gene McAllister was one step above. I often saw him. He would get involved in commercial affairs, sometimes directly. In which case he would call me in and we'd deal with the problem.

Q: *Did that happen often?*

WHITE: Not so often as I saw Hechinger because the bureau is structured that way. But I saw him every day at the staff meeting, sometimes more often.

Q: *Could you comment further on McAllister?*

WHITE: Gene ran a tight ship. He had a personal assistant, Regina Ethridge, with whom I dealt a lot.

Q: *What sort of issues did McAllister mainly get in?*

WHITE: He was engaged in all the major issues that EB was confronting.

Aviation negotiations with our major partners. That was a big issue in EB. The Office of Energy had a lot of issues going. Investment issues. Export control issues. There was no end of issues in EB that he followed.

We had staff meetings daily which I attended along with the office directors. This was the time, by the way, when the War in the Gulf was coming to a climax and that took a lot of everybody's time, including the assistant secretary. There was the formation of the Grand Coalition, which by the way had important commercial aspects to it. We were drumming up a lot of support for the war in the Gulf and we were insisting that others pay their fair share of this and that included the Saudis and a lot of other governments that were involved. That was taking a lot of time throughout the building.

Q: *Who was the undersecretary for economic affairs at that point?*

WHITE: Who was that? McCormick was the first undersecretary. I didn't have many dealings with him. My dealings on the seventh floor were 99 percent with Eagleburger's staff because of the personal interest he took in the commercial function.

Q: *Again, the question of DASs. You did interact with them quite a bit?*

WHITE: All the time.

Q: *Anything in particular you want to emphasize there?*

WHITE: Mainly they were dealing with trade policy issues. I dealt with them mainly when it came to Public Affairs questions or legislative problems. At staff meetings of course we kept each other fully informed on what we were all doing. So I was aware of what was going on in the bureau. I had to be. But I concentrated on commercial issues.

Q: *And that was mainly liaison with Commerce for many functions but also for direct surveillance over those embassies where there were commercial attaches not part of the Foreign Commercial Service. Could you say a little bit about the latter?*

WHITE: As I say, we had a lot of them. Some of them were very small posts where there was little commercial work to do. But some of them were in that gray zone where FCS might have had an officer there but didn't. There was a range of intermediate size embassies.

First of all, to deal with all of our posts, we had to work also with the regional bureaus. Each of the regional bureaus had, or were supposed to have, a commercial coordinator. Frankly, at least when I arrived, it was very spotty. Maybe they all had one on paper but some of them had real commercial coordinators and some of them didn't. Some of them frankly were very junior officers. I always thought they were too junior, some of them. No reflection on them but I always thought, and I know Dick Hechinger agreed with me, that the commercial coordinator for each bureau should be a fairly senior officer who would have the clout and the position to go with the job. That's one of the things we tried to do, was to get the regional bureaus to upgrade the level of their commercial coordinators.

Q: *In considerable part so they would have a presence when they met with American business people.*

WHITE: Exactly. And also so that they could coordinate with us more readily. After all the posts we were dealing with were their posts. We had some success in getting that beefed up. One of the things I did was to meet with the coordinators periodically. Sometimes it would slip but usually once a month or so I liked to meet with all of them as a group so that we could discuss things of common interest.

The posts of course needed several things. They needed guidance first of all. They needed to know what was going on in Washington. One of the things I did was to draft messages from Eagleburger to all ambassadors reiterating his personal determination that they were to give top priority to commercial work. In effect, these messages said, "Get with it, fellows!" We wanted to keep that a fairly high priority item for ambassadors and their staff.

We required - this had been in existence before I arrived - an annual commercial action plan from all of the posts where we did not have Foreign Commercial Service people. The purpose of that plan was to do several things. First of all, to force the posts to think a year in advance what they proposed to do in the commercial area. They were to report on, first of all, the overall economic prospects in the country. Then what sectors or even what

specific products they thought were good prospects for American business. And what particularly they wanted to do to enhance American business activity, like trade shows, trade missions, that sort of thing.

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Q: *This is Wednesday, November the 12th, 1997. I'm John Harter with Al White at the Association for Diplomatic Studies. Al, I believe at the conclusion of our last session, you mentioned the commercial action plans for those embassies for which there are no commercial attaches. Could you explain for me what those were? What was the purpose? And were they useful?*

WHITE: Yes. Let me just recapitulate a bit. I think we talked first of all about the legislative and the public affairs aspect of the job. With regard to the purely commercial function of the job which was 80, 85 percent I would say, my first aim was to establish a good relationship with Commerce. Of course I'd worked in Commerce. I even had some lingering associations there going back 20 years. The first week I was there I went over to see the senior people in the Foreign Commercial Service. I saw Sue Schwab who was the Director General if you remember, and Ted Rosen, her Principal Deputy for Foreign Operations.

He introduced me to his principal directors. They break it down by region, pretty much like the regional bureaus in the State Department. There was a director or deputy director or whatever his title was, for Europe. They combined Africa and the Near East in one large group. Then they had a deputy for the Far East and Latin America. Ted and I both felt at the outset that we had to make this work at the personal level in order to make it work at the professional level. Inevitably when you have a major change in the bureaucracy, you do have bruised feelings that are leftover and I think it is fair to say that both Commerce and State had some reservations about the split. There had been some bureaucratic battling done. Of course these things do leave their legacies.

Q: *But that was more than 10 years earlier.*

WHITE: Yes. But these things linger, John.

Q: *We'll have to talk about that later.*

WHITE: The further I got into it, the more I realized that it is there beneath the surface. We both wanted to dispel that.

Q: *I'd planned to go into that a little bit later, but now that you brought it up, let's go ahead. Do you recall the circumstances under which the split came or the shift of responsibilities where most commercial attaches went to Department of Commerce? When was it and what was…*

WHITE: It was in 1979. I left the Department in June of 1979 after a four year tour. It

hadn't happened at the time I left in July. But very shortly thereafter it did happen and I think it caught a lot of people by surprise.

Q: *Do you remember the task force with Ed Martin and Frances Wilson.*

WHITE: You are better informed on that than I am, John.

Q: *I must talk to Ed Martin about it. I don't think we have any record, a really good explanation of what was involved.*

WHITE: When it happened, of course I was overseas. I guess a lot was happening while I was in the process of transferring from the Department to Rome for the NATO Defense College. I remember being surprised when I read about it, When I was back on consultations at one point, I was sufficiently intrigued that I went around and tried to find some people whom I knew who had been involved in this. I recall talking to somebody who had been involved. His explanation was a rather cynical but colorful one. He was still clearly upset about it all. He said, "The Department decided to throw some red meat off the back of the wagon hoping the wolves would gorge themselves and go away." You may be much better informed on that aspect of things than I was.

Q: *Except I'm not as close as you are to the practical circumstances and the real consequences. The general impression I have, and we'll get more into this later, is that this did reflect the relatively low priority that the State Department in general ascribed to that function.*

WHITE: Well, that was the perception. It is certainly true that in many respects the Department had not given the commercial function the attention that it was due. I think that perception was there. To what extent it was justified is another question. As I told you, my boss many years ago in my first post had a keen interest in commercial affairs. At every post I served at, American businessmen were given top priority. No matter, the perception was out there that the Department was not doing as well as it could have. And certainly within the bureaucracy commercial work was not given a high degree of precedence.

Q: *That's the problem.*

WHITE: In the realistic world of promotions and recognition, I think it's pretty clear that the Department had not given the commercial function its due.

Q: *Well, but more important, we presumably had not given the attention to the businessmen that was there to…*

WHITE: That was, let's say, the widespread belief. Now I have to say that in all of my dealings with businessmen over the years, I never detected that they went away unhappy. I don't mean just with me but with the post where I was operating from the ambassador on down.

Q: *You never heard that grumbling…? I heard it everywhere I went.*

WHITE: I heard it.

Q: *What many told me was they were so glad to meet a Foreign Service officer who recognized the priority of their issues and they would say kind things to me. But they always did that in the context that most of the people they talked with and most of our embassies felt this really was not a high priority.*

WHITE: That was certainly a widespread impression. Obviously there had to be a basis for it. I had some businessmen who had a chip on their shoulders. You heard stories: that an American businessman here or there was refused access to the ambassador and he couldn't even see an American officer at the post. Now of course to go and call on anyone when you got down to the basis of these stories; it's normal to call for an appointment. If the businessman walked into the embassy without an appointment and the commercial attachés simply weren't there, he may have been referred to a local employee. They tended to think they're being a given a fast shuffle. As you and I know, very often the local employees know the local scene better anyway. The ones we had doing commercial work were usually very competent people. But certainly that was the perception.

Q: *Obviously by emphasizing perception, you believe complaints were grossly exaggerated?*

WHITE: To some extent. How far I don't know. Certainly the Department did a very poor job of countering that perception. If the perception is wrong, someone should take the steps to correct it. And I don't detect that that was being done. Maybe it's a sweeping generalization, but I think it's nevertheless valid that the Department was run, the Foreign Service was run, by political officers. Of course by virtue of their choice of being political officers they obviously tended to attach a great deal of importance to what they were doing and less importance to what others were doing. That was a time when our commercial interests in the post war period were not perceived as having the same degree of urgency that political and strategic factors had. This was after all the Cold War.

Q*: Now that we're this much into it, I'm inclined to think maybe it's better to go ahead now. Could you explain why you feel commercial work is very important to the Foreign Service? And as you say, why did this reduce during and after World War II at a time when really the importance to the American economy was increasing?*

WHITE: Well, there's a lag there. There's always a lag. During that postwar period probably for about 10 years, the great problem in the world was the dollar gap. You remember the dollar gap? We essentially had no competition in world markets. Our European competitors were flat on their back. Their cities had been razed, literally. You remember some of those pictures of cities with practically nothing standing. We didn't have to worry about trade in a large sense. In fact, at one point through our AID missions,

we were encouraging other countries to export to the United States and we were actually giving them courses in how to export to the United States. That changed. It began to change certainly in the late '50s. We soon found ourselves confronted with a trade deficit. I think the Department was slow to see that coming. And again, that generation, the leadership generation of that time, people who were certainly very well regarded and still are generally esteemed, the leaders of our diplomatic efforts at that time, were not focused on these economic changes that were taking place.

Q: *All of this was in contrast to the period from 1789 to 1939 when the principle function of the State Department really was to support American business overseas?*

WHITE: That's true. There was a shift due to the war and the period of crises and we had one after the other, if you'll remember. From 1945 on, we had the whole problem of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. We had the Berlin situation. We had a coup d'etat in Czechoslovakia. We had the policy of containment. We had the emergence of NATO. We had the Korean War and the impetus that gave to further development of the NATO Alliance and other alliances around the world. The point is there was a fundamental shift that was taking place and it was inevitable and it was indeed the consequence of our own policy. We wanted to reconstruct Europe. And after a certain point, we wanted to reconstruct Japan. Of course in doing so we were creating, or recreating competitive industrial powers. So the rebirth of Europe and Japan was a direct consequence of our own policy. We wanted that for overall security purposes in terms of a balance of power around the world.

Q: *At any rate, aside from all this there was as you say the perception, as I would say the reality, there was much less emphasis in the State Department and in embassies on supporting American businessmen overseas than there had been throughout American history.*

So the shift of responsibility for commercial attaches from State to Commerce was intended to correct that lower priority.

WHITE: I guess what I'm really saying is that the Department was not doing as good a job as it should have done but I'm not sure the Department was doing as poor a job as has been generally said.

Q: *In any event, do you think the businessmen were better served after the shift of responsibilities?*

WHITE: I'm not sure that you can make a definitive judgement on that at this point.

Q: *What were the immediate consequences?*

WHITE: Well, the immediate consequence was that the two departments had to sort out their relationship with each other. Now at the time of the creation of the Foreign Commercial Service, there was a memorandum of understanding signed by the Under

Secretary for Management in State and a comparable official in the Commercial Department, laying out how this would work. But it was a very broad and very brief and very general document. Of course, inevitably, no document like that can take care of every situation that would arise. But as you said, this had been done essentially 10 years before I came to that position.

Q: *So you were talking to Ted Rosen and Sue Schwab in this context trying to make sure that relationships between State and Commerce were optimally effective?*

WHITE: Absolutely. Always with the eye on one result, better service to the American business community. Let's face it, in Washington, there's an awful lot of bureaucratic warfare going on all the time. Turf battles are common. They've been going on for a long time. They are now. And they probably always will. What I wanted to do was cut through all of that and establish a good personal relationship with the people in Commerce who were running the Foreign Commercial Service. That meant close contact and the ability to see each other's points of view and make the relationship a good one; make it a healthy and a wholesome one.

Q: *I think you covered this somewhat before, but as you say, both in Commerce and in State, they had the geographic groupings and so much of the day to day relationships exist between these people in Commerce and their counterparts in State. So I'm not too clear what your overall responsibilities were in coordinating, presumably, the various parts of the State Department to deal with the various parts of Commerce.*

WHITE: Well, of course, State and Commerce deal with each other day to day at various and assorted levels. There is a need for some overall coordination.

Q: *What does that coordination involve?*

WHITE: Well. it involves first of all, as I said, establishing the right relationship at the outset with the people in Commerce. I was invited routinely to all of their regional conferences, and they had four such conferences every year, of their officers around the world. The Near East and Africa group met overseas for various reasons. I attended those meetings. They were usually two to three day conferences. The ones for Latin America were normally held in Miami. The ones for the Far East were always held in Los Angeles during my tenure and the European group met in different U.S. cities. They met two years in Knoxville, Tennessee and twice in Pittsburgh. We met once in St. Louis and once in New Orleans. These were their annual meetings chaired by their director general Sue Schwab. Of course, Commerce always brought its high command to these meetings and I was always invited and I participated and always chaired a session to review relationships with the State Department. In these meetings, many things came out. Some good and some bad and clearly some problem areas were identified that we had to work on.. I found that commercial officers in Commerce divided into two types of people. There were those who had been Foreign Service officers. Remember a lot of those people were from the Foreign Service. They of course understood the State Department. They knew how State worked and they were capable of seeing issues from both sides. There was

another group which I don't think had much experience with State and they were rather, shall we say, leery of State and had some resentments about State. A few complained that they were not being treated as full and equal members of the country team. That's how these problems would come to light.

Q: *I think part of the theory at the time of the shift was that if they were full time career commercial attaches, they'd be able to attract more prominent people with real business experience; people who really understood the businessman and they would have their own effective careers and that would be much more effective. I thought that was kind of foolish from the outset but I think that was much of the theory. This second group you're talking about, did it include people like that?*

WHITE: Some of them had a business background. Some of them were bureaucrats from other parts of Commerce or perhaps other parts of the government.

Q: *Business people for the most part were not such senior executives as I think they intended to recruit, right?*

WHITE: Well no. First of all you couldn't recruit a senior executive for a junior officer position or even a mid grade position.

Q: *Not even the highest position?*

WHITE: You might attract those people to higher positions in the Commerce Department, but not the average position in the field.

Q: *You mentioned you identified some problems in these meetings and you worked to solve them. Could you suggest what some of these problems were and how you solved them?*

WHITE: One of them had to do with the position these people had in our embassies. Some of them felt that while on paper they may have been regarded as full members of the country team, whether it was officially acknowledged or not, that they in effect had to report through economic counselors or economic ministers to ambassadors. That type of problem, I felt, can only be resolved really on a personal basis at the post. But it was important that we in State know the extent to which this kind of problem existed. Indeed we brought these problems to the attention of very senior management in State including Larry Eagleburger. Occasionally we would communicate with the field and inform our ambassadors that this kind of problem should be resolved. In the final analysis, commercial officers are members of the country team and they have to be treated as such. They have to be accepted by economic counselors in that way. I don't want to exaggerate that problem. It was a problem that came to light from time to time, but in relatively few posts.

The personal element is important and I think I got to know just about every senior officer in the Foreign Commercial Service. I got to know them not just through formal

meetings but when you are off someplace, all staying in the same hotel for two or three days at a time, you get to know people. You socialize with them and that way you develop a personal rapport with them which I felt was important and which Commerce obviously felt was important.

Q: *But in general, what did you think of those people doing their commercial work? Were they high quality, well dedicated, effective people?*

WHITE: I would say yes. I was certainly impressed with them. They certainly seemed very competent and hardworking to me. I think it was a good organization. It seemed to have good morale. It seemed to be well directed. It seemed to have good focus. It seemed to be working well.

That was really the first part of my job as I saw it: to establish a good relationship with Commerce and we did that. We had meetings back and forth all the time. Senior people from Commerce would come over to State and we would send people over to Commerce and I of course was back and forth all the time.

Q: *Of course the general complaint outside the Foreign Service is the problem is they just have meetings and meetings as such don't necessarily accomplish things.*

WHITE: We didn't have meetings to have meetings. We had meetings to discuss specific problems and deal with them - problems of staffing, problems of resources, problems of chain of command, that sort of thing, which are inevitable when you have two organizations working closely together.

Overseas, as I mentioned last time, we had 85 embassies or so, and 30 or about 35 consular posts with no FCS presence.

Q: *These were smaller places, right?*

WHITE: Small, but some medium. We had to do commercial work in these posts. There was no way we were going to say to a businessman, "Well if you go to that post, there's no Foreign Commercial Service representative, so we can't help you there."

That of course we wouldn't do. We had to try to ensure to the extent that we could, that the people who did this work in non-FCS posts, were reasonably competent to do that work, that they had adequate guidance from Washington, and that within limits, which were very limited indeed, they had some resources to do their work.

It was in that connection that I mentioned the Commercial Action Plan. That had been in existence before I came on the scene. It was an annual requirement. It was a document in which the post was supposed to think through what opportunities were there for American business. What problems were there for American business? What was the general overall economic situation in the country as it would affect business prospects? What were the pitfalls? Was the government friendly to American business or not? Were

there restrictions on investment? Were there exchange controls? Was there a level playing field? That sort of thing. The report moved from the more general to the more specific in terms of what particular opportunities the post saw. And finally, how they proposed to go about achieving some of those objectives. That might be a trade mission. It might be a catalog show, or full fledged trade missions or trade shows. We had to work very closely with Commerce of course in doing any of those things.

I must say Commerce was extremely helpful in trying to service the requirements of our posts. We had one very useful feature called the Partnership Post Concept, which meant that our own posts abroad, the non-FCS posts abroad, were paired with an appropriate nearby FCS post. If we had a young officer doing commercial work for the first time in his career in Tanzania, let's say, he would be able to draw on the resources of our Foreign Commercial Service personnel in South Africa. This was fairly successful. It's the kind of concept you can always develop more.

Commerce for example sent out to all of our posts, a large amount of material, just as they sent it to their own posts. They would contribute funding to trade shows and they would arrange to have trade missions, depending on the situation, stop in our posts.

Of course what was done from on high was informing our ambassadors in no uncertain terms what was expected of them. In the final analysis, everything depends on the ambassador's leadership. Eagleburger would from time to time send out such messages. Also, we drafted many a message for Eagleburger complementing an ambassador if we got letters from American business executives, as we often did, complementing this or that post for assistance.

We tried to keep up an active interplay with the business community. From time to time we supported surveys of the American business community to see what they thought of the services we were providing. Commerce did the same thing. In that way we tried to maintain a kind of monitoring device to find out if indeed we were satisfying the American business community. People I suppose are less inclined to complain, and I'm not prepared to say that everybody was happy, but I remember we had a very impressive number of letters from very senior U.S. executives stating the embassy's efforts were crucial in getting this or that contract.

Q: *But presumably you worked closely with the economic people in the geographic bureaus. So you shared responsibility for backstopping all of this.*

WHITE: Of course. Certainly not. I think I mentioned the commercial coordinators. That is something I attached a great deal of importance to. We always urged the regional bureaus, with varying degrees of success, to name top people who had the right rank to serve in that capacity as commercial coordinators. I would meet with them from time to time so that we would have a kind of collegial sense of the department's responsibilities here.

Q: *When I was in Regional Economic Affairs in Latin America bureau, we had these*

kinds of visitors. Depending on the level of the visitor, if he was sufficiently important, we would make an appointment for him to see the assistant secretary. This was in the early 1970s. This was Charlie Meyers who had formerly been a senior executive of Sears Roebuck. Presumably they mostly would have done that. We would assume that when a senior executive from some corporation comes to the State Department, the appointment would be with a correspondingly senior official.

WHITE: I would hope so! We arranged meetings, sometimes luncheons, like that all the time. We arranged meetings for Eagleburger with senior executives. At one point we had a very complicated and serious problem in the Near East, in Saudi Arabia to be precise. Company executives involved would come in and see the assistant secretary at NEA and we would sit in on the meetings and coordinate with that bureau.

One of the things that Ted Rosen brought to my attention, was the National Trade Databank. I don't know whether you are familiar with the IT.

Q: *Yes. I am.*

WHITE: In very brief terms it's a computerized approach to retrieval of information. The information is put on CD-ROM disks and this I think is a major revolution.

Q: *This is the era of 1991 or 1992?*

WHITE: Exactly. Commerce had put out a pamphlet describing and publicizing this. When I looked at the list of contributing agencies listed in that pamphlet I was flabbergasted not to see the Department of State listed. Now as you know, the lion's share of information that would go into any kind of a trade databank on our commercial relations abroad would come from State Department sources and certainly would come from embassies and consulates around the world. The Department wasn't even listed as a source, which is symptomatic I think of the passivity in promoting the Department itself. I saw a demonstration of the Trade Databank. I was extremely impressed and arranged for a demonstration to our commercial coordinators.

I think I mentioned the interagency body that dealt with commercial issues.

Q: *That was the Promotional Board Committee?*

WHITE: The Trade Promotional Coordinating Committee. That had been in existence for some time. I don't know how long exactly.

Q: *Could it be that Mosbacher beefed it up a bit?*

WHITE: It was chaired by the Secretary of Commerce, Secretary Mosbacher, in the Bush administration. I remember going to a meeting - he did chair but normally it was chaired at lower levels.

During all this time remember the war in the Gulf was exploding. In the aftermath of that. We had a tremendous interest in seeing that the American business community participated in rebuilding Kuwait. That was an exciting time.

Q: *You were involved in some kind of study of exports in 1993? What was that?*

WHITE: Yes. Let me first of all describe the transition there. Remember, we had an election in November of 1992 and a change in administrations. The transition period was a long one. In fact I've seen several transitions in Washington from one administration to the other. I'm always amazed at how long it takes. I hope we don't have a world crisis while one of these transitions is taking place. It was months before the Clinton administration really was in place. It was extremely slow. People were named early on but the confirmation process seemed to take a long time. Not that most of them were controversial. Just the inertia of the process. It wasn't really until the summer of '93 that the new administration was fully in place and demonstrating it's own approach to everything including the commercial function. Joan Spero was named as the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs. She had a very conspicuous business background. She had been with American Express.

Q: *And State Department, too. She was Jimmy Carter's ambassador to ECOSOC [UN Economic and Social Council]. And before she was professor of economics at Columbia. She had quite a distinct background.*

WHITE: She took a very keen interest in commercial work. She had just come from the commercial world of New York. She wanted to do something which I thought was long overdue, which I had been saying should be done. She wanted to elevate the Department's position in the eyes of the business community. She wanted to have one person, again, but someone with the rank and the clout who could indeed represent the Department to the American business community and also provide a leadership role within the Department for the commercial function.

Q: *Warren Christopher called this the America desk.*

WHITE: When Christopher became Secretary of State, he immediately launched what he called the America Desk. He mentioned it in his confirmation hearing.

Q: *This is what Joan Spero was talking about?*

WHITE: That was part of it. I remember drafting a message from Christopher to all our posts highlighting the America Desk. Like Eagleburger's bill of rights, this caught on. The concept of the America Desk. She wanted to create a new position. Again, though, some time went by before this happened. But it did eventually.

Q: *Paul Cleveland.*

WHITE: Paul Cleveland. And Paul of course had the rank and he had the clout within the

bureaucracy. He had been ambassador at least twice.

He had a great deal of enthusiasm. He came by to see me to talk about what I was doing and how this might fit into his pattern.

Q: *I wonder to what degree his office superceded yours?*

WHITE: Well, mine was folded into his to make the story short.

Q: *So he succeeded you?*

WHITE: Not really. It was a new conception and a new type of position.

Q: *When did you retire, Al?*

WHITE: In August of '94 I retired. He came on board early that summer of 1993. He asked me to stay on and I thought if I can be useful here, that's fine.

Q: *So you worked for him the last six months…*

WHITE: I stayed on and I worked with him for about a year until I retired. My title was senior advisor.

Q: *He was Coordinator for Business Affairs.*

WHITE: That's exactly right. We set up a new office and we expanded. We got a few more positions in the office. Paul was very keen on establishing a good relation with Commerce. We did that at the outset. There's no point in doing something like that unless you make people aware of it. So we did that. We sent messages out to the field and a press release was issued in Washington designating Paul Cleveland as the Coordinator for Business Affairs in the Department of State. Later, by the way, the office was taken out of EB and made a direct component of the Under Secretary's office to give it more clout.

Q: *I believe Paul was concerned that he didn't have sufficient independent responsibility and authority. He felt it would be better if he did have direct relationships with…*

WHITE: The seventh floor.

Q: *On the seventh floor right.*

WHITE: Yes. I think that was part of his thinking. And that did happen eventually.

Q: *It happened when David Ruth replaced Paul Cleveland.*

WHITE: Actually Paul stayed one year I believe in that position and then he elected to retire about the same time I retired in the summer of '94. Certainly he set about with great

enthusiasm and great skill to make that into a meaningful office which it should be. My own view is that you've got to have someone very senior in that position. Either a senior career officer with ambassadorial rank and experience and interest or someone from the private sector of comparable status. A CEO if need be.

Q: *Let me get your view on this. Well, I don't think you'll get a senior CEO.*

WHITE: Well, certainly a prominent person in the business community.

Q: *I think it's most desirable to have a career person because I think the career person has a much better sense of what the State Department can and cannot do.*

WHITE: That's true.

Q: *Whereas the outside guy from the business world spends at least a year, usually longer, in absolute frustration because he cannot solve the problems.*

WHITE: That is the advantage of having a skillful career officer who knows the bureaucracy, knows his way around. One way you could solve that problem, is to designate a senior business official and then have his deputy a "Mr. Inside," who would know how the bureaucracy works. But another approach of course is to make the undersecretary himself or herself in a sense the coordinator.

Q: *There's so many competing responsibilities.*

WHITE: Yes. That's correct.

Q: *Anyone in that job would never have the time to give a lot of attention to this function. But Al, my own view is you will never get a senior guy from the business…*

WHITE: It could happen. I mean, you could have a senior executive who might feel that it's time to do something different who would want to do something like this.

Q: *But after six months, he would die of frustration.*

WHITE: In any case what's important is that the Department have a single and prominent representative whom the business world can turn to. In Washington there is a practical matter that defeats so many people. I got so many phone calls when I was in that job, even from the Washington representatives of American companies who after all are paid big money to know how Washington works. I would get so many calls from people who would say, "Oh, I hope you can help me. I've made six phone calls. I've been calling all over Washington. I can't find anybody who can help me." You need that point of contact for the business community. I was delighted to see that job elevated and expanded to create that concept because I know no officer of my rank could have done it. You have to have a person with the position, the prestige, the title if you will, to make it work.

Q: *Do you know what's going to happen now? David Ruth of course has gone on as Vice President of Public Affairs for VISA international. Last I heard that job was vacant. And his deputy also retired so I think it's a shell of an office now.*

WHITE: That's unfortunate.

Q: *I think they are waiting to see, what, if anything, Stu Eisenstadt is going to do about it. You don't have any late information?*

WHITE: Frankly I'm a little out of touch on that. You are more informed than I am on that side of it. If that position is lapsing, that's a shame. It shouldn't be allowed to.

Q: *More broadly, how did the Clinton administration differ from the Bush administration?*

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Today is Wednesday, November 12, 1997. Al, you were about to explain how the nature of your operation evolved after the Clinton administration finally got under way some six months or so after the new President was inaugurated.

WHITE: Well, while this process of getting the new administration under way was taking place in the Department of State, a lot was going on over in the Commerce Department.

I think that there is a perception that Republican administrations are more friendly to business than Democratic administrations. I have to say that when the Clinton administration came into office, it was very committed to helping American business overseas. It showed a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and determination to do that.

You could see that very clearly in Ron Brown, the incoming Secretary of Commerce. Of course, he's dead now. He was killed in a plane crash in Bosnia. Some controversy surrounded him. However, I have to say, from my observations of him, that he was an extremely impressive "operator," if that's the word.

Q: Clearly, he was imaginative and energetic.

WHITE: And extremely articulate. He was very impressive as an individual. Obviously, he was in command of all of the fine political arts in a positive sense. He knew how to deal with people and to hold the attention of an audience. He surrounded himself with some good people.

During that summer of 1993 the administration, under his aegis, launched an exhaustive review of the entire governmental apparatus for dealing with U.S. business overseas. And not just the trade promotion parts of the U.S. Government and export controls. Just about any agency was looked at that had anything to do with U.S. international economic relationships. This included the work of the Trade Promotion Coordinating Committee

[TPCC]. Of course, this committee had previously existed and had been active before. Now it was reinvigorated. This committee was tasked with doing a bottom-up review or survey of this whole area of how government interfaces with business in foreign markets.

During the summer of 1993, the TPCC broke itself down into various working groups to consider different aspects of the broader problem. I was a member of the Task Force dealing with the overseas component of trade promotion work. The Task Force was headed by Bob Taft from the Department of Commerce. We had meetings which extended through long, long afternoons at the Commerce Department throughout that summer.

The result of this work was published in September, 1993. I don't know whether you have seen it. It was called, "Toward a National Export Strategy. U.S. Exports = U.S. Jobs." With your interest in the commercial field, you may want to look at this publication. It is about 100 pages long. I think that it's a very good study of the entire problem of promoting U.S. exports. Quite rightly, it not only goes into the international aspect but also into the grass roots of how to deal with the business community domestically to stimulate exports.

Q: Did it come to any conclusions and make any recommendations?

WHITE: Oh, yes.

Q: For the record, can you summarize it?

WHITE: It recommended a new kind of Strategic Commercial Plan which each post overseas would send in to Washington. I've already mentioned the "Commercial Action Program." This was similar to it but a much more detailed plan for each country, with much more high level involvement in its preparation.

Separate from that, it called for comprehensive Commercial Guides for each country in the world where we had any significant trade interest. As a result an American businessmen, instead of having to plow through a vast and incomprehensible array of different reports, would find in one document the kind of basic information a businessman needs to deal with a particular country. It was intended to be a fairly comprehensive document, kind of a one stop document. If a company were interested in exporting to, let's say, Morocco, that one document would help it. Of course, no single document will answer all of the questions that arise. However, this Commercial Guide would answer perhaps 90 percent of the questions that a company would have to ask about trading with a given country. A businessmen could find answers to his questions without having to plow through a huge array of government reports or even hiring some private, professional research group to do it for him.

The report did call, and this was of keen interest to us in the State Department, for making the Country Team a much more active instrument of trade promotion. It already was, of course, but this institutionalized the importance of the Country Team as an

integrated unit to focus on U.S. commercial objectives abroad. Of course, that meant enhancing the role of the Ambassador as Chairman of the Country Team. It called for improved training of personnel who do commercial work. In that area, of course, the Department of State was already engaged in a training program at the Foreign Service Institute [FSI]. This course was designed to provide basic training in the commercial function to officers going out to do commercial work.

We assisted FSI in devising a two-day training session for DCM's [Deputy Chiefs of Mission], which concentrated on commercial issues. That was a pretty high-powered program. A lot of work went into that.

More broadly, the TPCC report called for a harder look at export controls. In other words, what export controls really necessary? The program did not, in a sweeping way, advocate getting rid of all export controls. However, it did cast a new light on the whole area of export controls and ways by which we don't wind up shooting ourselves in the foot.

Anyone interested in commercial work should get his hands on that report. You can cynically say that the U.S. Government issues reports all the time. However, it was a good report with follow-through provisions. It was published as a report to Congress in September 1993. It is available from the U.S. Government Printing Office.

Q: You think that this report will have long term viability?

WHITE: At least as an indication of what the Clinton administration was doing. It certainly started off with a rush to assist American business. The Export-Import Bank had a new president at that time, Kenneth D. Brody. He was extremely energetic and played a very active role in the TPCC.

Q: Dan Tarullo replaced McAllister.

WHITE: That's right, in the new administration.

Q: Do you have any comments on his performance?

WHITE: Dan, of course, took an interest in everything in the Bureau of Economic Affairs, including my work as well. Again, there was an element of continuity there because Dick Hechinger stayed on during my tenure. Dick was always the front office person in the Bureau of Economic Affairs to whom I reported, in the normal course of events. I was in touch with Dick all of the time.

Q: What would you point to as your proudest achievement during the time you occupied that job? What do you think was the most significant action you took?

WHITE: Well, I would like to think that we raised the level of consciousness in the Department of State itself about the importance of the commercial function.

Q: Maybe you laid the groundwork for the development of the Paul Cleveland position.

WHITE: In a sense, although of course I had a predecessor, Tom Robbins, who did excellent work in that office. I would like to think that I played a useful role in the development of the office of the Coordinator of Business Affairs.

The other thing that I would like to think that I did was to improve the climate of relations between the State and Commerce Departments during that period. That was something that I had to work at. Again, one person cannot do it. There has to be a lot of good will on both sides. You know, this business of turf wars really is a scandalous thing. It infests the State Department, just as it does the Commerce Department, as well as every other agency of the U.S. Government. I saw that all the time, and that was one of the things that we had to deal with and try to overcome. Just as there were people in the Commerce Department who had a chip on their shoulder regarding the State Department, we had people in State who had a chip on their shoulder about Commerce. Just as there were narrow, bureaucratic turf fighters in Commerce, we had them in State.

Q: Again, I would say that that shift of the commercial function from the State Department to the Commerce Department was intended to ameliorate that range of issues. In fact, I don't think that this had much impact on that.

WHITE: On what?

Q: The tensions that you were describing, the turf wars, and all of that between Commerce and State. I think that it was assumed that if we shifted primary responsibility for the supervision of Commercial Attaches from State to Commerce, we would get rid of a lot of those problems. But I don't think that the shift worked in that way.

WHITE: Well, there were people in State who actually welcomed the shift. They were people who had no interest in the commercial function. In fact, every now and then I would find myself talking with an officer from one of the regional bureaus in State about a commercial issue and he would say: "Oh, well, you ought to talk to the Commerce desk officer about that."

The problem is that this function is not one which you can just give away for one very basic and simple reason. Commercial work is not done in a vacuum. Overseas, it is done in an American Embassy. An American Embassy, of course, involves the Department of State. So there HAS to be a close relationship between the two departments, day in and day out. The only question is whether that relationship is going to be infused with good will or just a lot of bureaucratic bickering.

Q: Al, I believe that this situation relates to the priority with which this range of issues is addressed. Since the end of World War II, with the Cold War and all of the issues which you mentioned, the commercial function has not been deemed by most of the establishment people in the State Department and in the Foreign Service as a matter of high priority.

Tell me what you now judge to be the importance of the commercial function in the Foreign Service, as American businessmen see it.

WHITE: Well, I think that during the period of my last job in the State Department, I spent about half of my time under the Bush administration and half of my time under the Clinton administration. Under two different Secretaries of State. I think that there was definitely a very high priority attached to the commercial function in the State Department by both administrations. Secretary Larry Eagleburger and certainly Secretary Warren Christopher, with his concept of the America Desk, strongly supported the commercial function. I don't think that you could ask for more in terms of top level support for the commercial function.

I certainly think, whatever their attitude may have been previously, that our Ambassadors abroad got the message, whether they wanted to get it or not. I think that they got the message that their effectiveness would be judged in good measure by how effectively they served U.S. business interests abroad.

Now, where that situation stands today I don't know, because I have not been directly involved in it for some time. I think that the shift in primary responsibility for commercial work from State to Commerce was aided, in a way, by the end of the Cold War and a lessening of the degree of tension in other areas. So more attention could be focused on our commercial interests, at a time when, in fact, they were becoming more important. Bear in mind, as I think I mentioned before that in the early ‘50s only something like 5-6 percent of the U.S. economy was involved in foreign trade. Even then, we were an enormous presence in world trade. However, relatively speaking, the U.S. economy could almost function without reference to what was going on in the rest of the world.

Q: And what is the percentage of foreign trade now in terms of the Gross National Product? Is it 12 percent?

WHITE: At least, to say nothing of the fact that it is growing more and more as a percentage of GNP. Most of the "Fortune 500" companies in the U.S. probably get half of their profits from international operations.

Q: To what degree and in what way do you feel that the role of Embassies, Consulates, and so forth, can really make a difference in terms of total U.S. exports? Economists would say, by and large, that it is the product, the price, competitiveness, and servicing that determine the level of trade. A lot of this other stuff is just a lot of sound and fury. What's your answer to that?

WHITE: My answer is: let's divide the world into two kinds of economies. In highly industrialized, advanced countries like those in Western Europe you certainly don't need the kind of micro commercial support that you need in a developing country. Why? In advanced, industrial countries, or whatever the term of art which is being used these days,

the architecture of the economies in Europe or in some of the countries in the Far East has reached such a degree of sophistication and after so many years of reducing trade barriers that your American businessman doesn't need as much assistance as he needs in developing countries. In the developing countries the rules, if there are any at all, are very sparse and vulnerable to manipulation.

Well, compare my own experience in Ankara and Rome. We had a separate Commercial Section in both countries when I was there. I worked closely with the Commercial Section. We simply didn't have the number of American businessmen coming into our Embassy in Rome that we would have coming into our Embassy in Ankara. Why? There are long established ways of doing business in a country like Italy. You didn't have the same degree of, how shall I say it, the finagling that goes on in other countries of the world, where contracts are often awarded to this or that party on non-commercial grounds and where institutionalized corruption is a problem. Secondly, big buck contracts are being awarded in the developing countries. You know, they're not building a lot of big dams in France or Germany these days. Where are they building big dams? They're building them in developing countries. By definition the local government is heavily involved in such contracts. I would say that in advanced, industrialized countries you need a U.S. government commercial presence to ensure that the playing field is kept level and that your companies are not being disadvantaged. There are rules and people are playing by the rules for the most part, but not always.

In the other kind of economy, in the developing countries, where big, infrastructure projects are under way, you're talking about billions of dollars. You need active intervention on behalf of American companies, if only because other countries do the same thing.

Q: Could you get a little more specific about what kinds of assistance are involved in both sets of countries to be most effective?

WHITE: In a country like Turkey, for example, or China, where you have these big, megabuck projects, such as big dams being built, you have to indicate to the local government that we expect American companies to be treated fairly. We expect commercial decisions to be made on commercial grounds. That is not likely unless we let these governments know that the U.S. Government, through its officials, is watching what is going on very carefully and very diligently, to ensure that that happens.

There is an area which I haven't mentioned but I should do so. More and more we are getting into a complex world where the whole question of what's an American company isn't even clear. In Turkey, for example, a big American company was bidding on a contract. Many of its production facilities were in Belgium. In our promotion of that particular U.S. contract we were working very closely with the Belgian Embassy. In fact, ironically enough, the Belgian Embassy was playing the lead role. Why? Most of the equipment, or a good part of it, was going to be manufactured in U.S. subsidiary companies and plants in Belgium. As far as the Belgians were concerned, they supported that contract totally. We are often inhibited, as you know, because there is often more

than one American entry in the field. We can't normally support one American company over another American company. In this case the Belgian Ambassador could and did support a Belgian interest and did so very effectively. I recall once being invited to the Belgian Embassy to a luncheon given for a senior, American executive of that particular company.

Or look at a situation today where there is a big contract up for grabs in the developing world. Let's say you have Northern Telecom, a Canadian-based company, competing with, for example, AT&T. Let's say that the equipment which Northern Telecom will supply is to come from their plants in North Carolina. Let's say that the equipment which AT&T would supply would come from their factories in England. Now, where does the American interest lie? You tell me. This is becoming an extremely difficult problem to figure out.

Q: I would say that the American interest lies mainly in the reduction of barriers to global trade and investment, wherever they are.

WHITE: This is one of the considerations I was referring to.

Q: Incredibly, I think that the Clinton administration has totally failed to project that fundamental fact in the fiasco last week, when the administration said, like a broken record, that we need fast track authority to negotiate trade agreements.

WHITE: I think that that was a failure of leadership and a failure to do the job right. My view is that President Clinton could have gotten fast track negotiating authority from Congress, had he gone about it in the right way.

Q: By the "right way," I assume that you mean by explaining what the issues were. However, I think that this administration is very confused as to what it would do with this kind of authority, if it could get it. But that's a different question.

WHITE: Yes, that is a different matter. Let me mention one other thing, speaking about our posts abroad. I have spoken of guidance and resources. Unfortunately, we could be long on guidance and short on resources.

In any case, I would like to raise the question of recognition. The key to any organization's priorities is recognition. By recognition I don't mean awards, medals, and ceremonies. I mean promotions. One of the things that we tried to do, and I think with some success, was to get the precepts for the Selection Boards altered, so that they would reflect adequately on the commercial function.

In this connection and quite separately from anything I tried to do, Ambassador Cobb, our Ambassador to Iceland and a Republican, political appointee, came up with the concept of an award that would be limited to Foreign Service Officers who did good work in the commercial field. This award would not be given to Commerce officers or officers from Treasury or Agriculture. He not only came up with the idea. He sold it to

the Department and provided the funding for it. It's now called, "The Cobb Award." This is a modest initiative, but it was well under way when I left the Department. Several Cobb Awards had been distributed, and that's a very good thing.

However, promotion is the real test. You would have to do a study to find out the promotion rates for officers who have done commercial work. Let's face it, promotions are the payoff in the career service.

Q: There are so many variables.

WHITE: There are variables, but you have to start with facts and then try to infer whatever may be found in those facts. It would be very interesting to know how many officers who have distinguished themselves in commercial work get promoted. That's the payoff, as I said. Promotions are not determined by the people at the top of the Department of State. They are determined by the system. The Selection Boards read the personnel files, and they agonize over the rankings of the various classes of Foreign Service Officers.

That's going to be the payoff. I think that we'll have to wait and see. Maybe the jury is still out on that question.

Q: I would be critical and quite skeptical of any conclusions that would derive from any statistical analysis of that kind, but that's just my own view. I think that there are too many flaws in the way the whole system works in terms of promotions and assignments.

WHITE: The Selection Boards are given precepts to guide them in their work. I don't know whether the members of these Boards take these precepts seriously. However, they should be taken seriously. That is the tipoff on what the Department really expects from its personnel. You know, people will respond to what their masters want them to do. You'll get a lot of interest in commercial work if the people who do it are promoted. The perception in the Foreign Service is that certain kinds of work lead to promotion and enhance the career prospects of Foreign Service Officers.

Q: What kind of companies, by and large, take most advantage of the commercial services that our Embassies offer? Is it the big corporations, which are more sophisticated and have a better understanding of these services, that take the most advantage of these services?

WHITE: I think that’s true are because those are the companies which most often come seeking our assistance. You know, it's very hard to go out and offer your assistance to people unless you know that they're looking for your assistance. You could argue that the big companies don't need the services of the U.S. Government. I have heard this, but I think that it is nonsense. The big companies need Embassy support because the contracts are big and the other interest groups involved are also big. As I said before, there is no such thing as a purely commercial issue, devoid of politics, if the amount of money involved is large enough. If the amount of money involved is big enough, it's a political

issue, with a capital "P."

It is our big companies that know what the U.S. Government can do, and they are the ones who come to us. However, in fact, it's amazing how many big companies don't come to us because they either don't know what we offer or have heard through some grapevine that the American Embassy won't give them the time of day, and so forth.

Let me give you an example that comes to mind while we are talking. When I was in my last job in the Department of State, I received a phone call late one afternoon from the Washington representative of a very big, American company. He had been frantically calling around Washington. As his company's representative in Washington, he was probably being paid a very handsome salary. He told me that he had made many phone calls but had been unable to find anybody in the U.S. Government who could help him. He asked me if I could help him. He seemed very relieved that I could at least relate to his problem.

This company had suddenly been confronted with a decree to be issued by the French Government which was going to cost them a lot of money. It was a complicated matter which involved financial aspects of French law and interpretations of it. The decree was going to be issued in a few days.

This man told me: "Look, this issue is so complicated that I can't even describe it to you." Then he said, rather timidly: "Would it be alright if our Vice President for Finance called you from New York?" I said: "Of course, that's what I'm here for." Within five minutes I had a phone call from a man who, you could tell from the way he was speaking, was used to wielding a great deal of authority. He explained that his company had this problem and asked what could the U.S. Government do about it. I said: "Do you have people in Paris?" He said: "Oh, yes. We have a very large office in Paris. We have a General Counsel in Paris." I said: "Well, have they been in touch with the American Embassy in Paris about this problem?" He said: "We haven't been in touch with the American Embassy." I asked: "Why not?" He said: "Well, we kind of like to take care of our own problems." I said: "Now you want help on a decree that's going to be issued in 24 or 48 hours?" I said: "Send me a fax, one page, not more, boiling this problem down into its bare essentials. I will send that fax to our Embassy in Paris. Meanwhile, you tell your General Counsel in Paris to get over to the American Embassy when it opens tomorrow." I had that very handy little book which lists our senior personnel abroad, in the various sections of our Embassies and Consulates. It's a handout to the business community, a little pocket book.

Q: It gives the names and telephone numbers of our senior people.

WHITE: I also talked to our French desk and we got through to the Embassy and set up a meeting with the company's General Counsel in Paris. The next afternoon this same company executive called in New York was falling all over himself with gratitude, expressing his undying appreciation. He said: “We did just what you told us to do. We sent our man over to the Embassy. The Embassy had set up some appointments.

Somebody from the embassy went with our man to a French Government ministry." He said: "The issuance of the decree has been delayed. That's all we wanted. Now we can explain the situation to the French Government." We're quite confident about the outcome."

So here was an American company, a household word in the U.S., which had made no contact with the Embassy in Paris on a problem that had obviously been developing for months. They phoned us frantically late one afternoon when they were faced with the issuance of a French Government decree that would have been very detrimental to them. Now there you are. This was a big and sophisticated company. I'm very sure that from now on that company's guidelines to its personnel abroad are to keep in close touch with the local American Embassy if they anticipate having problems. Moreover, I am sure that there are a lot of companies out there like that.

Q: How about the small and medium sized companies?

WHITE: It is very hard for us to help them because we don't know that they are there.

Q: And they don't know that we're there.

WHITE: They don't know that we're there. The problem is that the U.S. Government does not communicate well on what it can do for American business. If this big company, headquartered in New York, didn't know what the U.S. Government could do to help them, how do you expect some small operator out in Kansas to know? That is really more of a problem for the domestic side of this coin.

Q: That's more for the Department of Commerce to handle.

WHITE: It is, to get out and interface with the American business community. They have the means of doing that through their local field offices, local chambers of commerce, and through trade organizations. One of the results of that study that I told you about, the trade study published in 1993 as a result of all of those deliberations, was to address that issue. It was addressed in depth: how do you communicate that these facilities are available? How do you get American companies to focus on foreign trade? Bear in mind that, generally, the smaller the company, the greater their domestic orientation. Many of them don't have the foggiest notion that there are opportunities out abroad.

Q: Do you think that many of them really would have competitive products to do well on a worldwide basis?

WHITE: I'm sure that many of them do, certainly. I have seen many cases of companies that have done that.

Q: Presumably, the Internet would help them a great deal to do these things.

WHITE: Well, I'm not so sure how business systematically treats sales through the

Internet. But there's a whole, domestic interface out there. This has to be tended to.

Q: What is the role of the Field Offices of the Department of Commerce?

WHITE: To do just what I'm talking about. They are the people who have to interface with the American business community at the local level.

Q: Do they do this?

WHITE: Of course, they do. And I think the quality of those Field Offices has been improving. All of those commerce regional conferences that I attended representing the State Department were also attended by people from Commerce Field Offices. Some of their personnel were extremely competent and were very highly motivated. But it's an ongoing, educational process. Overseas, as far as the State Department is concerned, our job is to see that the information on trade opportunities is reported back to Washington. Then this information has to be included in data processing systems whether a national or state data bank or otherwise. The information has to be retrievable information so that it can be passed on to companies.

Q: Of course, with modern computer technology there should be a fair possibility that this data can be retrieved.

WHITE: I think so. There has been an incredible increase in American exports. So I think that these policies of export promotion are paying off. American companies are finding that they can export. At these regional conferences sponsored by the Department of Commerce there would always be people who would come in from some local company to explain that they hit a gold mine in some foreign market for their products.

Q: You know, people say that the Foreign Service has no constituency in the U.S. I have always felt that we have a potential constituency in the American business community, to the degree that we could collectively persuade the business community that at least some of us in the State Department and the Foreign Service are sincerely and deeply interested in what they do. What's your view on that?

WHITE: Well, let's be realistic and face it. The Department of State is a very small part of the U.S. Government bureaucracy. We don't have, and I suppose that we'll never have, the kind of constituency that an organization like the Departments of Agriculture and Defense have, or even the Department of Commerce has. There are certain, inbuilt problems here. We are a foreign affairs agency. We need to build up a constituency in the business community. We also need to build a constituency in Congress. I think that we have been abysmally poor in developing good, healthy relationships with the U.S. Congress. I think that that is part of our problem.

In terms of dealing with the business community, a key role is that of the Ambassador. A few years ago, you may remember, we brought back to Washington a group of our Ambassadors from the Far East. In fact, I think that Paul Cleveland may have been in the

first group, before the Office of the Coordinator of Business Affairs was established in the Department. This group of Ambassadors had a fantastic public affairs reception in the United States. They went around the country to various major cities, participated in press conferences, appeared on TV, and attracted attention to business possibilities in the countries to which they were assigned.

The idea suddenly hit the people they met in the hinterland in the United States that the word "Ambassador" had some kind of cachet to it. They thought: "Our Ambassador to Malaysia is in town. He is telling us that we ought to look at Malaysia." I think that we need to make better use of our Ambassadors domestically. We need to pull them back from overseas more often. Our public affairs people and that office which Paul Cleveland and I were involved in should set up meetings for our Ambassadors. We need to get these Ambassadors out into the community to speak to various groups, including service clubs such as Rotary or appear on local television programs. We need people to have the right rank and title. Some people will say titles are empty things, but they're not. They are very important things.

Q: You're familiar with the conferences which I've been organizing for some time.

WHITE: I've participated in a few of them.

Q: I was quite startled to learn that the Washington representatives of major American corporations had such limited awareness of what the State Department and the Foreign Service actually do.

WHITE: It's astonishing.

Q: Of course, a fundamental purpose of this series of conferences has been to enlighten the business group. I have felt that we have a certain amount of momentum going in this connection. However, what do you feel about it? Does this kind of activity help?

WHITE: Yes. I think that I've mentioned previously in our discussions the occasion when I was asked to address a trade association at its annual meeting. These people really didn't know what an Embassy did. They had only a vague knowledge of the subject. They were extremely surprised and interested to hear of the things that an American Embassy can do for American business abroad.

Q: I thought that these conferences I was organizing could foster a dialogue between representatives of Government and business and establish informal links during coffee breaks, lunches, and receptions. I thought that we could continue this dialogue on key economic issues which normally do not receive a lot of public attention. These meetings were held right in the State Department.

WHITE: I think that those meetings are very valuable.

Q: I think that we developed a certain momentum as a result.

WHITE: I think that that is very important.

There is another problem in the State Department. We tend to hide our light under a bushel, as the old saying goes. I used to have problems lining up State Department officers to accept invitations that would come to us through our Bureau of Public Affairs. Sometimes, the answer to our approach to one of these officers would be: "Well, I'm too busy. I've got to go to Paris next week and I've got this report which we have to get out." They did not seem to realize that here was a golden opportunity to send a senior, U.S. official, an Office Director, let's say, out and talk to a major, industrial group or a big company, about the issues that he was dealing with.

We're not very good at this. The problem is that the Foreign Service, even when its members are stationed in Washington, is not really in the Washington game. FSOs are no sooner back in Washington than they are wondering what their next post will be. They do not spend enough time in Washington. There also is not enough time spent dealing with other U.S. Government agencies. If I were writing the rules of eligibility for the Senior Foreign Service, I would set down an absolute rule that no one would be admitted to the Senior Foreign Service who did not spend at least one period of service of one, two, or three years in another agency of the U.S. Government.

Q: Al, we're just about out of time. We have a few more minutes. What did you feel about your last assignment, which we have been talking about, as a way to complete your discussion of your period of service in the State Department?

WHITE: I'm glad I did it. I thought that the work was important. I knew when I took the job that it would be sort of thankless in many ways. I knew that I had very few resources in that office to do what I felt needed to be done. But somebody had to do it, and I felt, frankly, that I was as well qualified as anybody to do it. I had spent two years in the Commerce Department, speaking on behalf of another point of view and seeing the world as observed from another agency. I had also done enough commercial work to convince me that I understood the commercial function. I was delighted, in a sense, when my job became unnecessary, when it was melded into a larger operation headed by Ambassador Paul Cleveland. I think that this was a useful period of four years, with all of its frustrations.

Q: Were you ready to retire?

WHITE: I was. We're getting into a broader area here. If I had my preferences, I would return to the mandatory retirement age of 60 and I would do away with this arrangement whereby the Department sacrifices its officers when it has made a very large investment in training them, just when it is about to pay off.

Q: It is a fantastic waste of talent.

WHITE: Well, it is perverse. The State Department is the only organization that I know

of which dismembers itself. I think that people in other organizations, both government and private, watch this process, and just shake their heads. They can't figure out what on earth is going on here. People from other agencies who know us and work with us abroad, for example, the Treasury, look at this spectacle and find it positively incomprehensible. We're losing too many officers just at the point where the Department is about to recoup the investment made in them.

Q: When they are at the peak of their careers.

WHITE: Exactly. That has to be changed, in my view.

Q: That's what I've been arguing for 30 years. If you had it to do over again, would you join the Foreign Service?

WHITE: I'm not sure. I'm not sure, at this point, that I would recommend it to a young man. If such a person came to me today and asked what I thought about the Foreign Service, probably I'd say: "If you're interested in international affairs, go into international business." However, I certainly enjoyed my career in the Foreign Service. I think that commercial work is fascinating and is very creative. I think that business is very creative. I think that the closer you get to business, the more creative you find the experience. In the final analysis, you cannot be a good Economic Officer without having done commercial work. You can't separate these two things. Economic and commercial work are part of a single entity. They are two aspects of the same thing.

Q: Any further comment?

WHITE: Well, there are a lot of comments I could make, but as I look at my watch, I think that it's time to wrap this up. Some day it would be nice to talk more about the Foreign Service and where it may be going. I think that would be something that we could do another time.

Q: Thank you very much, Al.

End of interview