

CZECH REPUBLIC - CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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CARL F. NORDEN
Consular Officer
Prague (1940)

Carl Norden attended boarding school in Switzerland where he became bilingual in English and German. He served in Yugoslavia during World War II. He then received a Master's in political science from Harvard and worked for City Bank for

six years before he entered the Service. He has served in Prague; Paramaribo, Suriname; Havana, Cuba and with ARA. This interview was conducted in 1991 by Ambassador Horace G. Torbert.

Q: You went to Prague by way of the Foreign Service school, did you get some training? Were you doing the same thing in Prague as in Berlin?

NORDEN: No. I went to Prague because there was a scandal, a visa scandal. Our local staff had been selling visas, I was sent to put a stop to it which I did.

Q: I had one of those in Salzburg after the war. Did you leave Prague because Prague was invaded?

NORDEN: It already had been invaded when I went there. The Germans treated the natives quite well, their motto was give the Czechs plenty of beer and feed them well and they will make no trouble for us. Which it turned out to be so, the Czechs were not about to make any trouble of any kind.

GEORGE F. BOGARDUS
Vice Consul
Prague (1945-1948)

George F. Bogardus was born in Iowa in 1917 and graduated from Harvard University in 1939. He served in the U.S. Army in 1941 and joined the Foreign Service in 1941. His overseas posts included Canada, Kenya, Czechoslovakia, Algeria, Germany, and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 10th 1996.

Q: You were in Prague from when to when?

BOGARDUS: December 5 of '45 until Easter of '48. That was a most fantastic period.

Q: We want to talk about this, but first, how did you get there? I mean, this was right after the war. Things must have been in pretty bad shape.

BOGARDUS: That was an odyssey, it certainly was.

Q: Your wife came with you?

BOGARDUS: Yes. We took the Queen Elizabeth from Halifax. It was still a troop ship, basically, but they allowed some civilians on board. That took us to Southampton. Our objective was Prague and I had written ahead to the ambassador (you had to do this sort of thing). On the way, I said, "How are we going to communicate with these people? They all know German as a second language, but we know that's very unpopular." It just happened that Czech colleagues who had

been in their consular service in Montreal, who had met me earlier, were going back, too. So, I wandered around to them and said, "How do you say, 'I'm an American and I don't know how to speak Czech. Do you speak English perhaps?'" "No, no, of course not." And then, "French maybe?" "No, no." "Well, what about German?" "Oh, yes." So, they did, they told us. That was very, very useful at that time because in Prague they were grabbing people who looked Germanic and putting them into a little concentration camp until they found out whether they were Germans. It worked like a charm, especially for my wife, who has some German ancestry, partly, and looks pale and blue-eyed and so forth. It worked. When we got there we went through the routine, and invariably the Czech answer was "Natuerlich, Was wollen Sie?".

Q: Did you take a train?

BOGARDUS: Oh, that's right. The train took us from Southampton to London. We stayed around several days there in London. The embassy was trying to figure out, "How are we going to get these people off on their way?" Eventually, they got us on a Channel boat to France and Paris, a train, the boat train. We arrived in Paris and nobody knew we were coming. It was not terribly easy, but as soon as they did find out we were there, then the Embassy was very helpful. It was late in November. When we got word that we were going to fly to Prague, I sent a telegram to the American embassy, the ambassador, saying, "Here we are. We're going to be there." Well, the airline said the airplane was not going to fly after all. Two days later, we finally did take off. It was to go to Prague. We put down near Frankfurt and they said, "No, we've been diverted. This plane goes to Berlin." Eventually, they flew us to Prague. So, it was a three, four, or five day delay in all this. When we arrived in Prague airport, the only American around was a man to meet the courier... Well, he was designated to meet the courier and trade pouches. He wasn't going to pay a bit of attention to us. And we didn't know, for example, the word for "men" and "women" at the airport. And my wife took our little daughter, who was two years old that day into the men's room. Anyway, that's the sort of thing. Eventually, we got a colleague -- we called downtown. We got through to the embassy to the duty officer, Walter Birge. He was a third secretary like me. Then our odyssey was over, except not entirely because we stayed in the Alcron Hotel for several days, which is one of the two finest hotels, or had been pre-war. But it had just been vacated by the Russian officers who left their lice behind in the beds (bedbugs). The milk was not in bottles at all, all food was severely rationed. We had a hard time, especially with this little two-year-old daughter. You'd go across the street to the milk store and take your own pail. There was no real cereal even, no real bread even. The coffee was ersatz. Well, the embassy helped us out a bit more, but even they couldn't do so much, except the ambassador got us a supply of canned milk a few days later.

His name was Laurence Steinhardt from New York. He was a non-career ambassador but he was the first ambassadorial or chief of mission appointment by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, who sent him as minister to Stockholm. Then he went to Peru after that, and then to Moscow during the early part of the war, and then they had gone to Ankara and finally to Prague. The Steinhardts had arrived in early June of '45, six months earlier. The chancery is a big, old building, the Schönbrunn Palace that the U.S. government bought in 1921. It's baroque, one of the finest places. It's very old and extremely interesting.

We didn't get settled into our house really until early January of '46. The embassy gave us the

German equivalent of a jeep, called a "Hanomag," which apparently had been to Stalingrad and back. The motor jumped from extra low to high gear. It was entirely open in the winter, and the winter can be quite cold there. But the Czechs were so eager to see foreigners that they immediately said, "Oh, we're a western people. Remember, we're a western people." That's true. I'm going on and on and on here.

Also in January my father in Des Moines very naively forwarded through to me in the open mail in an official brown envelope with official letterhead a routine appreciation of my loyal services to the OSS! This arrived by mailman after having undoubtedly been opened and scrutinized by the Czech intelligence, including the Communist Party. There was nothing I could do to make them believe that I had left the OSS. Years later, in 1955, the East German Communist Party printed a book ostensibly of all CIA covert agents, and there I was, correctly listed as in Hamburg. Of course, we chuckled at their wasting energy watching my espionage actions.

At the same time I did get a letter through APO mail from my cousin, Katherine Bogardus, a school teacher in Clinton, Illinois. She asked me to get in contact with a Czech lady, a Mrs. Kohak with whom she had gone to college before the War in Monmouth College, Illinois. Most fortuitously, at the same time John Bruins, the DCM, told me to carry an official request for the regular exchange of the Congressional Record with the equivalent of the Czechoslovak National Assembly. And, who was the National Assembly Archivist, but Dr. Miloslav Kohak? It was his wife who was Katherine's friend. We quickly started the permanent exchange of the two records, and my wife and I became good friends with the Kohaks. And through him I received the basic biographical data on all members of the Assembly, officially confidential for Czech officials. Although the Department encouraged confidential biographic reporting, I never received any recognition from the Department or the Embassy for this minor coup.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about Steinhardt and how he ran the embassy and your impression of Steinhardt? He's a major figure in American diplomacy of that period.

BOGARDUS: You've heard about him already?

Q: Oh, I've heard about him, but I'd like to hear your impressions about his way of operating.

BOGARDUS: He was a very astute and shrewd individual. I remember talking to him four or five months after we got there, just chatting around one afternoon with other people there. *Fortune* magazine had published the pictures of a number of ambassadors of various kinds. They classified them as professional, semi-professional, and amateur. *Fortune* put him in the semi-professional. I said, "Are you pleased with your classification, Mr. Ambassador?" He said, "No, that's not right. I've had on-the-job training for 12 years now, running embassies and legations!" That was quite right. So, he was very, very shrewd.

In early May of '46, there was the first big election. The communists and Social Democrats as the two joint Marxist parties were really running against the democratic parties - the National Socialists or the Benes Party, and the People's Party, which was largely Catholic, coalition on the democratic side. Of course, we had the very best relations with those two. As the results came in, we were there in the national headquarters of the Ministry of Interior in Prague. It turned out that

the communists were getting a plurality and, with the Social Democrats in their coalition, they were going to have 53% or 51% of the national legislature. All these journalists were hovering around Ambassador Steinhardt, getting his comment on the returns which were most unsatisfactory to our side. He was basically an attorney and very strong for property rights. In this case, he was really acting like an attorney in a criminal case. They would come at him and he would begin with an oblique answer which was just five degrees off-line, not direct, and maybe add a little more comment, going farther, farther, farther from the subject. Five minutes later, he was still going strong, talking about something entirely different. He got away from the subject beautifully. I just admired that. That was very useful at that point.

I must say also that, later on, he could be quite severe and properly so, too. He discovered that three of our secretaries of the embassy were ordering through the embassy commissary large amounts of hard liquor from abroad. One instance came up in which three young female secretaries each ordered 10 cases of whiskey. That really caused him to blow his top. He said, "You're lucky. I'm going to let you have one each. The rest of it is available for the whole staff." But he really gave them a reaming out for that, very properly.

Q: They were selling it, I take it?

BOGARDUS: Well, that was the surmise. At that point, my wife and I could have bought lots of things with cigarettes. We certainly didn't want to do it, absolutely wouldn't. We know one other embassy colleague in the USIA, who acquired large Oriental rugs, unfortunately. Two cigarettes would be a very good tip at that point. If you could offer a carton, you could get a lot of things. You could buy furniture, and so forth. We bought a few things at a public auction in crowns. The other part of it was that a big mistake had been made before we got there, probably by the Army, and our Treasury Department should not have acquiesced to this. At the end of the war, they agreed that the exchange rate should be 50 crowns to the dollar. After a bank fee, we were getting 49 3/4 crowns per dollar, which was ridiculous. Day after day, the Herald Tribune reported the dollar was being traded for 225-300 in Zurich or Basel. That went on and on until we came home in 1948. I complained about that bitterly to Bartley Gordon, who was sort of debriefing me. I think they finally wised up to that error. It was bad for the embassy's accounts, too. All the other embassies were dealing surreptitiously in the black market -- we felt confident they were. The French, the British, the Dutch, the Belgians, and so forth.

Q: What was your job at the embassy?

BOGARDUS: My main job was to look at the Prague newspapers, a whole gamut of them, each sponsored by one of the six political parties, four Czech and two Slovaks, and pick out things that should be translated. I would give them their thing, "You do this," and so forth, from the various parties. The other thing I did was, I gave passes to get on the airplane, which we had once a week, to fly from Prague to Frankfurt. We had control of that, of the passengers. But that was a very small part of my work.

One thing that happened, which is interesting -- the way it turned out was unfortunate -- a young Pole came in. He was a priest, I think. I think he was dressed as a priest. I'm not quite sure, maybe not. But he turned out to have a clerical passport from the Cardinal Bishop of Krakow. I forget his

name, but I recognized it once. It was not a regular passport at all. It was a clerical one, just valid within the Church. He said, "Won't you help, as we've got a lot of Bibles that we want to send out." Well, I'm sure there were a lot of other things as well. I was sympathetic to that. I said, "Sure, it's all right with me, but you'll have to go across town to talk with another office." There was an international pair of officers, one American and one French, who had to okay what I did as well. I made the mistake of telling our guy, Kovach, who was a Hungarian-American on the phone, that somebody special was coming, and the police nabbed them on their way over there. I felt very sorry about it. There were Polish troops in Germany and certainly at the end of the war in Western Europe, too, and they wanted to try to get together, I suppose. That's a shame.

Q: During this '46 to '48 period, from your observation, what was the political situation in Czechoslovakia and what was our role?

BOGARDUS: Well, we were trying to help them resurrect the pre-war democracy, the democratic republic, in every way we could. The cards were stacked very firmly against us. One thing I did for the ambassador was, very directly, from him in 1946. There was a ground control approach system out at the airport that we had supplied on a temporary basis. We received orders (and this was a big mistake) from Paris in ordinary mail, I think it was (something like that), in clear anyway, that they could read, saying, "Give it to the Czechs." The ambassador saw this and said, "Oh, that's not right. They shouldn't get things just free. They should pay something for it, to make it valuable for them." This was his attitude about American property that had been stolen, taken, expropriated abroad. He was very keen on this. So, he said, "It's worth \$250,000, this ground control approach. I want you to get \$125,000 out of this. We'll let them grab it for that." So, we started off the negotiations and I said, "\$125,000, not crowns." Well, we went back and forth for about three weeks. They complained about this and that. Finally, they came out. They called me over there and they pulled out this original instruction, or maybe it was a later one, which was a clear telegram. They just handed it over to me and said, "What do you think of this?" I was terribly embarrassed, of course. So I said, "Well, that doesn't agree with what I've heard. The ambassador doesn't think that's right" and so forth, and so I left and went back. Finally, we settled with them for \$90,000 in dollars and a balance of \$35,000 in crowns. But I had to threaten them by saying, "Well, otherwise, we have another candidate for this in Austria. They would like to have this, too." That was a lie, but it was a diplomatic lie and it had good cause in that case. So, that took a bit.

One other thing that happened when we were there, in the spring of 1946. Well, a number of things happened. In March of '46, the Czechs sent us a formal third person note, saying, "Greetings" and all that sort of thing and, "We have a number of German aliens here, several hundred thousand of them, that we would like to send over to the American zone. Please tell us how soon you will receive them."

Q: These were Sudeten Deutsche?

BOGARDUS: Leftover. Our occupation authorities in Frankfurt refused a couple of times. Then, finally, the third time (this was oral), they came back and said, "Well, if you Americans won't receive them into the American zone, we're sure that our Russian friends will receive these people into the Russian zone." Eisenhower and everybody else was saying, "We can't feed everybody who's already here," but within three weeks, the trains began filling up. By the end of the month,

we were sending out 50 trainloads of Sudeten Germans a day to Nuremberg and points west. That's exactly the way it happened. They had us on a barrel and they were not going to relent. Our democratic politicians said, "Hell, we've got this election coming up in May and we couldn't possibly refuse to expose that. We couldn't stand up for these Sudeten Germans, even though we know that, for the long term, it's a terrible brain drain and a loss to the economy, et cetera. But it's the only thing. We have to. Otherwise, the Commies will win everything." So, that's the way it happened. The commentator Dorothy Thompson raged about it, to no avail.

Just about that time, too, Marshal Tito came to town. I happened to be out and watched that. It was very difficult. You couldn't see him. There were three big limousines that were all black. The security was severe. All windows closed in town, and sharpshooters on roofs. Also just about that time, I remember this. There was a circular telegram to every post in the world from the Department, saying, "There is this man, Josef Broz Tito who has come to power in Yugoslavia. If anyone knows any biographical information about this man, please report at once. We want to know everything we possibly can about his background and who he is and so forth, his personality." That was an interesting thing. That was the first time I had ever seen that.

Q: Did you have any contact with the political parties in Czechoslovakia?

BOGARDUS: Oh, yes, a lot of them.

Q: How did that work?

BOGARDUS: My wife and I knew several politicians, Ivo Duchacek of the People's Party (Catholics) and Jan Stransky, National Socialist (Benes) Party and Firt, a moderate of the Social Democrats. I must say that they had originally been cultivated by the OSS man. By that time, it was called SSU, I think. They had all come over from London, and had been in London together. So, they knew each other. We had social parties with them. I had something else I wanted to say. I'm 78 and I lose the trend of things.

Q: It's no problem.

BOGARDUS: I wanted to tell you this though. This is one of the things that I -- a fellow colleague, a young officer, came up a few months after we were there, maybe in early February of '46, with his wife. His name was Claiborne Pell. Had you heard that?

Q: Oh, yes, I interviewed him. He talked about his time there and in Bratislava.

BOGARDUS: This was before Bratislava.

Q: But please tell me about your impression. He's just retiring as a Senator.

BOGARDUS: Well, he doesn't respond to my letters anymore. I could tell you a damaging incident about him, but there's no point in doing it. We first met him and his wife -- I went across the room and I said, "I'll bet he's Princeton." Sure enough, he was. I didn't know, but there was something about him. Princeton puts a cachet on people. Harvard men are very heterogeneous.

You can just sense it. He was very keen on dealing with the Marxists and trying to butter them up a bit, or at least get information with the Fierlinger brothers. Zdenek Fierlinger was the Prime Minister after '46. He had been the Czech ambassador in Moscow during the war. Then there was his brother. I forget his brother's first name. He had been in the Office of War Information in New York during the war. But he too was very, very susceptible to communism. Claiborne did try to dialogue with these people a bit, maybe. I'm not implying anything wrong, not at all. He told me on the side that one of his ambitions was to resurrect *The North American Review*, the ownership of which he had inherited from his father. He thought it would be a good idea. It was quite clear from his discussions and so forth that his desire at that time was to play the role of a British lord in the House of Lords. Eventually, he did. Of course, *The North American Review* never was revived.

Q: Were there any prohibitions about opening a dialogue with the communists at this '46 to '48 period?

BOGARDUS: Well, I don't think we ever even inquired about it. We did see democratic officials like Jan Masaryk once in a while. For a time, I worked in the same small office with Charles Yost in this Embassy in the room just above the entrance down below from the street. He later became a very prominent ambassador to the UN. I want to tell you something about him, since we're on to Charles Yost. In July of '1947, if you recall, the US proposed the Marshall Plan. The Western European governments all said, "Sure, that sounds great to us. We'll go in for it." The Czech government said, "We're invited, too? We think that's fine." So, they very quickly agreed. It so happened that two or three Polish cabinet ministers were in town when this occurred, including the Foreign Minister, Jyrankowicz. They too said, "Well, that's fine. But we can't guarantee the Polish government. As soon as we get back to Warsaw, we'll join you." The Czechs said, "Boy, that's great. We're all going to go in on the Marshall Plan, the Poles and Czechoslovakia." Well, two or three days later, the Czechs withdrew from the Marshall Plan.

Charles Yost, on that very weekend, was in charge of the embassy because the ambassador and the DCM, John Bruins, were off on a boar hunt organized by the Czech Foreign Ministry, with all the diplomatic corps. Charles wrote a smashing analytical analysis of this in a long telegram, saying, "This means that the Kremlin, or Stalin, has definitely stopped this and will not permit it. It's very likely that they will reestablish something like the Red Army in this country." That was eight months before it actually happened. He sent this off when he was alone in charge, before the ambassador came back. But I know this because he called three or four of us who were still in there, political officers, read it aloud and said, "Now, any comment on this? Anybody disagree with anything in there?" Nobody had anything to disagree with at all. So, it went off.

A couple of days later, I happened to have a good contact, who told me the following story. The Czech government had received a stern command from Stalin by the Russian ambassador to send a delegation up to Moscow, to the Kremlin, to explain the adherence to the Marshall Plan. So, they sent three ministers: Jan Masaryk, the Foreign Minister, officially neutral in the Cabinet between democrats and Marxists, Zdenek Fierlinger leftist Social Democrat Prime Minister, and Jan Drtina, Minister of Justice of the Benes National Socialist Party. Don't be put off by "National Socialist."

Q: It had nothing to do with the old German National Socialists.

BOGARDUS: Far from it. So, the three of them went up in a special plane. On the way, they agreed, "We'll have a little get-together before we go in to see Stalin. We'll freshen up and so forth. We'll concert our position and what we'll say and so forth, and meet in 45 minutes, something like that." They were lodged in the Kremlin. They separated, and Fierlinger didn't show up at the appointed time. He showed up about a half hour late, trembling and sweating, white, very agitated. He said, "Stalin called me in by myself. He said, 'You people are going to review this and revoke it and refuse the Marshall Plan if you know what's good for your country and yourselves.'" They agreed they had to take the message and came back and that's what happened. Now, there was another source who reported the same thing to somebody else, but I think I was among the very first, at least, to get it. That report reached the Department by telegram about the time Yost's despatch (or airgram) arrived.

Q: How heavy did you find when you were there, the hand of the Soviets? Were the Soviets calling the shots or not?

BOGARDUS: Up to then, fairly pressing, but mostly persuasive. Well, calling the shots, yes, but not heavy-handed, not especially. Just about this time, they began to do that. That was the time, too, when the ambassador sent Claiborne Pell down to Bratislava to open it up in the Bristol Hotel. He sent me down there later with an instruction for Claiborne. We visited the Pells and then came back. But this really gives you the explanation why Czechoslovakia and the Marshall Plan did include the Czechs.

Q: You left before the coup, I take it?

BOGARDUS: No, it began on February 20th. Early in February, the ambassador had gone home for medical reasons and he did not come back until February 20. We were at Ruzyně Airport. We knew there was the beginning of a severe Czech government crisis between the communists and the non-communists. While we were waiting for the ambassador at Ruzyně Airport, our SSU (ex-OSS) officer who was with us said, "I just learned that Soviet Ambassador Zorin just came in from Moscow on the far side of the field." Then we met the ambassador.

That night the whole crisis became ominous. Finally, it came to a head on February 22 or 23. I felt it my duty to go down to the center of town and see how things were developing there after President Benes had given in. My wife was at home and there were wild Communist militia in the neighborhood, running around with rifles and searching for enemies. She was terrified. Then, as this developed, the big news journalists (*The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Post*, and so forth) descended on Prague, at the embassy especially, maybe 15 or 20 of them. It was a real ring ding show. Finally, it was all over and the Iron Curtain was coming down. My wife received no less than three telephone calls from other ladies, saying, "We invited you to a reception (dinner, etc.), but under the circumstances, we must postpone." Of course, we understood.

Q: What was the attitude of the embassy and the officers? How much of a surprise was this and was there a feeling of frustration?

BOGARDUS: Yes, definitely a feeling of frustration. We were cooperating with the British embassy, too, in reporting this and how things were going. Things ended up very badly. What

really annoyed a lot of us was that Henry Wallace came out with a fatuous statement in New York. He was running for President. He said, "Oh, you see, the Russians just stepped in ahead of the Americans who were plotting a coup. Our Ambassador Steinhardt got back there, but he was too late." That especially enraged me because my grade school was just 300 yards from Henry Wallace's home in Des Moines, Iowa. I had known his son, young Hank, fairly well. We always bought our milk from the Wallace's dairy and all that sort of thing. So, I came up for home leave some six weeks later, and I went into the ambassador. This just happened to be that way. It was approaching Easter, and Jan Masaryk had died in the meantime.

Q: He had either jumped or been pushed out of a window.

BOGARDUS: That's right, yes. We saw his funeral with immense numbers of people. Just before Easter, we came up for home leave and transfer, probably. So, I went to the ambassador and said, "In view of my background with Henry Wallace and so forth, I would like to go there to New York to talk to him. It's obvious that he is influenced by radically Marxists or Commies. He's honest, he's not communist, he's not socialist even but he's partly under the influence of crypto-commies. I'd like to get to him and speak to him and correct him and tell him, "What you said is a lot of baloney; that the Ambassador went home for a private operation and was in the USA." The Ambassador thought about it for a few minutes. He liked me quite a bit, but he said, "No, George, don't do it. It wouldn't do any good. You couldn't get to him, and wouldn't persuade him." So, I followed orders and did not. I wish I had been able to.

So, following that, we got off on home leave and he wrote me a very nice letter and said, "I hope you'll come back and serve with me." Our daughter was just four years old at that point so I respectfully declined to go back. I could have had a promotional push behind me, but I chose not to because of my family.

Q: When you were there after the coup, was there the general feeling that something was going to happen?

BOGARDUS: Yes. It was very dangerous any time after December. I heard from the *Time* correspondent that he listened to Masaryk in December and Jan had said to them, "This is off the record, gentlemen, but sometimes, I think my father made a big mistake in breaking up the Austro-Hungarian Empire." Terrible, remarkable confession. We learned also that in early March after the Iron Curtain came down, Jan Masaryk said to the coalition government- (You see, the majority were communist by that time, but he was Foreign Minister still.) He said, "Well, gentlemen, I've got a meeting coming up for the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) in Montreal this month and I'll be away for about a week." The rest of them just roared with laughter. "You aren't going anywhere."

We also knew that he had a mistress there who lived just around on the other side of the square of where Masaryk lived, which was the Foreign Office, the Cerninsky Palace. Marcia Davenport was her name. She was a novelist, American. She called up Jack Guiney, our admin. officer at the embassy and said, "Jan tells me that I am to leave right away. Will you take care of my refrigerator and my automobile and the rest of my belongings (furniture, etc.)? I have to go right away." She did. So, we did have some inkling that things were really very foreboding.

Q: I assume you were going out and talking to various people both in government and private life to get the temperature of the times. Did you find any support for this coup by the communists?

BOGARDUS: I was not able to go out and talk with the people, no. They wouldn't want to talk. It was too dangerous for them to talk with us -- that is, after Christmastime. There was very little of that. Hardly anybody did any of that. One friend of ours came and said, "If you'd like to know a good way to get people out, I can tell you a precise way over the mountains and Southern Bohemia." I thanked him and passed the word along, but that was not for me. The ambassador had instructed all of us not to get mixed up in any of this sort of thing, covert activity, which was very frustrating for us. I should tell you that in October or November, a good friend of mine, Miloslav Kohak, who had been head of the Czechoslovak YMCA and had also been incarcerated as a spy by the Nazis and lost his teeth in a concentration camp previously, asked me whether he should accept the job of being the principal editor of *Svobodne Slovo*, the National Socialist paper for the Benes Party. We talked about it over lunch for maybe an hour or so. I said, "Well, you know, as a devout Czech and a devout Christian, you do have to do that." He did, very capably, and suffered for it later because he and his wife had to ski over the mountains with their two children. When we left, we knew that was impending and took some of their luggage with us on a train and handed it over to the Embassy in Paris, contrary to the ambassador's orders. I think that's about everything I have to say about Steinhardt. He asked me to come back and I declined. Then we waited around and I got orders to go to Algiers.

CLAIBORNE PELL
Consular Officer
Prague and Bratislava (1945-1948)

Born into a family of diplomats, Claiborne Pell joined the Foreign Service in 1945 after serving in the Coast Guard. His stations included Prague, Bratislava, Genoa, and the Eastern European Desk. This interview was conducted on April 9, 1987.

Q: Did you ask for Czechoslovakia or Eastern Europe?

PELL: No, this was just a random assignment. I know I would have loved to have fulfilled my original assignment, that was as third secretary to Tirana, Albania, but unfortunately our mission was closed at that time and I was sent to Czechoslovakia. Albania is the only country in Europe that I have never visited.

Q: Not many have been there since the war.

PELL: Virtually no Americans have been there.

Q: What were your duties when you first went to Prague?

PELL: I was in the consular section and my duties were to determine who was LPC (Likely Public

Charge) [a visa applicant who was likely to be unable to support him or herself] who would get visas and who would not get visas. I was also the protocol officer.

Q: The ambassador there was Laurence Steinhardt, he has been described to me as somewhat a tough character of the old school. How did you find him?

PELL: Laurence Steinhardt was very much an individualist, tough, competent, a lawyer. He started out as a political appointee but acquired a great deal of service and expert knowledge. He was a pretty darned good ambassador, although a fundamental mistake of judgement was made towards the end of my tour of duty there, where it was inevitable to my mind that the Communists would have to have a putsch because they were not going to do as well in the upcoming elections [spring 1948] as they had previously. They and the Soviets could not afford to do worse because they felt that Czechoslovakia was, as the Russians termed it, a "dagger in their side". I know that I predicted such a putsch. I sent a memorandum up [to the embassy from Bratislava] which is a matter of record, to the effect that I felt that there would not be a peaceful turnover of government when the Communists were forced to reduce their strength by the vote [this refers to the scheduled spring elections of 1948 - which never took place due to the Communist takeover in February 1948] and therefor there would have to be a military putsch to avoid such an election. This is just what occurred, but this prediction of mine from Bratislava was not forwarded by the embassy to Washington. I think that the people in the mission put a little too much faith in the Social Democrats and thought they would prevail and they probably would have prevailed if there had been, as I foresaw, a fair election. But, the Communists would not permit a fair election.

Q: I know that just as you arrived in July of 1946 Ambassador Steinhardt was reporting [as published in the Foreign Relations series] that Clement Gottwald was a "a thorough Czech patriot and unlikely to embark on extreme measures" which in retrospect seems not to be the case. Were other officers in the embassy concerned about this peculiar mix of communists and non-communists in the Czech government?

PELL: I really don't recall, it was more than forty years ago.

Q: Were you having to deal with the Sudeten Deutsche or Czechs who were coming into your office for visas?

PELL: These were mostly Czechs.

Q: Did you get to travel much when you were stationed in Prague?

PELL: Yes a great deal. We would go out each weekend in our car and get as much traveling in as we could.

Q: Was it your impression that the Czechs were leaning towards the Russians until things got difficult?

PELL: No. You know the Czechs wanted to join the Marshall Plan and the IBRD.

Q: I know they were forced to reject the Marshall plan because of Soviet pressure.

PELL: But they definitely leaned towards the west.

Q: You were assigned to Bratislava to open the consulate general, why were we interested in opening a post there?

PELL: Actually I had resigned from the Foreign Service at that time, but then when the opportunity to have my own post came, I requested the Department [of State] to withdraw their acceptance of my resignation which they were nice enough to do. My dear friend and supporter and a man I literally worshiped, Charles Yost was at that time Counselor of the embassy helped me with this. I was stimulated by the thought of having my own post, it was a real challenge.

Q: Why did you think about resigning at that point?

PELL: Well I had my own economic independence. I had lots of ideas of what I wanted to do. I thought of publishing my own newspaper or maybe publishing a magazine or teaching. I really wanted more freedom to move around in my own country than I would have in the Foreign Service.

Q: Why were we interested in opening a post in Bratislava?

PELL: Because we have many Americans of Slovak extraction, I think more Americans are of Slovak extraction than of Czech extraction, it was a very important political listening post for eastern Europe and an important historic city which was called in various languages Pozsony, Pressburg, and Bratislava, respectively in Hungarian, German and Slovak.

Q: I notice that Ambassador Steinhardt was sending cables back to Washington complaining that we did not have a post in Bratislava, and saying that the Russians, British and French did have posts there. Were you given much support when you went to Bratislava or were you pretty much on your own when you went to open up this post?

PELL: I was given whatever support that seemed proper. We had to live in a hotel when we were getting it going. Eventually our Government had a good building, which we still own. I had sort of my own USIS operation on the ground [floor] with magazines and books, and then offices on the next two floors. My wife and I rented a house not too far away.

Q: What was the major work you were doing in Bratislava?

PELL: The major work there was political reporting.

Q: What was the situation there? I go back to the official record, Ambassador Steinhardt was saying that Slovakia was the most ripe area in Czechoslovakia for a Soviet style coup.

PELL: The Slovaks were very independent; they were very conservative, very religious and for the Communists to get anywhere there they would have to do it by force, by putsch not by popular

election.

Q: Things were moving towards an election in the spring of 1948 there was this putsch in February 1948.

PELL: As I explained the election was coming which would have had the Communists doing much worse than they had and the Communists and Russians could not permit that to occur and they had to intervene to make sure they had control of Czechoslovakia.

Q: You were reporting your observations of this phenomenon from Bratislava, but this was not being included in the reports from the embassy as far as you know?

PELL: As far as I know.

Q: After the Czech Communists took over were you and your staff in Bratislava put under particular pressure at that time by the authorities, the police?

PELL: Not particularly. Of course I was followed wherever I went driving. I used to go walking or running and they would keep tabs on us, following me. They did arrest a couple of my people, one man who was working for me as an interpreter was terribly beaten up and abused and then a couple who had worked for me were arrested and maltreated - very badly treated. One man who had driven for me, was reported to me as having been beaten to death. So it was a grim business when the Communists took over, about half my staff was either put in jail or fled.

Q: These were all Czech citizens?

PELL: Yes, John Hvasta was a dual citizen.

Q: One final question Senator. You were in Czechoslovakia at climatic time of East-West relations, it was perhaps the pivotal point. A democratic government was taken over from within by the Communists and you were there at the beginning and end of this act that took a year or more to happen. Has this had any effect on you now that have been involved in foreign affairs, East-West relations for so many years? Is this experience something that you have taken with you in your other role as Senator?

PELL: Yes, it has sensitized me to the dangers of Communism. It has also impressed upon me the poor and unsuccessful system that Communism is. It goes against human nature, the very natural desire to acquire a little property for your children, to worship freely, to travel freely to engage in politics freely, to express your opinions freely. These are all human tendencies no matter where you are. When you live behind the Iron Curtain for a little bit you really get a very strong impression of how much one dislikes their system of Communism. I know when I went over there I was rather conscious of some of its theoretical features about which we were taught in the colleges of America at the time of the late Thirties. But then, when you were exposed to it, you realized that it really was a pretty dreadful system. Moreover, the present Communists go back to the past's Bolsheviks and really are willing to seize and to carry out any opportunity.

HAROLD C. VEDELER
Central Europe Division
Washington, DC (1945-1948)

Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1955-1957)

Harold C. Vedeler was a university professor before entering the State Department in 1955. He served in Washington, DC in Central and Eastern European Affairs, was U.S. Representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency and was posted to Czechoslovakia. He was interviewed in 1995 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Let's go back a bit. You came back from Germany in December, 1945, and were working in the Division in the State Department which dealt with Central Europe.

VEDELER: That's right.

Q: This Division concerned Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. This was a tumultuous time in Czechoslovakia, up through 1948, when the Communists took over the country. Did we see this coming? Prior to 1948 you were dealing with Central Europe where the Soviet Union and the United States were sort of confronting each other. From your perspective, did the State Department see the Soviet Union as a potential enemy or a threat at that time?

VEDELER: By 1946 it was already clear that we were going to have great problems with the Soviet Union. That was the time when the Soviet Union prevented Poland and Czechoslovakia from entering the Marshall Plan. I think that that was the real beginning of the discernment that the Soviet Union was really going to be difficult to deal with. I don't think that there was any conception, generally speaking, that there would be a Cold War which would last as long as proved to be the case. There may have been some Soviet specialists [in the State Department] who may have seen farther than any of the rest of us about what might develop with the Soviet Union.

Q: Regarding Czechoslovakia, there was basically a coup d'etat, and then there were elections and the Communists took over the country in February, 1948.

VEDELER: That's right. It was early in 1948.

Q: Did the State Department follow this situation very closely and was there much concern about it?

VEDELER: Well, we followed the situation closely, but, as I remember it, there was no anticipation that the Communists were going to take over Czechoslovakia at the time they did. Ambassador Steinhardt, our chief of mission at our Embassy in Prague who was in Washington at the time of the coup, was optimistic that the democratic parties in Czechoslovakia would win the elections and put down the Communists. The chargé d'affaires in Prague had a similar view.

Indeed, it was this prospect, we concluded afterwards, that impelled the Communists in concert with Moscow to take over power.

Q: How heavily did our concern about Czechoslovakia weigh in the Department of State? Was Czechoslovakia considered an important country?

VEDELER: After the Communists took over Czechoslovakia in 1948, we were beginning to have a clearer perception of what the long-range problem of dealing with Communism would be. The Department broke up the Division of Central European Affairs. For a time it was uncertain where Austria and Czechoslovakia would be in the structure of the Department. Then Czechoslovakia was shifted to the Division of Eastern European Affairs, and a separate Office of German Affairs was set up. The conduct of Austrian affairs was then shifted to the Division of Southern European Affairs.

Q: Which division did you stay in?

VEDELER: I stayed with Czechoslovakia and went into the Division of Eastern European Affairs.

Q: Within the State Department there must have been a cadre of people who had been dealing with Eastern Europe in one form or another, going back to the 1930's. Did you find that there were differences of view among these people? Were some of them taking a very hard, anti-Communist line, while others, you might say, took a more "accommodating line"? Were there differences of outlook within the Department?

VEDELER: I think that by the time the Communists took over Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries there was a pretty unified position in the State Department opposing the expansion of Communism and the influence of Communist regimes. I don't recall any differences of opinion in that regard.

Q: There had been an effort during the war, particularly on the part of Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, of getting rid of some of the "hard line" anti-Communists in the State Department, because we were trying to be more accommodating to the Soviets. I was wondering whether there were any lingering after effects of that.

VEDELER: Not that I recall or noticed.

Q: Then you concentrated on Czechoslovakia for some time.

VEDELER: That's right -- Czechoslovakia in the Division of Eastern European Affairs. But soon I was dealing with Poland and the Baltic countries, too.

Q: What were our concerns at this time, in the later 1940's about Poland and the Baltic countries? Obviously, the Soviet Army had entered the area and wasn't going to leave. What were the major things that you were concerned with?

VEDELER: In those Eastern European countries we were always trying to find a way to get to the

people, to keep them in touch with the West even in the isolation imposed by the Communists, and to exert the influence of the democratic West on the people themselves. For example, we tried to leave magazines throughout Czechoslovakia. I went there later, you know, as DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission]. We developed Radio Free Europe as another means of access to the people there -- any way that we could, when we saw that this was going to be a long run proposition. We tried to exert influence on the people through the various channels that we could develop.

VEDELER: When I went to Czechoslovakia as DCM...

Q: This would have been in about...

VEDELER: 1955. We had tables out in the Embassy grounds full of magazines. People could come there and pick them up. They were much desired. We did this for some time. Then the Czechoslovak government forced us to stop that. Still, we found ways to spread magazines throughout the country. Whenever we took a trip and stayed at a hotel, we'd leave a pile of magazines.

I remember that we had a big celebration of Washington's birthday [February 22], when the Embassy [in Prague] was closed. We went up to a little resort town in the northern mountains of Czechoslovakia and stayed there for a couple of days. We took a car full of magazines and left them all over the place. That's the way we did it. Wherever we went, we'd leave magazines.

Another thing we did was to bring in a [theater company]. A company putting on "Porgy and Bess" came to Prague in December, 1955. This made a strong impression on the local population. We had a big party at the ambassador's residence afterwards and invited all of the Czechs that we were in contact with to that party. It lasted until 6:00 AM. That was another way we had of trying to maintain contact with the people and influence them in a democratic direction -- to show how well things were going in the West, compared to how the Czech people were suffering under Communism.

Q: Going back to the period before you went out to Czechoslovakia, was there really any feeling that we could "do business" with the Communist governments in Poland or Czechoslovakia? Did you feel that these were very difficult governments to deal with?

VEDELER: We had to have diplomatic relations with them. There was no point in breaking off diplomatic relations. That would have cut off a channel we had in those countries. We wanted to maintain a diplomatic staff in those countries. We didn't like it when they declared anyone on our staff "PNG" [persona non grata -- unwelcome].

It was always difficult to deal with the governments of these countries. However, we still wanted to continue relations with them. We also had some difficult problems to settle with them.

Q: You were trying to obtain compensation for the property of American citizens which had been nationalized.

VEDELER: When I was there in Czechoslovakia as DCM, I carried on negotiations on this subject for two years, trying to advance the possibility of a settlement for those whose property had been taken by the Czech government.

Later, when I was in the State Department after my tour in Prague as DCM, we dealt with the Romanians and Bulgarians on the same subject and obtained settlements. It was one of the principal problems we had with these countries of Eastern Europe.

Q: You said that you were assigned to the Embassy in Prague [in 1955]. Who was our Ambassador there at that time?

VEDELER: U. Alexis Johnson.

Q: How did you find working with him?

VEDELER: Just fine. We got along very well and had an excellent relationship. He and I would meet from time to time in the library of his residence for evening cocktails and discussion of affairs at the Embassy and in Prague.

Q: He was more of a Japanese specialist, wasn't he?

VEDELER: A Far Eastern specialist, yes.

Q: What was his reaction to the Czech government at that time?

VEDELER: He carried on his diplomatic functions there as chief of mission. A good deal of his time was devoted to negotiations with the Chinese [Communists] in [Geneva], Switzerland, trying to get American prisoners free. For much of this time I was in charge of the Embassy in his absence. He didn't do anything in "frontal opposition" to the regime [in Czechoslovakia]. He maintained a formal diplomatic position, as any ambassador would in any country. Of course, he was opposed to Communism in every way, as all of us were, and vigorously supported our efforts to maintain contact and influence with the people of Czechoslovakia. Of course, he encouraged the exercise of caution since there was always risk of a contact being an agent of the secret police, seeking to entrap us.

Q: You were in Czechoslovakia from 1955 to 1957. What was your impression of the situation there? How did you regard the Czech government?

VEDELER: I could see how unpopular the Communist regime was with many of the people there. I could see what a bad job they were doing, economically speaking. There was so little electricity there that at night the lights were dim when you would drive around Prague. There was very little produce in the markets. We couldn't buy anything to speak of. We had to get our supplies in from Germany. We brought in a truck [of supplies] every month or two months. The truck was loaded

with supplies for the whole Embassy staff. In our own house, the residence of the DCM, we had an inventory of \$1500 worth of supplies which we always kept.

There were [local employees] of the Embassy staff who [worked for] the secret police. We knew that some of the local staff were secret police agents. We weren't sure about some of the others, and some, we were sure, were not secret police agents at all. We knew that, at times, they would have to act as secret police informants. They would go along with the secret police to the extent that they had to, and no more.

Q: You were there [in Prague] at a very important time, November, 1956, at the time of the Hungarian revolt. Can you talk about your experiences at that time?

VEDELER: Well, there were some people who said that the same thing could happen in Czechoslovakia. They packed their bags in readiness to go to the border, if there were any chance to do so. That was the case of the family that worked for us in our house.

Q: What were we doing at our Embassy at this time?

VEDELER: We were trying to find out what was happening in Hungary and what might be the possibility of its occurring in Czechoslovakia. We tried to report on opinion in Czechoslovakia at that time and report whatever pertinent information other Western diplomats managed to obtain.

Q: Did you notice any extraordinary security precautions being taken in Czechoslovakia at that time?

VEDELER: Not any more so than usual in overt actions. The secret police were everywhere, all the time, anyway, in the city of Prague itself. They were often very much in evidence. For example, just before the musical, "Porgy and Bess," came to town, the secret police put on a campaign of strictly watching all of the [official] Americans, wherever they went, except for the Ambassador. They followed us around -- and obviously so. They kept watch on us where we lived, day and night. This campaign went on for about a week.

For example, I went to a French exhibition of drawings located in a Czech building. I drove down in an Embassy car, got out, and went in. There was a secret police car right behind me. I went into the building and walked around. Right behind me, like a shadow, was a secret police officer, wearing one of those leather coats. They wore leather coats as a matter of dress. To this day I hate to see leather coats! That's an indication of the kind of surveillance which the secret police maintained on the people. They didn't want any contact between the people and U. S. Embassy officers. Of course, we tried to have contact with the people to get their views and report on them.

Whenever we talked over the telephone, we had to exercise the utmost caution because the phones were probably being tapped. If we needed to make sure a conversation with another Embassy officer would not be overheard, we talked outside buildings or in the security room of the Embassy. We found "bugs" [listening devices] in the attic of our Embassy. The secret police had rigged up a whole system of bugs from a building which had a wall next to the wall of our Embassy. They had bored a hole through the walls of both buildings and then worked in the attic to

install this system going down into the ceiling of the rooms below the attic floor. Then they put in a kind of "plug" where they had made an opening to get in. We only found out about this when the Department sent out officers from the Office of Security to see what bugs they could find. The man who discovered the hole in the ceiling was lying on a bed in one of the apartments to inspect the ceiling. He looked up very carefully all over the ceiling -- and then he saw the tiny opening of the place where the bug was installed. Then we went up to the attic and found the whole system, where it came from, and where it went to an adjoining wall.

Q: As DCM you were responsible for running the Embassy. Was there a problem there, with the Czechs trying to "compromise" our people? Traditionally, they used "sex traps," black mail, and all of that.

VEDELER: Yes, they were always trying to do that, one way or another. One of their favorite ways was to have somebody approach us and try to give information. We always had the problem of trying to determine what was genuine in any approach to us or any relationship with a local person and what was the setup of the secret police. That was an eternal problem, because we had to try to collect information from the people to report to the Department.

I remember one case in particular. An Embassy economic reporting officer had developed a contact who was in touch with the secret police. They caught him in a meeting with this secret agent as the latter passed information to our officer. Our officer was declared "PNG" and had to leave the country. That is what they tried to do whenever they could. Again a police agent seduced one of the Embassy's clerical secretaries by worming his way into her affections from the posed position as a driving trainer and then attempted to control her as an informant in place.

Whenever the Air and Army attachés went on a trip, the secret police would try to follow them. I remember going on a trip with our agricultural affairs officer. The secret police had five cars traveling with us. There was one car in front of us and one behind -- and one on each side on parallel roads. And they also had another one, for a total of five secret police cars keeping tabs on us.

Q: You left Prague in 1957. It must have been a difficult tour, with all of this security attention.

VEDELER: Yes, it was. Especially in view of the Hungarian revolt. I think that that event scared the Czechoslovak regime. They were very alert to any sign of something similar happening in Czechoslovakia. They took special precautions in dealing with all of the Western Embassies and their representatives. It was a difficult time right at the height of Communist control over Eastern Europe. I think that the control tightened everywhere in Eastern Europe, after the Hungarian Revolt.

VEDELER: I might mention that during the time that I was in Czechoslovakia [1955-1957], I made a trip to [southern] Poland, to Krakow. It's an attractive town, one of the most interesting in Europe in the survival of its old picturesque structures. This trip was purely for sightseeing. We watched a parade on a Polish holiday. We felt then the sense of solidarity there among the people. It was impressive.

Perhaps the most striking thing during this whole period was the revolt in Hungary [1956] and the effect it had on Soviet policy. It made [the Soviet leaders] "tighten the clamps" on the Eastern European countries.

After I left the Department, there was this Soviet movement into Czechoslovakia to oppose "socialism with a human face."

Q: That happened in the spring of 1968 -- the "Prague Spring."

VEDELER: Yes. I think that the Hungarian Revolt [of 1956] and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia [in 1968] were two of the most important developments, if not the most important of all, in Eastern Europe during the period from 1946 to 1989.

LOUISE ARMSTRONG
Rotation Officer
Prague (1948-1949)

Louise Armstrong was born in Tokyo in 1917 and educated at Wellesley College. She entered the Foreign Service in 1943. Her career included posts in Madras, Prague, Palermo, Montreal, Ottawa and Geneva. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: In '47 where did you go?

ARMSTRONG: In '47 I went on home leave, and my appointment was to be Praja. And I thought when I saw that, my gosh that must be in Latin America, [but] Praja's a name for Prague. There's a place, Paraj, I believe in Brazil. And I was confusing that in my mind. Well I found out differently. I had home leave, and I had consultation. And I spent some time in the department talking to people who were working on that area. And I was told that Steinhardt had just been there on his home leave, the summer of '47, and had talked everywhere about Czechoslovakia being the bridge between east and west. Literally, nobody was alerted to the possibility of a coup and that was September, October, November, December. I arrived in January '48 to Prague, and still, as far as I could see, there wasn't anybody expecting any difficulties of the USSR.

Q: What was your job?

ARMSTRONG: My job was again third secretary-vice consul, and I was put into the political section initially. Then I was moved, no I was put in the economics section initially. Then I was moved to political, and then the consular. You were supposed to get a variety of experiences. And in the political section it involved having somebody be my translator, who would translate the press for me because I didn't know any Czech. I knew a little German, and my mother who was with me knew some German, so we got along with that as best we could. But literally we had no way of expecting what happened. Steinhardt was playing bridge nightly with members of the National Socialist party, who were the conservative party in Prague. And the only person I think in

the embassy who had any contact with, I'll say the labor union, was our labor attaché. And would have been the only one who sensed that something was going to happen.

And when it did take place, it was done so skillfully, so smoothly, without very much eruption of any kind. There was a little shooting around the castle area when there was a student protest. There were armed bands of workers - they had colored or black bands on their arm, they weren't themselves armed - but were marching down the center of town. The Czechs themselves weren't prepared for anything like this. They thought this was a passing phenomenon. They said, "our people are not thugs. Our people are not vandals. This will all shake out." And of course what happened was, because it was done so smoothly and gradually, a lot of Czechs were taken in and instead of making the obvious move, which was to get their money outside, sell off their country places as fast as they could, move anything else outside - and they could still have done that for the first several months - get their exit visas and so forth, they didn't do it. And they stayed on, like my immediate neighbor, who was a splendid man, a fine lawyer. His family stayed on, and he was sent to a labor camp. She was obliged to share their apartment with another family and do housework and so forth. It was a very bitter period.

Q: Can we talk a bit about what life, what you were doing, how you operated before this coup in '48? I mean, when you arrived there, early '48 -

ARMSTRONG: January 10.

Q: --was the Soviet Union considered a menace or a problem? What was your impression of them?

ARMSTRONG: Well, I don't think any of us felt nervous about our own immediate situation until the Berlin Airlift. Then we could see the possibility of that blowing up, and then we'd be out of there. But as far as the Czech coup is concerned, it was fairly deplorable. We hated every minute of it. We did our best to keep out of trouble. It was very easy for us to blunder in that way. We could embarrass ourselves; we could also embarrass our Czech friends. One had, even as arrived as late in the game as I, you'd have met some Czechs, who spoke English, and who circulated in the social life of the town with the social and diplomatic community. Then you found yourself in the position of wanting to do favors for them and be helpful.

And we'd be repeatedly warned by Steinhardt that we were not to do things like take valuables out of the country or take possessions out of the country or take people out of the country. And we knew all the time that he was doing that very thing. In fact, Mrs. Steinhardt was in it with him up to the elbows. And if you went to a dinner at the ambassador's residence and the ladies left and went into the petit salon with Mrs. Steinhardt, I was never sorry because she knew as much as he did about what was going on.

At any rate, one found oneself in the situation of trying to be helpful, trying to keep out of trouble and in the end, I was declared persona non grata and apparently it was because Walter Berge, who was senior to me in the political section, wanted to pass on some contacts to me when he left. One or two of them were very fine young Czechs who had served in the air force out of England during the war, and they had formed their own little resistance movement. I had no idea how it operated, and I did not really want to. But they wanted to be in touch with me, and under those circumstances

I thought it was their responsibility if things went wrong. May I pour you coffee or tea?

Q: A little tea would be fine.

ARMSTRONG: What do you like in your tea?

Q: Straight.

ARMSTRONG: So I did meet with some of these people, but not often. And now and then I would meet with somebody, for a walk and he would ask me if I would take a letter for them. And once he asked me if I would take a suitcase out, and it wasn't for him, [it was for] somebody he knew he felt indebted to. And apart from that, I knew a couple very well –

Q: Would you take suitcases and letters?

ARMSTRONG: Yes. Always a little concerned, of course, with crossing the border. Because we would be stopped. The diplomatic passport was usually satisfactory, but you could never be positive that they wouldn't want to search you. But I and most of the Americans, the ones who didn't I hadn't very much respect for, cause I figured they weren't doing it out of conviction, they were just doing it because they were nervous Nellie's. Because if you could help somebody you helped somebody. I did wind up in the Czech archives, and I was declared persona non grata. And I'm not quite sure how this came about.

But fortunately I was already out. I had my travel orders to go to Palermo. Most of our third secretaries went to Italian posts. And I watched the good ones being picked off and my tour was Palermo.

Q: Yes, my Claiborne pal went to Genoa.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. I think the same personnel bureau was handling both countries. At any rate, I stopped in Florence to see if I could get some petrol coupons. Petrol was still scarce. He greeted me with the Herald Tribune with my picture on the front page. That was the reason the professor from Boston got in touch with me, because he found me. He said that by and large there was nothing in there that suggested that I was anywhere as guilty as I had been made out to be.

Q: What were they claiming?

ARMSTRONG: They were claiming that I had been working with the Czech Underground and named Czechs who were later imprisoned and executed in some cases. In other words, I should have blood on my hands, but in fact I'm exonerated by what's in the archives.

Q: I'd like to go back to Czechoslovakia. Once the coup had taken place and the Communist regime had taken over, did you find you were in really hostile territory at that point?

ARMSTRONG: Very much so. My mother would be followed every step of the way when she left the apartment. We had an apartment downtown. She and friend of hers who drove, they would

often go out together, just to a market let's say, and they would walk and look at antique shops and things like that. They were always followed. It gave them a great charge. They would turn around and wink at the guys and so forth. In my case, I was never conscious of being followed. I would take the car to drive to the embassy, and I would have it there all day. I would go out in the evening, and I wasn't conscious of being followed then. But evidently I was more observed than I realized.

Q: Did you find your work, as a political officer, terribly curtailed at that point?

ARMSTRONG: Our political reporting, of course, was based on the local press and whatever gossip we could glean. I wasn't privy to as much high level gossip as other people would have been, for example people who were talking to the Czech foreign minister and so forth. I did meet Masaryk briefly right after I arrived, and I was of course among those who stood on the street corner and wept when his bier went by. It was a real shock.

Q: He was apparently killed, pushed out a window.

ARMSTRONG: No question in the Czechs' mind that it was a murder-assassination. Defenestration. This professor from Boston has looked in the archives with respect to Masaryk of course and he tells a story about three men who would have been eyewitnesses to what happened. That one of them is dead and one of them, two of them are dead and one of them is living in a situation where he's had a stroke and he can't talk. At any rate, what he could glean was that they had forced their way into his apartment in the foreign office after he'd gone to bed. He had tried to escape by going into the bathroom and climbing out on a fairly substantial ledge outside the bathroom. If he was pushed, he may well have been pushed. If he wasn't, he obviously fell.

What was unpleasant was, for example, a senior member of the foreign ministry, that is senior to me, who was in charge of the American desk approached me and asked me if I would keep his family silver in my apartment. Of course I said I would and I kept it under my bed. I didn't think anybody was going to break in and look. He was just afraid that they were going to come and collect things like that from his house. And I don't know what happened to him. I have never known. But he did reclaim it before I left.

Q: Was there any discussion among the Americans there, here you'd been living in Czechoslovakia, and all of a sudden a new regime comes in and it turned out to be, the regime itself turned out to be one of the nastiest in the whole bloc-

ARMSTRONG: Yes.

Q: Why [were] the Czechs so nasty?

ARMSTRONG: Good question. I've never really put that to myself as to why it took them, why they were so hardnosed with their form of communism for so long. All I can tell you is the communist penetration of Czechoslovakia was done in a very gradual and disarming fashion. And then after that, things tightened up and people were thrown in prison or sent to labor camps. They totally wiped out the professional class and the middle class. They didn't need any lawyers any more. The doctors who practiced in hospitals were, by that time, working under conditions which

were dominated by whoever was the Czech communist in charge. All the government offices were taken over with a communist at the head of it. Everybody had to watch his step. Everybody had to swear allegiance to a communist [unknown word]. Children were supposedly brainwashed in schools. Their parents would worry about this, wonder about sort of children they were bringing up since they were being so heavily indoctrinated. I asked my Czech professor friend about this because he would have been of the age, he was of the age of these children and he said not to worry, it didn't take.

I go back to Prague now, and I don't remember what I said before. But I can tell you the only time I was ever frightened was soon after I arrived with my mother. I didn't know a word of Czech. This was in the days before they would prepare you for a foreign post with language studies. This was January '48. And I arrived on Woodrow Wilson Avenue, at Woodrow Wilson station. And if there hadn't been somebody from the admin section of the embassy to meet me, I would have had to stumble along on my own, with getting my own cabs. But fortunately he was there. And we stayed at a hotel initially, my mother and I, and one night, there being a movie theater not far away, we thought we'd go to see what was showing. It turned out to be a very ugly anti-American piece of communist propaganda produced in Poland. And the Americans were depicted so viciously, as being so villainous and so debauched, that the two of us in a full theater were sitting, cringing, slumped down in our seats, hoping nobody would notice. [We were] thinking to ourselves if there should suddenly be a fire alarm or something dramatic and everybody would be rushing out, we wouldn't dare open our mouths to declare who we were.

I may be repeating myself, but the main thing was to find a place to live. This is always true when you're starting a foreign service post. There aren't government quarters. We first had the Alcron Hotel, then we moved in with three American girls from the embassy. And then we tried to buy a house in the suburbs and found it was just impossible. It didn't work; my mother was too isolated. It was hard to heat. And the only thing remarkable about the house, it looked attractive, was that they had stored, people who were renting the house had stored three great canisters of goose fat. Goose fat was their treasure. Why they left it behind I'll never know, but they couldn't take it with them. After a week of this, we decided no go and we were lucky enough to stumble on the apartment, which we eventually used, which I think I talked about earlier.

And then there was the issue of socializing. Initially, we having arrived just before the coup, there was a social community of Czechs and westerners, that you could easily move into. It was very agreeable. But gradually one became more concerned about mingling with Czechs. There was one young woman who approached me cheerfully because she had known GIs [American soldiers]. Her English was very fluent but also very GI English. And she was easy, outgoing and bright. She was a Jewish woman named Eva Donodova. And Eva had a circle of friends my age so that every now and then I joined up with them for a pleasant evening. But Eva had been imprisoned by the Nazis because she was Jewish. And she thought it was time she got out of Czechoslovakia because she didn't know how things would go under the communist regime for her. She borrowed a little money from me; it didn't amount to much, it was really a gift. And she got caught going over the border, she and her companions because it was at the time you couldn't exit Czechoslovakia anymore. So she disappeared off the radar screen for a while, then lo and behold she was back in Prague. And she got in touch with me, and she said to me quite open and honestly, "They let me back because I knew you and they want me to report on you." So you know she was pleasant to be

with and fun and there was no reason to cut her off. She was honest with me, and I knew where I stood. But that was one of the curiosities of living there at the time.

I guess I also mentioned the fact that my translator-interpreter later explained to the embassy that he was obliged to report on me. Something, on a weekly basis. And if he didn't know anything, he made it up.

I think I mentioned last time that things got more and more uncomfortable when we realized that the concierge of the apartment building that I lived in was an informer. And she was a very unpleasant, made life unpleasant for me and anybody that I employed, but there was nothing I could do about it. At the same time that we were going through this period of social isolation, the embassies, the foreign embassies drummed up their own sociability. They, among other things, the Americans had an opportunity which was unique, through the foreign office we were able to use a villa of some two hours drive outside of Prague, set in the hills, which would accommodate skiing and other outdoor activity. And that was a great salvation particularly, I think, for the clerks. But we all enjoyed it. Eventually after I left I understand that the government took this back again. They had already appropriated the property from the owner who was a shoe manufacturer. But then they decided I guess that the Americans didn't deserve this anymore, so they took it back.

But on one occasion while we were visiting there, usually it would be on a weekend, I found three little boys huddled in a rabbit hutch. A rabbit hutch looks rather like you see in kennels for cats. And they had a kind of a tiered, tiers and mesh wire in the front. And these children had heard that the police were looking for them and here they were hiding in a rabbit hutch, which tells you what life was like in the country at that time.

I'm not sure if I mentioned going to Krakow. I had an opportunity in, perhaps it was May of 1948, to fly in the air attaché's plane to Krakow, no to Warsaw. I was fortunate enough to stay with friends in Warsaw. One of the women in the embassy who was of Polish extraction, American, suggested to me that we could make a trip to Krakow by bus, by plane and bus. She would enjoy it, and I said I was delighted with the thought. So we flew to Krakow and landed in a pasture. I'm pretty sure I talked about this before. The pasture was the airport. As we were about to leave, the police detained us. She had taken a photograph as we came into landing. And we were obliged to go to the police station and just sit there and study our shoes. We didn't know what was going to happen. They took her film away from her, which of course was a big disappointment. She explained that we had diplomatic privileges and so forth and they should call the embassy. They took their own sweet time. Eventually we were released and allowed to go our own way. So we did our Krakow sightseeing, but we didn't have as much time left as we wanted. Then we got on a bus to Auschwitz, and that's one reason I've never felt it necessary to go to the Holocaust Museum here. They had so recently opened Auschwitz as a museum that if you walked past bin after bin, first there would be a bin of what you would call crutches and other things of that sort, artificial limbs. Then there was a bin of teeth that had been taken from people with gold and melted down. Then you came to a bin of shoes. And the human oil in the shoes was such that the flies were buzzing on it. As I say I don't think I need to go to the Holocaust Museum. But enough of that.

MARY CHIAVARINI
Secretary to Ambassador Jacobs
Prague (1948-1949)

Ms. Chiavarini was born and raised in Massachusetts. After Secretarial training, she worked with the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington DC before joining the Foreign Service in 1944. During her career with the State Department, Ms. Chiavarini served as secretary to the ambassador and other officers in Naples, Tirana, Manila, Seoul, Prague, Rome, Singapore and Warsaw. After her appointment in 1957 as Consul and Secretary in the Diplomatic Service she served in Palermo, Monrovia and Paris. She also served as special "trouble shooter" in Nicosia, Dublin and Riyadh. Ms. Chiavarini was interviewed by David T. Jones in 2007.

Q: Well, you were in Prague at a particularly important point. That was when the democratic government was overthrown wasn't it?

CHIAVARINI: I think so, but we weren't in any danger.

Q: What was the embassy like in Prague at that time?

CHIAVARINI: It wasn't like Manila because that had a lot of people.

Q: Was this a very small embassy in Prague?

CHIAVARINI: Yes. It was small.

Q: What was Ambassador Jacobs doing professionally in Czechoslovakia?

CHIAVARINI: Well, trying to get the State Department to recognize the Czech government.

Q: Did you travel in Czechoslovakia?

CHIAVARINI: I did. I had a car -- a Ford. The ambassador had given me the money to buy it.

Q: How nice! That was a good opportunity to travel.

CHIAVARINI: It was another friend of mine, Lydia. She had retired and gone to live at home with her mother, but she came over to visit. The two of us took a trip through Czechoslovakia. We went up to Pilsen. I got stuck and the automobile horn got stuck. It wouldn't stop. I got some help from somebody to stop it. I didn't know what to do. Anyway, we got back home to Prague. We often talked about it; how we didn't know what to do. Lydia didn't know any more than I did although she had a car in the United States.

We got through a lot of terrible countryside as far as the automobile was concerned. There was a lot of mud. We got stuck in some mud. The local people helped us out even though we were from

the embassy.

Q: Did you still see effects from World War II in the countryside?

CHIAVARINI: I don't remember.

Q: Were you able to do things in Prague that were interesting? Theater? Culture?

CHIAVARINI: Oh yes. When Lydia was there we went to quite a few events. In the time that she was there we had the visit from the staff of "Kiss Me Kate. They came to Prague to do the play. I remember giving a pair of stockings to one of the players. She didn't have any.

Q: Was it part of a United States Information Agency (USIA) cultural exchange?

CHIAVARINI: Yes, it was.

Q: Were the officers at the embassy particularly effective? Were there any that you remember?

CHIAVARINI: They were all my friends. I used to see them after I left and if they were stationed in Washington; which a lot of them were. I still see them once in a great while.

Q: Oh, How nice! Any in particular from Prague that you remember?

CHIAVARINI: Oh, I remember them all.

Q: What projects were they working on?

CHIAVARINI: Oh, I don't remember that.

Q: Do you have any observations on the Czechs--the citizens of Prague and Czechoslovakia?

CHIAVARINI: I thought they were ineffective. I didn't think a lot of them.

Q: Any particular reason?

CHIAVARINI: Well, that's sort of faded into the past.

Q: Were you living in embassy housing?

CHIAVARINI: Lydia and I lived in the ambassador's house on the top floor. I remember burning the vegetables for Sunday dinner. I didn't watch the stove.

Q: Were you doing some of the cooking for yourself or for other people in the embassy?

CHIAVARINI: No, just for myself and Lydia and anybody that I would have invited.

Q: Were there other people living in the residence as well?

CHIAVARINI: No. We were up on the top floor in that famous embassy. It was a beautiful place. I don't remember, but it also may have had a swimming pool. I think they did, but I'm not sure. The rest of the building was very nice and very nicely furnished. We had two bedrooms up on the top floor. Lydia and I used to think we were so lucky. By that time she was staying a lot longer than I had expected her to visit. But that was all right since she had been in Albania with me. We talked a lot about those days. Of course, that was my first post.

Q: Yes.

CHIAVARINI: And Mr. Jacobs was there. That's where I met him.

Q: After Prague you went on to Rome.

CHIAVARINI: Yes.

SIDNEY SOBER
Consular Officer
Prague (1949-1950)

Sidney Sober was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 21, 1990. His Foreign Service career has included assignments in Madagascar, Czechoslovakia, Iceland, Turkey, Bombay and Pakistan. He also served in Washington, DC in INR (Intelligence Research), the Bureau of Near East and South Asian Affairs.

Q: You were in Tananarive from 1947-49 and then you were transferred to Prague.

SOBER: It was a direct transfer, and we arrived in the spring of '49. That was somewhat more than a year after the communists had taken over in Prague. It was difficult and fascinating. It was a time when the communists were tightening the screws in all aspects of the scene. It was virtually impossible to strike up any sort of social acquaintance with any of the Czechs because of their concern of police supervision. There was lots of talk about being sent to the uranium mines that they were said to be developing.

Q: As a sort of Siberia.

SOBER: Within Czechoslovakia, that's right. People had their properties taken over, of course. All the businesses were being nationalized. And if you met someone at some sort of a diplomatic or state occasion, a Czech, it was not possible to say, come to my house, not possible from the point of view of their safety. So that once in a while you would arrange to meet someone at a corner downtown, join up and walk along the street, hoping that the man you were with would not be identified and would not be followed. It was a real police state that was tightening the screws all

the time. On the other hand, there was a great deal of interest back in the United States at what was happening as part of the clamp down of Eastern Europe. It was a very interesting place to be.

Q: What sort of work were you doing?

SOBER: I was still a young, junior foreign service officer so that I had a series of rotational jobs. I started out with consular work and that was very interesting in a way because one of the things I was doing was reviewing visa applications from Czechs who were anxious to get out, and then there were questions as to whether they had collaborated during the war or things like that. Later on when I saw Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul*, it brought home to me some of the terror.

I did some administrative work and then I did some economic work, a variety of things.

Q: Your ambassador at that time was Ellis Briggs, for most of the time?

SOBER: Ellis came while we were there. Our first ambassador was Joseph Jacobs. He was transferred to Rome, not as ambassador, and he was replaced by Ellis Briggs.

Q: Ellis Briggs, is one of the more interesting characters in the foreign service. His son is an ambassador now, but this was Ellis O. Briggs?

SOBER: Yes, that's right.

Q: How would you describe his method of operation?

SOBER: Ellis was a delightful person. We didn't get to know him that well because we only stayed at that post about a year. We got caught up during Ellis' tenure in the very tight squeeze by the Czech government during which, within a couple of weeks, the embassy was reduced by two-thirds and slightly later by another fraction. It was cut down very sharply. Thus we didn't really get to know him very well. On the other hand, because I knew French well, he had me come along on a couple of introductory calls on ambassadors where French was going to be the medium of discussion and he asked me, for example, because I'd picked up a few words of Czech, to accompany our public affairs officer, Joe Kolarek, to the border when Joe was declared *persona non grata*, and had to leave in haste. We got enough of a feel for Ellis Briggs although we did not get to know him at all intimately. I must say he was my ideal of what an ambassador should be and was. He was very concerned about his staff which was all to the good. He was a professional in every way and he knew when to be tough and to be satirical towards the regime, and I think when to play a more tactful role when it was something that he wanted to do. I think, we, my small group of junior officers and I think the embassy, at large, looked up to him as a very fine fellow.

Q: Were you there during the attack on South Korea, and the development of NATO?

SOBER: We were there at the beginning of NATO but not as long as June 1950 and South Korea. At that time, we had already left, had to go out with the two-thirds efflux from the embassy as a result of the clampdown by the Czechs who made the demand that we reduce.

Q: How did you feel about the "Soviet" menace. Was there the feeling that you were on the wrong side of an imminent attack on western Europe.

SOBER: No, I don't think so. This was 1949-50 and obviously the Cold War was in effect. Czechoslovakia had been one of the first steps of the communization of eastern Europe. We knew there was a problem and we felt it in the limitations on the way we could operate and the contacts and all that, as I've mentioned. But I think at that time the supremacy of the United States in terms of military prowess as well as political and economic strength was such that I don't recall ever being concerned that there was going to be an attack through Czechoslovakia on to West Germany.

WILLIAM J. CUNNINGHAM
Clerk
Prague (1950)

William J. Cunningham was born in California in 1926 and educated at the University of New Mexico. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included posts in Prague, Paris, Seoul, Tokyo, Sapporo, Saigon, Phnom Penh and Taipei. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

CUNNINGHAM: September of 1949. I spent about a month at FSI and then was sent to Prague to be pouch clerk at the American embassy there.

Q: You were in Prague from when to when?

CUNNINGHAM: From October of 1949 until May of 1950.

Q: What was life like there during this time? How did you find life like there?

CUNNINGHAM: The day that I arrived set the tone for the seven months I spent there. Three of the Foreign Service staff at the Embassy met me at the railway station that evening in October. I had come up from Paris on the Orient Express. With me on the train also were George Speshok and his wife. George was the newly assigned Security Office at the Embassy.

The Embassy group that met us at the railway station said, "Welcome to Prague. The Third Secretary of Embassy (Ike Patch) has been declared persona non grata and has three days to get out. A civilian (a naturalized American of Czech birth) has been arrested as a spy and is in jail." And they told me something similar had happened to a third Embassy staff member. Then they said, "Now we're going to the party." Off we went to the home of Dale and Sarah Fisher. The Fishers were a very popular and respected couple. Dale was either third or second secretary of the Embassy, I believe in the Political Section. The Fishers had two or three children at the time. They acted as elder brother and sister to the young singles, like myself, in the Embassy. By the time we arrived from the railway station the party was in full swing. I remember it as a lively and cheerful gathering, and I particularly remember the warmth and friendliness with which the Fishers welcomed me. Dale Fisher was killed in an airliner crash in Ethiopia a few years later. Several

years later I returned to the Department on consultation from overseas, and there was Sarah Fisher managing the Foreign Service Lounge. She remembered me immediately and welcomed me with the same generosity and sincerity with which she had received me into her home on my first evening in Prague. She and Dale were truly fine people, loved by all who knew them, and devoted to the Foreign Service and its people.

I found Prague very grim, although not so much for myself. First of all we were conscious of being under constant surveillance, all of the time. I had to live in the Alcron Hotel for a long time. You could not go out and rent a house just off the market, you had to have permission from the Foreign Ministry to find a house and there was some kind of rigmarole that was involved though I don't recall the particulars now. Government permission was necessary and it was granted for only a limited period of time. There was one woman, Ann Stoyak, who later married Norman Getsinger, a Foreign Service officer and Chinese language officer – Ann is now deceased sadly – who was moved 13 times. Ann was fluent in Slovak, and she was a first generation American, I think from Pittsburgh. Her family had come from Carpathia, as I recall, now a part of Ukraine. Ann wanted to visit her Grandmother who was still living there. Carpathia, then on the border of the Soviet Union, was considered a sensitive area. I don't recall whether a travel permit was required to go there, but it definitely was a place where the Czech authorities didn't want Slovak-speaking Americans roaming around. I think Ann did make it down there, and that made her highly suspect in the mind of the Czech authorities. So they constantly forced her to move. They were really trying to get her out of the country. There were those conditions for one thing that were very depressing in a way.

The people in the embassy were really remarkable. Everybody had a university degree it seemed to me in those days regardless of rank and regardless of position. There was very little differentiation on a personal level between ranks. We were all friends. The morale was extremely high and there was very great solidarity. Many people were very kind to me. I remember particularly Mary Vance Trent, who was third secretary in the embassy at that time, who was somebody who encouraged me a great deal. Also Sydney Sober who was a political officer was there at that time. There was very strong solidarity and no apartness of any kind based on rank or anything else.

We had very little contact with the Czechs although there was one guy, Jack Crockett (Thomas J. Crockett, III), a USIA cultural officer, who I thought was quite remarkably adept at getting to know people in the Czech community and had a very broad range of contacts who knew a lot about what was going on. I did not get to know any Czechs on a personal basis except Mrs. Tumova, who owned the apartment in which we were housed by the Czech authorities. It was a very elegant apartment in downtown Prague. Her way of protecting her ownership of that apartment was to have foreign diplomats living there, and she kept house for them. The Czech people at that time, their manner was very downcast and pessimistic. This is kind of a trait, I understand, among the Czechs, who tend to look upon the gloomy side of life just naturally.

In any case, there was nothing in the shops to speak of except in the shops where you used foreign exchange. My recollections of Prague in those days were of people all draped in black trudging back and forth along snow-covered streets. I was there at a bad time of the year. It was wintertime. I arrived in October and left in May so I saw Prague in its least attractive time of year; gloomy, short days, and smoke in the air from industrial plants located all around the rim of the city added to the gloom.

On the other hand I used to go on various little guided tours. Prague is a great outdoor museum and it was just a thrill to be in this medieval European city with artwork on every corner. In that sense it was a tremendous education and advantage to me, a real opening. I was just a country boy from California. I had been east of the Mississippi only twice and this was the second time. I had never been outside of U.S. territory in my life. This was a great thrilling experience for me to see all of that. I studied some Czech and I found that an extremely difficult language. I had already by that time studied Latin, Spanish, French, and Russian, so Czech really seemed very tough with all the case endings and the nuances in them.

There are only two events that stand out in my memory as relieving in any way this kind of atmosphere of gloom. One of them was one evening when we went to hear one of the orchestras in Prague. I don't think it was the philharmonic; I think it was one of the radio orchestras. A visiting Italian conductor led the orchestra, and it played at the conservatory. Here were all the students lined up on a balcony behind the orchestra watching the musicians perform. They were young, about my age, and that attracted my interest. The Sorcerer's Apprentice was one of the works on the program that evening. Afterwards the man who ran the commissary in the embassy who had a doctorate of history or something, met us outside and asked us how we liked the performance. We said it was very exciting. He said, "I'm sure the audience understands it. You know" he said, "the story is of a revolution." His implication was that the Czechs wanted to throw off the shackles of the Russians, but the Czechs were not prepared to do that by themselves at that point at all.

The other was one evening when Jack Crockett took me to a high school graduation of some friend of his or some contact of his in the class; I don't remember the circumstances. He told me it was a black tie affair. We went through these dark and gloomy streets of Prague and into this auditorium, this ballroom, and it was aglow everywhere with crystal chandeliers. Here were people dressed in formal dress. It was like the top-notch social event of the year. The parents were all in the boxes around the side admiring their daughters and sons down below. Everybody was wearing jewels. I had never seen such splendor or elegance, or such a display of wealth. I couldn't understand how people could dare to do this under the circumstances in Prague with this terrible oppressive atmosphere that you felt everywhere. I've never been able to reconcile that or explain that to myself ever since. I guess I commented on it to Jack and I don't remember what he told me about it. I suppose some day I should get back to him and ask him to explain all that to me.

Q: Did you ever find somebody trying to trap you or something from the Czech secret police?

CUNNINGHAM: It was a concern always for everybody in the embassy but it never happened to me. We all felt that we were constantly watched and followed. There were black Skoda automobiles all over the city, which were said to be owned by the secret police. Everywhere there were guys in black leather long coats that were said to be members of the secret police. It was nothing at all unusual to be walking down the street and find other people so garbed walking along the street behind you or otherwise. You did feel this constant sense of fear and apprehension everywhere.

One evening in the hotel room I was talking with Mary Vance Trent and I made some remark. She tried to keep the conversation away from what I was talking about because it was assumed that the

hotel room was bugged. One night about 2:00 A.M. one of the code clerks who lived in the Alcron received a call from the embassy guard saying a NIACT, a night action message, had come in and he would have to come in and decrypt the thing. The clerk got dressed and went downstairs. As he walked into the lobby from the elevator the desk clerk said, "Your taxi is at the door." The clerk had not called for a cab nor given the desk any prior indication he would be going out. There were other incidents of that kind.

Q: I thought we would end this and we will pick it up the next time when you are off to France in 1950.

CUNNINGHAM: Right, and maybe a little more about the evacuation from Prague.

Q: Today is the 4th of June, 1998. Bill can we talk about the evacuation from Prague in 1950?

The seven months I was in Prague – from October 1949 to May 1950 coincided with a period when our relations with the Czechs very seriously deteriorated. There were constant allegations in the press that the U.S. was spying on Czechoslovakia. In January of 1950, the authorities arrested two senior local employees of USIS. Eventually the Czechs charged them with espionage. Of course this was the early years of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which turned out to be very Stalinistic. They were charged with espionage and were put on trial as I recall in March or April of 1950. In the course of that trial, which lasted for several weeks, virtually everyone of any importance in the embassy was alleged to be a spy. A lot of that came about through rigged questions that were put to these two Czech employees. They were eventually sentenced and then the trial was over.

In late April of 1950 a Foreign Ministry courier delivered a note to the embassy about 3:00 P.M. one Friday afternoon. I was by that time working in the file room of the embassy. The routine always was first to send the Ministry's notes up to the file room for them to be logged in, and then to send them downstairs to an appropriate action officer. Two things about this note were unusual, and their importance was realized only in retrospect. The first was that it had arrived late, and with no fanfare or indication of priority. The second was that it came without an English translation. The Foreign Ministry had not followed a consistent practice with respect to accompanying translations. Sometimes they were provided; sometimes not. The pattern was entirely random. My colleague, Patricia Mostosky, (now Mrs. Peter W. Bush of Seattle, Washington) and I logged the note in, and we sent it downstairs to the Czech language officer in the Embassy; we had three or four of them I guess. Somebody looked at it, made kind of a cursory translation about it, and said "They are demanding that we reduce our staff by two thirds," and that word filtered back upstairs to Patricia and me. The embassy shut down at the end of the day, completely normally, and everybody went off for the weekend. They said we will take care of this when we get back on Monday. I do suppose, though I do not recall for sure, that a summary of the content on the note was sent by telegram to Washington.

That weekend, as a matter of fact, a number of us went up to a villa that we had near the Polish border. It had belonged to some wealthy Czech family and had been made available through a

complicated process to the American embassy as an R&R spot so that it would stay out of the hands of the Czech government; so that it would not be taken over by the Czech authorities. We were up there and nobody paid much attention to this. We had a good time and all came back to town.

Work began in a very normal way the following week. Word got around that this note demanded that we reduce our staff by two thirds because the state of relations between Czechoslovakia and the United States as indicated by this trial no longer justified representation of the level that we had there. There were about 85 Americans in the embassy at the time and about 120 local Czech employees.

Somebody said, I guess we should start getting rid of some of these files here, so I started cleaning out some files and looking for some things that weren't particularly important. There was a lot of stuff. I did know that one burned files when embassies were evacuated so I was kind of waiting for these instructions but nobody was very excited. As an aside it is very interesting that an FSS-13, which is what I was at the time, although I did have a masters degree in government and public administration and had served a year in the Navy as a commissioned officer, was allowed that much discretion to just weed stuff out and discard it. I'm not really sure we made all the right judgments at the time. We had something like 15 or 20 bar-lock filing cabinets that were crammed full of stuff all the way from unclassified to I guess top secret, though I'm not sure. Work went on in a very desultory fashion for the week. I do recall, and I thought it a bit odd, that no response to the Foreign Ministry's note went out from the embassy all week. I also was not aware of any cable traffic back and forth to Washington. I suppose one should keep in mind that most communication went by diplomatic pouch in those days. We did not have electronic transmission facilities in the embassy. Once telegrams were encrypted, they were taken to the telegraph office and sent to Washington. Also, we had a budget for telegrams, so the pressure was on to keep them short and few in number. Friday afternoon the week after the note had arrived, the ambassador was summoned over to the Foreign Ministry.

Q: The ambassador was who?

CUNNINGHAM: Ellis O. Briggs. He was a Latin Americanist - - had spent his entire career in that area. His last post before Prague had been Montevideo, where he had been Ambassador. Briggs went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and they said to him, "We sent you a note." He said, "Yes, I got the note." (This is hearsay. This is what I was told was said.) "We sent the note back to Washington and we are waiting for further instructions." They said, "Well we want you to reduce your staff by two thirds in all categories," which meant also the Czech employees, "within a reasonable time." (Ambassador Briggs said, "We are working on that." They said, "Reasonable time expires at midnight Monday and we can not be responsible for the security of your staff after that time." The ambassador protested saying this was not reasonable, and so on and so forth. I saw the reporting telegram of the ambassador's conversation with the ministry so now I am citing from recollection. It made a very deep impression on me at the time. They said, "When you shut down our consulates in Chicago, Cleveland, and Baltimore, you gave us ten days. We protested and you said that was reasonable time. Reasonable time is 10 days from the day you got the note. That is midnight Monday and we will not be responsible for the safety and security of your personnel." The ambassador protested some more and they said, "Look here, you are not dealing with Uruguay

any longer. You are dealing with a fraternal socialist country,” etc., etc. and they carried on in this fashion.

There was panic in the embassy when the information of this meeting at the Foreign Ministry got around the corridors. Briggs came back to the embassy and drafted a highly classified telegram, which requested instructions. The code room in the embassy was right next to the file room. You had to go through the file room to get to the code room. Although Patricia Mostosky and I were never allowed in there because we didn't have the proper clearances, we could hear those code machines clattering and making all the racket that they used to make through the doors. The Ambassador's telegram, which he classified Top Secret, came up after a while from his office and was taken in the code room. By then I think it was well past closing time.

A man by the name of John Horan, a Boston Irishman, was the chief code clerk and also responsible for control of all Top Secret messages. He was a fairly bureaucratic fellow, as I recall, sticky about all sorts of things that the rest of us thought were kind of picky. His assistant was a woman by the name of Grace Edwards who now lives in Arizona. She was a close friend and roommate, as a matter of fact, of Patricia Mostosky who was my colleague in the file room. I believe they owned a car together.

When Briggs' telegram arrived for encryption and Grace Edwards read it, her eyes just grew wide in amazement. We were all very young people and Grace, who grew up on a farm in a very rural part of Oregon, wondered what in God's name is going to happen to us now? Here she is the roommate of the file clerk and she knows about this but what about her roommate? Obviously everybody is going to be affected in some way and so far as we knew Tuesday morning would find us all in a Czech jail someplace. That was Grace's thinking at the time. I should add that Grace was no shrinking violet. She was not so much frightened as astounded. Nothing like this had ever happened in the part of Oregon where she had grown up. Grace persuaded John to call the two of us (Patricia and me) in and they showed us this message. John said, "You can not say anything at all about this, absolutely nothing at all about this message." Out it went.

I am trying to remember, that evening after work we all went off to a nearby pub to have dinner and a couple of beers. There were four of us in the group one of whom was Ann Stoyak.

At any rate, the four of us were having a beer and unspoken on our minds was this situation and our concern, apprehension, tension, and excitement about what was going on. In the bar we dared not say a word about it so we talked about other things; I have no idea what we talked about. . I remember only that none of us dared to say a word about the situation of which we now were aware or in any way let on in public that anything was going on. This was not something of which we had to remind one another or pledge one another. It was a sort of unspoken, conscious compact.

What I do remember about that evening was that there was a young Czech soldier in the bar and he invited Ann to dance with him and they did a fantastic czardas there in the bar, then somehow or another we all went our way home. I think everybody was summoned into the embassy Monday morning. The ambassador convened a meeting of the staff to tell them what had happened and that we were going to have to carry out this evacuation. I think the sequence of events is that Briggs reported the note to the Department of State. A reply came back with instructions to press for an

additional period of time. He got agreement from the Foreign Ministry for an extension of another ten days, which carried us well into May up to the 10th of May. After these instructions had come back and an extension had been obtained, a meeting of the entire American staff of the embassy was convened. The ambassador explained to us what was going on. What I remember very distinctly is that Briggs broke down in tears in this meeting and apologized to the staff for what had happened to them. He was clearly unable to continue to conduct that meeting, and I do not recall that he gave us any direction or instructions as to how to proceed.

The other thing that I remembered is that the ambassador at that point left the room. He was ushered out, escorted out, or something. James K. Penfield who was the deputy chief of mission took over the meeting and really took charge. He said, "Okay, this is how we are going to carry it out. You are going to do this. You are going to do that," and so on. He answered all questions. He was gentle about this, but he was very strong and forthright. I had great respect for Mr. Penfield after that incident. The way in which he took command reassured everyone. It was, I think, a classic example of leadership in a tense and uncertain situation. The United States I suppose had evacuated some diplomatic posts previous to that time, but in the post-war period probably Prague was one of the first where we had to carry out such a large-scale evacuation under that kind of duress.

In those days we were not accustomed to evacuating diplomatic posts. There wasn't any drill for it and Penfield had to work it all out on his feet. He did a superb job of maintaining morale, organization, discipline, and esprit de corps in the embassy. I give him very high marks for that. I don't know whether he ever got the credit for it that he deserved or not, but he sure as hell did a magnificent job.

Of course work picked up very quickly in the embassy. We destroyed a lot of files up in the file room. We all knew what we were doing. People's effects had to be gathered together. They had to be packed up and assembled in the embassy. People were assigned various duties and it went off very well. We met the deadline for the evacuation from Prague. Frank Siscoe was the Administrative Officer at that time, and he was another strong, calm figure in these uncertain circumstances.

The Czechs left it to us to select the people to leave. Of course just about all of the American staff volunteered to stay and we were thanked for that, but about 60 of us had to leave. I was among those whom the embassy and Washington decided should go. It was a particularly tragic situation in the case of the Czech employees of the embassy because many of them were people who had worked in the embassy since the '20s and '30s. They had been with the embassy since the founding of it. When the Second World War came, the embassy was shut down of course. The Czech employees had in many cases been very helpful to people leaving at that time. They had remained loyal. They had come back to the embassy when it reopened in 1945 and some of them were just short of eligibility for retirement by 1950. A lot of compassionate work was done I understand at that point trying to solve the problems of those people. Upon leaving the embassy, they were going to be sent off to labor camps somewhere under the work permit system that the Czech government had. They were assigned to very mundane positions of drudgery in humiliating conditions. One, a very senior employee – a silver-haired gentleman, said to me "You have the atomic bomb. Why don't you just drop it on the Kremlin and solve the whole problem?" I was dumbfounded by his

statement, and I don't recall what I said, although it showed me the state of his desperation and distress.

I remember very well a young man by the name of Karel Prohaska, who was one of the chauffeurs of the embassy and was somehow associated with my roommate at the time, a man by the name of Keith Corley, who was in the military attaché's office. Karel was about my age, a young fellow. I remember talking with him one of the last afternoons that I was in the embassy. He was there with his girlfriend in a vacated Embassy office. I said to him, "Karel, you've been awfully good to me." His English was quite good; I spoke no Czech. "If there is anything I can ever do to help you out, let me know." His girlfriend immediately hushed us and pointed to the telephone. Here we were in the American embassy and there was such a climate of fear on the part of people that she believed that it was entirely possible that the telephone on the desk between us was tapped, even though it was on the hook, and that people would be able to pick up the transmission of what we were saying.

I have no idea what happened to Karel Prohaska or any of the other people in the embassy at that time. There were some who escaped. I saw one month later in Paris. She was the fiancé and later married a captain in the air force attaché's office. Her story was a chilling example of risks people took, I suppose some unsuccessfully, to escape from behind the Iron Curtain. She said that she had paid someone to get her out of the country by crossing over the border. They had escorted her on a certain day, followed by a moonless night, all this business, up to a point that was something like three or four miles from the border at which point they said to her, "Okay, now you head in that direction through the woods." She did as she was told and after awhile, through the darkness, she saw a guard approaching as she was getting very close to the border. She said she turned her back toward him and crouched down on the ground to look as though she was part of the vegetation and kind of blend with it. She said, "I waited a long time. I expected him to come up from behind and take me. After a very long time nothing happened and I looked around and no one was there. I have no idea whether he saw me and decided to allow me to go, or whether he didn't see me and I was successful." She said she then crossed the border. It was a real ordeal, that experience.

HARRY G. BARNES, JR.
Consular Officer
Prague (1953-1956)

Ambassador Barnes was born in Minnesota and raised in Minnesota and New York. He was educated at Amherst College and Columbia University. After service in the US Army in World War II, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted in 1950 to Bombay, India. His other foreign posts include Prague, Moscow, Kathmandu and Bucharest. He served as United States Ambassador to Romania (1974-1977; India (1981-1985) and Chile (1985-1996) in addition to having several senior level assignments at the State Department in Washington. Ambassador Barnes was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: So in 1953 the Barneses are off to Prague. Following your plan!

BARNES: This was my plan. It was a good plan, you know, why shouldn't it work?

Q: So you were in Prague from when to when?

BARNES: Prague from December of 1953 until July of 1956. When I said I wasn't successful in language I was completely unsuccessful in getting language training before I went to Prague.

Q: How did you find language training? Often I've noticed myself, I have found that you put out a great deal about the society, the culture and all from your language teacher at the FSI. How did you find Prague?

BARNES: Well, since I didn't get language training before I went to Prague, I had to learn it on the spot. What I did there essentially I was the consular officer, a one person consular section, what I did there essentially, was to recruit my FSN (Foreign Service National, i.e., locally hired) staff and tell them I needed help and from the beginning to try to use as much Czech as I could. I had picked up a book so before I left the States. I did a little bit and I remember writing on the boxes that were packed that we sent to Prague. On some boxes I wrote "office" and on other boxes I wrote "home" and one of the first lessons my Czech staff gave me was I'd used the wrong word for "office". I had used in effect "institution," "office" in that sense and not office "office." So I that was the way learned.

We had a Czech maid servant who had some knowledge of English and worked for our predecessors, but I tried to always to speak Czech with her. By the time I left I could manage fairly well.

Q: Who was our ambassador while you were there?

BARNES: When we arrived George Wadsworth had just left and so there was an interregnum before Alex Johnson came [Editor's Note: Ambassador Johnson presented his credential for this his first ambassadorial post on December 31, 1953 and left post on December 29, 1957]. In fact, one of the nice things I would say about our beginning in Prague, we got to Prague in December. Have you ever been to Prague? It burns soft coal as its principle fuel and so in an otherwise drab as European winters made even more drab by clouds of coal.

The fact there was no ambassador and the fact that the Czech authorities, I have forgotten who hit whom first, but either the U.S. reduced size of the Czech mission in Washington or the Czechs reduced the size of the U.S. Mission in Prague, but we were cut to thirteen people just before we scheduled to arrive. That required giving up houses outside the compound, for the most part, where people had lived and bring everybody into the compound and converting chancery space into living quarters. For a period of about two or three weeks when we first arrived we were put up in the Residence before the Johnsons arrived and that was a very comfortable beginning compared with what we ended up later.

Q: Who was the DCM?

BARNES: There were a couple, two while we were there. The first was Nat King who left about six months or so after we got there and the second was Gary Anderson.

Q: I take it when you arrived, that relations with the Czechs were not...

BARNES: This was what? Six or eight months after Stalin's death and the thaw, so-called that began to take place in the Soviet Union took a year or two to get there and the Czech Communists at that point had the reputation of doing exactly what the Soviets did, almost as if it were a pattern, as if things were cut out and all the detailed instructions were given. They followed them slavishly and so if relations were bad between the U.S. and the USSR they were at least as bad and maybe even a bit worse. Well, whether that was an exaggeration or not, but in any case, no, it was not easy. We were followed wherever we went and one difference was that there were not travel restrictions imposed on us. For whatever reason, I don't know why, the U.S. imposed no travel restrictions on Czech diplomats at that point, so we could travel all over the country. We would be followed, but we were not restricted, whereas in Moscow and some other places you had limitations on where and when you could travel.

Q: Well, it's a pretty small country.

BARNES: Well, actually when you go from the German border to what was then the Soviet and now the Ukrainian border it's a good day's drive.

Q: Let's talk about your work first: what type of work were you doing?

BARNES: Consular, I was the consular officer with comparatively little visa work, mostly visas for officials coming to the embassy of the U.N. Mission and that sort of thing. Occasional visitors' visas, the one case that stands out in my mind was a case of a prominent Czech theologian, by the name of Framanka, who was invited to come here, I have forgotten whether it was the National Council of Churches or the Council of Churches or something of that sort. A certain amount of protection of Americans in jail, dual nationals basically. At the time we arrived there was a dual national who was a refugee in the embassy, someone who had worked in our consulate in Bratislava before it had been closed, imprisoned and managed to escape from prison and make his way across the country and reconnoitered the street in front of the Embassy, it is a very narrow street; police stationed outside and cars with the secret police as well. This individual named John Hvasta was able to reconnoiter the entrance to the Embassy, the gates, and slipped in when somebody was going out and caught the guards by surprise. The Embassy had a Czech receptionist right inside the gates. Obviously, under those circumstances responsible to the secret police more than to the embassy. She tried to stop him but he got past her and got up into the section of the embassy where the Americans were working.

We refused to surrender him to the Czech authorities for a period of, it must have been about four or five months, part of the time before we got there, part after we got there. We took turns, the small embassy staff in effect standing guard at night and locked John up in a secure area of the embassy. We were never sure, given the tense relations at the time whether we there would be an attempt to take him by force. As it turned out, we were able to negotiate his departure, so it worked out all right.

The other specific case I remember particularly is a woman, the daughter of one of the founders of the Czech Republic in 1918, a newspaper editor himself who died in prison. She remained in prison. I was able to visit her a couple of times and she was, before we left, allowed out, I think, allowed out of prison, stayed a while in the country and then subsequently left.

Q: Were there any attempts on our part to reunite families?

BARNES: People would come to the consular section who had families in the States, but for the most part though they were dual nationals and that was the difficulty. There were attempts but not a lot of success at that point.

Q: How did you find working with the Czech authorities?

BARNES: I had limited contact with them simply because of the fact that there were so little in the way of links between the two countries, practically no trade, for instance. The dual national question I was talking about, not much in the way of cooperation on that score. Essentially, quite formal, at best not very helpful, occasionally of some help. The arrangement that was negotiated, for example, for John Hvasta to leave was one of the few exceptions and that was more the ambassador's doing than mine. The exceptions were not much in the way of cooperation so it was pretty much at arm's length.

Q: In those days Prague was not a place where American tourists went?

BARNES: No. Travelers were basically anybody of Czech descent.

Q: How about when you traveled around? Was there a concern about provocations?

BARNES: A potential concern; just you needed to be alert to the possibility but during the period we were there, there were none. We as Americans, when we traveled tended to get, what shall I say, sort of a mixed welcome from the Czechs. On the whole, I am talking non-official, on the whole, very friendly simply because we were Americans, at the same time somewhat cautious lest their own authorities raise questions about you know, why they were even for a while associating with Americans.

I remember when a music festival we went to the eastern part of the country where we were quite openly welcomed as Americans and they never seemed to have that much in the way of inhibitions.

Q: Did you get involved in federal benefits, social security payments, and that sort of thing?

BARNES: These were sort of routine type things, tracing people, trying to confirm things.

Q: To get out of country, where did you go, to Munich?

BARNES: We were dependent on the Army commissary facilities in what was then Western

Germany, specifically in Nuremburg. We had a six ton truck which would take periodic trips to Nuremburg and come back with supplies, things we couldn't get locally. There was a great shortage of things in Prague at that point and the Mission had a small commissary. We just took turns driving out and getting the stuff loaded on and coming back. So that was the place we knew best. It was a little bit like just a change and nothing else aside from the work we'd do in regard with the commissary. Went to Vienna once or twice again for change, not so much for supplies.

Q: Well, Vienna was, this was rather an exciting period while you were there.

BARNES: It was the occupation still, but the treaty ending the occupation was in 1955.

Q: Was there any feeling that this might indicate a thaw?

BARNES: Yes, there was some hopes because, what was it, the spirit of Geneva that was also '55. And there was some slight relaxation in Czechoslovakia in terms of the stridency that began.

Q: Did you ever sort of discuss about why was Czechoslovakia such a, kind of a hard line place compared say even to Poland and so many other places where there seemed to be much more, they didn't take things as seriously.

BARNES: We talked among ourselves but I don't think anybody came up with any terribly clear explanation. If you want to make a connection, just sort of thinking out loud, the Czech Revolution in 1989 and it was called the Velvet Revolution, I don't know if there is a link here somewhere, a less strident, or less violent approach.

Q: Now Alex Johnson was one of the major figures in the Foreign Service. How did you find him as an ambassador?

BARNES: At one level, very professional and clearly someone who, what should I say, he knew what he wanted to do and why he wanted to do it. At another level, cold, not great on what I would call staff relations, somewhat aloof but then perhaps that was my vantage point as consular officer as distinct from others who were doing more "substantive" stuff.

Q: Well, I would thinking this environment the political officers spent most of their time reading newspapers, didn't they?

BARNES: Yes, in good part although also comparing notes with colleagues and exchanging what they thought in this case we would have Pravo, which was the equivalent of Pravda was saying or meant. For the rest of us too, not only the political officers, much of our life was within the diplomatic corps and a lot of exchange of what you call analysis at one level but gossip at another. We had a very good first secretary political officer, Jack Iams, who was something of a mentor for me.

Q: Was the Soviet presence pronounced there?

BARNES: Not very visible, no. There was a huge monument overlooking the river to the glorious

Red Army. The Czechs have something of a sense of humor and the standard Czech version, at least that we heard, was the presence - as part of the sculpture - the presence of figures symbolizing the people of Czechoslovakia and their solidarity with the Great Soviet Union. The Czech version of that was that they were lined up behind the Soviet figures in order to push them into the river when they could get the chance.

Q: Did you get involved at all with the people trying to defect or to give you information or anything like that?

BARNES: No, I didn't and I don't remember, this goes back to provocations and so on. No, I don't remember any of that.

Let me go back to Alex for a moment; one example. Prague has sort of an historic center which was called the Old Town, very narrow streets, and attractive squares and so on. As I mentioned, we were followed regularly, drive out of the embassy compound and right across this narrow street was enough room for a couple of Czech cars called Tatra which were a large car. They always had an antenna which indicated they were a secret police car and they would just sort of fall in line and would follow you as you left, particularly the first secretary I mentioned.

I sometimes got tired of this type of surveillance and so we would drive into the old town and because of the configuration of the streets, if you sped up a little bit you'd go into one of the squares and we would sort of keep going around and around. That attracted onlookers who were trying to figure out what we were doing, could see the Tatra following us and sort of a measure of some amusement to these people who watched. A Tatra has a limited turning radius and so what we would do once in a while when we had gone around a couple of times is suddenly go off in one of these streets off the square and then because there's probably an intersection only a hundred meters away, we would get to the next place, turn and because they couldn't keep up us so by the time they got to where we had last been seen, we were gone.

Alex thought that was probably not such a great idea and he told us to stop playing games. He was probably right.

Q: I am told in Moscow that they play those games. If your car was parked somewhere you would have a deflated tire.

BARNES: That happened with my friend I mentioned, the first secretary once in Prague and what he then did was to break the antenna off the Tatra. Why they didn't retaliate, I don't know but we did cool it a bit.

Q: By the time you left did you see, relations were pretty much a deep freeze, weren't they?

BARNES: Actually, there was a bit of a thaw. More, I would say, about a year or so, about 1954 toward '55 partly as a result of Geneva. Khrushchev was coming into office at that point and that began to bear change. Malenkov was on his way out. Yes, it was less strident in terms of the tone and somewhat more civil in terms of the relationships.

Q: When you left there in '56, it sounds like it was about time to go back to the States.

BARNES: It wasn't as it turned out. I had decided at that point that I wanted to go to Moscow and take advantage of my Russian and my Russian Institute background. I applied for the course then given at the Army Language School in Oberammergau. Its school to Garmisch, called Attachment R at that stage for Russian. So in the summer of '56 my tour in Prague was curtailed and we transferred to Oberammergau for a year.

WILLIAM A. CRAWFORD
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1957-1959)

William A. Crawford was born in eastern Pennsylvania, yet moved to France and graduated from the American High School in Paris. He entered the Foreign Service in 1941. His career included posts in Havana, Moscow, Paris, and Prague, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. He was ambassador to Romania from 1961 to 1965. Crawford was interviewed by H.G. Torbert in 1989.

Q: This was an interesting year to study Hungary because it was the year of the uprising.

CRAWFORD: That's right. I was to go over as number two there, but then they cut down the size of the mission considerably and Gary Atkinson took over there, so I was sent to Prague.

Q: Who was with you at Prague?

CRAWFORD: Alex Johnson was there for a few months. I arrived in August of '57 and he left at Christmas. Then I was in charge for four or five months until John Allison arrived. I actually had a two year tour there as DCM with both of these far eastern specialists.

Q: Who were basically dealing with the Chinese. At least Alex was?

CRAWFORD: Alex was.

Q: Was there any particular excitement while you were in Prague?

CRAWFORD: No. Things were in the deep freeze, Novotric was in charge, and nothing much happened. I was a rather gloomy place. One thing that struck me when I first arrived was that when I made calls on my close colleagues in other missions their immediate comment was "of course you're going to enjoy Prague because it is such a beautiful city," I waited for them to say something else, but that was the best thing they would say about Prague.

Q: We both have had this experience in the east European post where your major job was to maintain a moral presence and to observe.

CRAWFORD: Yes and just keeping the flag flying.

JONATHAN DEAN
Political/Economic Officer
Prague (1961-1962)

Jonathan Dean was born in 1924 in New York City and educated at Harvard and Columbia. His career included posts in Limburg, Bonn, Prague and Elizabethville. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: *When you were taking Czech, were you getting an equivalent to area studies, consultations with the desk? Were you sounding out and getting what the situation was in both Czechoslovakia and our relations with Czechoslovakia in 1960 and 1961?*

DEAN: Some, but the area studies was not very heavily developed. I was doing a lot of reading of Czech history and the background of the current situation. I was also going over to the desk every once in a while and reading telegrams.

Q: *You went out there when?*

DEAN: It must have been the summer of '61. I was the first secretary there for economic and political issues.

Q: *You were there how long?*

DEAN: Two years from '61 to '63.

Q: *What was the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1961 when you arrived?*

DEAN: Czechoslovakia was the last holdout of Stalinism and they even had a statue of Stalin still intact. Anton Novotny, the party head, was an old line Stalinist and they did not permit even a slight movement or change. That spring when we arrived, or perhaps the spring thereafter, they had a traditional May Day celebration which people recited a poem called Queten, or May. This was certainly not an active resistance but they were able to get six or eight student together for this purpose. The regime was so thoroughly oppressive that they really couldn't get off the ground. Yet it was these celebrations which in the Dubcek era became the focus of the Prague Spring.

Q: *Were you at the embassy following this type of modern dissidence at all?*

DEAN: We tried to but the fact of the matter was that we were in relative isolation because of comprehensive police coverage. Every individual or person that we talked to was picked up and interrogated by the police. A few were permitted to have dealings with us, but reported to the police. I knew one musician who was also a curator of organs in the churches of the country and I went around with him on the clear understanding on my part that he was probably giving a

summary of everything we said to the authorities.

They had 14 men in the United States section of the secret police and I got to know them all. One reason for this was that they had one portable motion picture camera that they used with us. It was in a blue plastic case and they passed it on from team to team as they took over the surveillance, so we gradually recognized them all. One time I attempted to get a man, who had come into the embassy apparently without being seen, out of the embassy. We sent out 12 cars in a row. I figured that would take them all away but our first car came back too soon. I dropped him on a bridge and they did pick him up. It was a complete police state.

I had a Czech language teacher, very capable. He had a police permit, but after a while they arrested him. They forced him to appear on a monthly television program about American spies to say that I tried to suborn him into espionage. He didn't cooperate very well with them so they removed him from his job as a secondary school teacher and put him on a road-building gang with some former priests. They took his own children out of secondary school and put them into trade school.

Q: Was it ever a matter of speculation at the embassy of why did the Czechs seem to be both so hard line and really basically quite effective as sort of the nasties in this Cold War business?

DEAN: They were the nasties and I remember that our desk officer was a particularly objectionable unpleasant man who jumped on the United States whenever possible. I remember him insulting Dean Rusk at an interview at the UN about Vietnam after I came back. Nevertheless, he turned up a few years later as one of the leaders of the Prague Spring. My theory about a policy of engagement might have been OK, but I never was really able to carry it out. I remember trying to contact a local district leader. He did finally see me but it was the last time I was able to do that. The Foreign Ministry sent us a message asking us not to disturb local officials in their work.

Q: Who was the ambassador at this time?

DEAN: We had two ambassadors. Christian Ravndal was the ambassador at the time I arrived. He had had the most ambassadorial posts in the service. There was a change of administration in Washington at the time. As was the custom, he submitted his resignation and was told that he should continue owing to his sterling record. Low and behold, about six weeks later in the middle of the night the telegram comes in, "You are hereby relieved," and so forth. He took it very hard and we had to try to help him, console him in this matter. Anyhow, he retired to Vienna, Austria where his wife had been a concert pianist and he was trying to make it up to her by getting her back in her own milieu. Edward Wailes, who had been the director general of the Foreign Service became ambassador, though we had a considerable interregnum before he arrived.

Q: With both Ravndal and Wailes, how did they relate to the idea of you almost want to say constructive engagement or whatever?

DEAN: I think Ravndal agreed with it but he wasn't able to do much with it. He did perform in an extremely courageous way but was this was later toward the end of his tour in the Congo. Lumumba was deposed and shipped to the Katanga and died as a result of mistreatment en route I

think. In all of the Warsaw Pact countries, there were very big demonstrations and we had an enormous demonstration in Prague.

They turned out all of the foreign students from the local university. They were organized by my friends from the secret police whom I could see loitering on the edges of the crowd. The student leader was a redheaded Argentinean. They came over the walls of our compound, pulled down the U.S. flag from the gloriotta, a little summer house in the back and crowded into the narrow triangular place in front of the entrance of the Schoenborn palace, which had been bought by Mr. Crane, the first American ambassador to Czechoslovakia after World War I - he was a personal friend of Thomas Masaryk - and presented the building to the U.S. government.

Our ambassador went out in the street alone and talked to these kids who were yelling, shouting and so forth. He spoke very good Spanish and spoke for a long time with the leader. He convinced the leader that his action was not worthy of a caballero, and that he should return the American flag to us. He actually convinced this kid to do that. The young fellow left, and went down the street with his group. They never returned because I saw the police closing in on him and so forth. It was a remarkable, unsung act of personal courage and genuine diplomacy on the part of Ambassador Ravndal.

Q: About this time I was in Yugoslavia and we were able to travel all over the country. We covered it like a blanket going to every little hamlet practically, calling on communist officials and all. I take it that this was not in the offing for you?

DEAN: I did travel to every okres, every single county, of Czechoslovakia. Day after day in traveling around -- I usually did it on a sort of art history or historical basis -- I was followed. The local United Nations representative, a man named Arnost Bares, told me that he was free of this surveillance and didn't have that problem. He invited us out to a place he had outside of town. We went out there and I observed that we were followed as always. However, we went into his house, sat down at the table, and started to talk. At one point, I looked up and in front of every ground floor window looking into the room there was a policeman looking in intently. That of course was very discouraging for Mr. Bares and it was the last time I think I ever saw him.

I would go along the road and pick up someone thumbing for a ride and would observe after I dropped them off that they were being picked up. Even the very last night I was there, our public affairs officer, a rather feisty bird, tore down a poster from the Communist Party election of 1948. The next day the Foreign Ministry made a protest to our Embassy that I had defaced and destroyed government property, so they were right behind us even on that last day.

Q: Were there efforts or concerns about being set up usually with women but sometimes just handing over plans or something like this, this type of thing?

DEAN: We did have a lot of walk-ins.

Q: Could you explain what a walk-in is?

DEAN: A walk-in is somebody just appearing from the street and asking to talk to an American

official. We did have a lot of them and I usually talked to most of them since I did speak Czech. One day this young kid of about 18 came in. He smelled pretty bad. He said he had been sleeping out in the woods for the past three or four days. He had quite a story which I became convinced was true. He was from a non-communist family and had wanted to go to the music conservatory. He had tried several times and had been turned down on political grounds. He was assigned to a chemical factory in Ustinad Labem in northern Czechoslovakia. He kept pestering the personnel director there for a chance to compete for the music academy. One day he went in to see the director and they fell to wrangling and he pushed this man. The man fell down, hitting his head, and apparently was unconscious or dead. The boy pushed the body into a closet, left and took about three days to get down to Prague. He came to the embassy and told me about this. I thought it might be really an artificial affair. He gave me a violin to keep for him and said he was going to try to get out to an international youth meeting through East Germany. Against my better judgment and standing regulations I took his violin and wished him the best.

Six months later two kids appeared, other walk-ins, and they asked for Mr. Violin. I finally got the signal and I talked to them. They were young students and I was convinced they were pretty genuine. They told me this young fellow had been caught trying to go to East Berlin and get out that way. He was now in prison and he wanted them to have his violin, so I gave it to them. That was a fairly harrowing exchange.

In another aspect, the Czech secret police had broken into our embassy from a neighboring house and had put wiring all over the apartment ceilings, listening devices. They had put a listening device in the fireplace of the ambassador; the one that was later shown I think by Cabot Lodge at the UN. That aspect of life pretty well dominated everything else. Our consular officer was picked up in a military restricted area and declared persona non grata. Approximately half the country was a military restricted area. Many of us had persona non grata insurance to cover this contingency.

Q: I've never heard of that before, what is it?

DEAN: Particularly with communist regimes, you could be arbitrarily picked out for retaliation or get thrown out. If you had spent a lot of money getting supplies together, buying a new car, etc., being assigned to a new post, you could be very heavily out of pocket. There was a British insurance outfit that insured you for a small sum against modest losses for a premature PNG.

Q: You were both political and economic officer?

DEAN: Yes.

Q: Can you describe how you went about your business routinely? Let's do the political side first then we'll do the economic side.

DEAN: It was a question of reading four or five Czech papers, listening to the radio and television which was of very poor quality, seeing a wide range of other diplomats, talking to them and talking to an occasional Czech journalist who was permitted to have foreign contacts. I knew a guy from Rude Pravo, the main party newspaper, and I was occasionally able to see him. We would just sort of piece things together, relying on continuity and full exposure to provide some assessment of

significance. The product was not very high quality stuff in my opinion; it couldn't be. Economic reporting was similar. We would get an idea of some development and then attempt to go see some ministry official and so forth. Our efforts were usually quite fruitless. I tried to sign up for an adult education course in Marxist ethics, thinking I might hear some complaints, but in the second session, they told me to leave.

Q: Were you involved in a way of the art of Kremlinology? Who was standing where in pictures and this, or was there really much of a need to do that?

DEAN: There wasn't too much need for this because Novotny was very clearly on top of the situation and there didn't seem to be any cracks in that situation. We had a big issue with Czech gold, which had been taken by the Allies from the Germans, many millions of dollars. We had repeated discussions about it with the Foreign Ministry. The desk officer there, Duda, was an extremely unpleasant character. Above him was this other man, Hayek, who later became a leader of the Prague Spring and of the velvet revolution. It really was pretty desperate. It was tough, but still it was fascinating and the effort of trying to push against the system to try to learn something about it and influence it, however minimally, was fascinating and most of us thought it was worthwhile. The America House library and film showings were, however, getting to quite a large number of people.

Q: Did you have any problems with American newspaper men getting in there or media people that couldn't get out or anything like that while you were there?

DEAN: No. I did know a Czech journalist who had been in prison for illegal efforts to get out (He was the son of Alphonse Mucha, a well-known artist of the art nouveau period), and I knew a young Czech artist who also had worked in a foundry turning out statues of Lenin. In his spare time, he made me a Madonna but he couldn't cast it in Prague without getting into severe trouble, so we took it out to Nuremberg and got it cast. No, we didn't have any American citizen problem of that kind. Most of the problems were from our own personnel getting detained and worries about that. There were worries about the Czech personnel who were working for the embassy with police permission, but who often fell afoul of the secret police nonetheless.

Q: What about Czechs who were getting Social Security and other benefits? I would have thought there would have been a relatively sizable community.

DEAN: There was but you couldn't get around to see many of them. You did have an America House operation with films which did have a modest outreach but their audiences of 30-50 people were rather marginal in the Czech society and couldn't go down much further and therefore didn't mind whatever additional opprobrium they had. I don't think one can dredge out of that experience any very big nuggets so to speak, unfortunately. We were there and the Czechoslovak people knew we were there and that was perhaps the best side of it.

KENNETH N. SKOUG
Commercial/Economic Officer

Prague (1967-1969)

Kenneth N. Skoug was born in North Dakota in 1931. He attended both Columbia College and George Washington University. His career included positions in Germany, Mexico, Prague, Moscow, and Venezuela. Mr. Skoug was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 2000.

Q: Often when one is taking a foreign language you pick up quite a bit about the country from your teacher, just by viewing their personalities and all that. What were you picking up about Czechoslovakia as you were getting this? You were doing this between 1965 and 1966 about. How did you find the Czech language?

SKOUG: Well, very difficult. It was much harder than German or Spanish or French. Those were the languages with which I was familiar. I'd even studied Italian out of a Berlitz book and could get around Italy, but Czech was far more difficult for me, like Russian later. The Slavic languages are tough. At least they were tough for me. For one thing, I was older. I was already in my 30s, and it's not as easy to pick it up at that point. It was a challenge, but I did acquire Czech, obviously, well enough to handle my job. It's just that it took a lot of hard work.

Q: So you went to Prague in 1966, was it? Oh, no, you had economic training then.

SKOUG: Yes, I had Czech training for 10 months, and that ended in the summer of 1966. Then they had just started this economic-commercial course. I guess they just called it the Economic Course, under Jacques Reinstein, and we were in the second group. Only one group had gone through there before with this program. It was a program that went from July until December, really an excellent, excellent program. My background was really political science, and my doctorate, which I had concluded while I was still in UN Political Affairs, was on the Eastern policy of the German Social Democrats, and I hadn't done much on the economic side. So this special course was of great value to me, and I did a lot of reading about Communist economics, which is totally different from Western economics, to put it mildly, so that when I finished that course, my Czech level had eroded a little bit in five months of not using it, but when I went to Czechoslovakia in January of 1967, I could speak Czech and I could speak economic language well enough to focus on what looked to be the main interest that I had in going there, which was that it was going to be having an economic reform.

Q: Oh, yes.

SKOUG: The new economic system was begun officially in Czechoslovakia January 1st, 1967, and I showed up two weeks later. So I thought this was an opportune time. That's why I chose the economic job. I had been given a choice of economic work or political work. I thought political work in a Communist country would be exceptionally difficult because it's so hard to get to talk to anybody... I had dealt with Communist officials before. I had dealt with them when I was in Munich in spring 1961. We had a session with the Russians and Czechs one time in Salzburg - I don't know if I mentioned that - at an international conference in which RFE and Radio Liberty were present. The Russians and Czechs were there spying on it, and we got to know them. The conference was taking place shortly. It was before the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna, so

we invited them for a drink and then they had us for a gala evening in the Czechoslovak consulate. There I got my indoctrination in dealing with Communist officials. I still recall the ominous sound of the heavy door to the consulate being closed and locked behind a colleague and me after we entered.

I found it to be pretty hard at first in Prague. We were butting heads all the time, but in economics and business there might be some way. You see I was also the commercial officer as well as the economic officer, the only one in our embassy, and that gave me an entrée. They could always say they were talking business with me. It was always possible for Communist officials to talk business, but talking economics would have been not so easy for them to explain to their security monitors. But once there, with a foot in the door, I could talk about anything I wanted to talk about.

Q: *You were there from 1967 to when?*

SKOUG: Till the middle of 1969.

Q: *Oh, so fascinating times.*

SKOUG: Yes, and this is what I covered in my book, Czechoslovakia's Lost Fight For Freedom.

Q: *Let's talk, in the first place, about the embassy when you arrived in 1967 and how you and your colleagues viewed the Czech Government in relations with the United States at that time.*

SKOUG: Well, it was a small embassy, very capable guys with different points of view, headed by a professional officer, Jacob Beam, who was later ambassador to the Soviet Union and had already been ambassador to Poland, a thorough professional. Ted Burgess, the deputy principal officer or the DCM, had been the head of the Political-Economic Section. It was a combined Political-Economic Section that was next headed by George Kaplan. Kaplan was on the cutting edge of wanting to have a new policy, a much more engaging policy towards Czechoslovakia. Then there was myself and another political officer, the CIA establishment, the military representatives, the public affairs officer (Bob Warner, who just died - a very good friend of mine), the Administrative Section, and the Consular Section. So it was a small embassy. As a matter of fact, when we had an inspection, the inspector had been serving there in the embassy in 1947, and we had a picture for him showing how big the embassy was then and how few officers were now doing the same functions.

As far as our view of the Czech Government, we came at a very hard period. We had caught one of their spies bugging the office of the director of Eastern European affairs in state and kicked him out a few months before, and that was still festering. Then they kidnapped an American from an airplane coming from Moscow to Paris, kidnapped him by diverting it to Prague, where everybody was let off the plane and then everybody was let back on except him, and he was then arrested for a crime allegedly committed 20 years before. He was a Czech-born fellow who had been accused of crimes in the immediate postwar period. He was exfiltrating people out of Czechoslovakia. So that was the situation. This man's name was Kazan-Komarek. Komarek was his Czech name. He had taken a Russian name, Kazan. This was something that engaged the Secretary of State. So relations were bad at the beginning. We forced the Czechs to release Kazan-Komarek by cutting

off visas and other means. It was very tough at the beginning. They backed off on this case, but this was the last year of Antonin Novotny, the year in which Novotny was going to be challenged within the party by his own intellectuals. Economic reform was on, and that was something that he was suspicious of anyway because he saw his own powers being eroded by this process. So they looked constantly for an American spy that they could blame all this on. And I was one of the candidates. An American citizen named Jordan, who was a representative of the Jewish organization JOINT, was found dead floating in the Vltava River. It was pretty obvious somebody had killed him, but it wasn't clear who. This mystery remains unsolved. Things got very tough as the year developed.

Q: By the way, were you married?

SKOUG: Yes, oh, yes.

Q: How did this affect the family?

SKOUG: Well, my family was the greatest consolation to me. It would be impossible for me to live in a country like that without a family. Now I had my wife, and I had my daughter. My son wasn't yet born. And our cat from Mexico. We were a solid nucleus. I can tell you that the family was very, very essential. It was tough, but my wife - as I think we discussed earlier - my wife knew I was going to be in the Foreign Service before we got married, so I didn't take her by surprise. It's hard, very hard for the ladies to live in those countries. They're so isolated and there's so much pressure. For example, our maid would do things like removing some silver or a place setting before a diplomatic dinner, so you were expecting to be ready for 16, and suddenly you don't have the wherewithal for it. Little things like that. I had Columbia University buttons on my jacket, and one day it had no buttons at all. The buttons were all sewed inside the lining. Well, it was pretty obvious that someone had done this, and who could it have been? That was the sort of little tricks that they played.

Q: Were there problems just sort of going about your business? You know, people coming up, "Here, take this," and trying to hand you envelopes or anything like that?

SKOUG: Oh, yes. And as the crisis got worse there were notes on my door to meet at a certain place, "You'll recognize me by the book I'm carrying." Well you can counter that sort of thing, but there were surveillances. I'm aware of intelligence work. In the business, there's the discreet, and there's the close. The "discreet" is when the target is not supposed to know that surveillance is on. The "close" is when he's supposed to know it. I had both, discreet and close surveillances while I was there in Czechoslovakia. But that anticipates a bit, because at the beginning that wasn't done. You asked what the attitudes were. In 1967, at the outset, because of this Kazan-Komarek case, there was concern that not much progress could be made on any issue. Beam, in his original interview with Novotny when he arrived in 1966, got a very negative reaction. Novotny didn't care. He asked Novotny what his main objectives were. "Stomping out the last bit of capitalism," was his response. It was clear that it was a harsh place. Along with Ulbricht in East Berlin, Novotny was the closest thing to a Stalinist left in Eastern Europe in 1967. Other countries, Poland and Hungary, had already demonstrated resistance to Soviet domination. The Czechs, on the other hand, were militantly loyal to the Russians under Novotny. So here was Kaplan looking for

engagement and others skeptical. Burgess also was in favor of building bridges. After we got rid of the Kazan-Komarek case, we did build a little bridge. We started to. We had civil air negotiations. Since aviation was economic, I took part in the negotiations. We didn't conclude an agreement with the Czechs in early '67, but we did have really quite amicable talks, and it wasn't political, it was really financial issues, their inability to let Pan Am have enough compensating benefits, that prevented agreement. Eventually in 1969, we got the agreement signed, but we laid the groundwork for it in '67. So in that sense, things were getting a little better.

Later in the summer, the Germans concluded negotiations with Czechoslovakia to establish a trade mission in Prague. Willy Brandt was now in a coalition government with Chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger - Brandt was foreign minister. It was still Kiesinger, a CDU-led government, but with the SPD participating. And they sent representatives to Czechoslovakia negotiating for a German trade mission, which would be a first step toward establishment of formal diplomatic relations. The Germans already had trade missions in the other Eastern European countries, and they wanted to get one in Czechoslovakia. They really wanted diplomatic relations. They were willing to recognize the Czechoslovak state and government. At this point the Hallstein Doctrine had been jettisoned, by Brandt really. And they were willing to recognize Czechoslovakia, but the Czechs wouldn't do it. They did, however, agree on a trade mission, and a German trade mission was opened up in early 1968. And so there were contradictory movements. On the one hand, the East Germans were worried by this Brandt doctrine, and so the Russians tried to form an "Iron Triangle," based on would be agreements between the East Germans and the Poles and the Czechs. The Poles were hardening at this point under Gomulka. He had been, of course, or he seemed to be, a relatively liberal Communist in 1956. That wasn't true by 1967. He was a hard-liner at that point and very concerned about the West Germans. Ulbricht was still in power, and Novotny was under pressure to cooperate with Ulbricht and Gomulka in forming this so-called Iron Triangle. At the same time, Novotny was not uninterested in getting from the West Germans what they could offer, because he had this economic reform on. So there were various trends.

I got involved in that part. I went to a Quaker conference for diplomats in Zvikov, Czechoslovakia in June, 1967, and the West Germans were there. Since the Germans had no representation in Czechoslovakia, I was able to play a sort of intermediary role between the Czech vice-foreign minister and the German representative, who then had a nice talk. We passed telegrams on behalf of the West Germans back to Bonn to further their initiative, which we fully supported.

My own primary role was to look at the economic reform, and the interesting thing was that it gave me access to so many able Czechoslovakian persons, particularly in the management field, not only economists. I had some people I could honestly call friends. They eventually became friends whether Communists or not, some of the economists. And the management people, even those who were quite firm Communists, liked American management methods. They didn't want the Yugoslav system. They thought they could have a Communist system and yet have American business methods.

Q: The Yugoslav system is one of trained control over the workers' council, which is a lousy way to do things.

SKOUG: That's the way management specialists saw it. There was an argument over this, however. Some Czechs favored workers' councils. The chief intellectual father, Professor Ota Sik, eventually came around to it, but on political grounds. In mid-1968, with the Dubcek regime under growing Soviet pressure to halt the reform, Sik urged workers councils as a means to protect gains already achieved. After the Soviet invasion, trade union and even business leaders thought that workers' councils offered some way to resist the reconsolidation of centrist power under the hard-liners. But to begin with, the management people wanted nothing to do with workers' councils.

Q: Well, what was the economy like? One always thinks of Skoda and other outfits that Czechoslovakia, particularly in the Czech part of the country, had prior to World War II, been probably a major manufacturing center.

SKOUG: Right, it had the same standard of living as Germany. The income was just about the same. It was a major manufacturing country, and it continued to be. But under the Communist system, basically it manufactured the wrong things, and the quality of the production went down. The Skoda works continued to exist and produced machinery and equipment for power engineering. Automobiles with the Skoda trademark were produced by the Czechoslovak automobile works in Mlada Boleslav. It also manufactured trucks, buses, motorcycles, etc...

I should say Skoda produced a lot of heavy equipment for engineering and metallurgy. They did a lot of mining and manufacturing in the northern part of the country. In fact, that zone was just about devastated. They called it the "lunar landscape" because there was given no environmental concern whatsoever to mitigate the extractive process. But you're right, heavy industry. And it also produced a lot of textiles. Textiles was one of their exports to the United States. The trade between the United States and Czechoslovakia, however, was insignificant. Their trade was really with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Q: Until the unification of Germany everybody thought the East Germans really at least can produce pretty well, but it turned out to be almost as much of a disaster area as the rest of it. But I would have thought the Czechs were close behind on it.

SKOUG: The Czechs and East German economies were very similar. They traded a lot between themselves, and they made goods of the same sort of type and quality. The production was made for a less demanding market, the Soviet Union. Much that the Czechs produced could be sold to the Soviets. It was usually better than what the Soviets could produce themselves. I like to call it the "Babe Barna" principle. Babe Barna was a ball player who at the end of the 1930s and in the 40s played for the Minneapolis Millers in Triple-A ball. He was a fearsome hitter, had a lot home runs. From time to time he would go up to the majors to play for the New York Giants. They thought that a guy with such powerful hitting in the American Association would be formidable, but Barna couldn't hit major league pitching. So he never was able to make it in the majors. He would go up on a trial and come down. He was a fierce hitter in the Triple-A. Czechoslovakia and East Germany were playing in the equivalent of Triple-A baseball. They were able to hit the ball very well in their own minor league. They were the Babe Barnas of Eastern Europe. When I was in Moscow, any product coming from East Germany and Czechoslovakia was considered by the public to be better than what could be produced in the Soviet Union. Lines of Russians would be at

the store anytime anything new came from Czechoslovakia or East Germany. If those products had been traded in Western Europe, hardly anyone would have bought them. They would have failed. They had gone up to the Majors and went down. I later had analogous arguments later when I was deputy director of German Affairs in the Department of State. There were people in the Department of Commerce who thought we should be trading with East Germany, this seventh or eighth greatest industrial power in the world. But I had seen Czechoslovakia, and I knew it was a power only because of the market it was in. It was not a power that would be able to sell much in the West. East German automobiles could be used anywhere in Eastern Europe, and Czech cars, the Skoda and others, were sold at home, but they could not have been exported.

Q: Did you find much knowledge of the United States or even of the West among the managerial class that you're talking about? Did they understand what was happening?

SKOUG: Well, progressive ones did. There was a management institute headed by a man named Jaroslav Jirasek, and Jirasek clearly understood that American methods were superior, and he was training managers, sort of like the Sloan Fellows of Czechoslovakia. He was training them. He wanted to get them to the United States to observe our system. We wanted them to go, so we already had a mutual interest in inviting American managers to Czechoslovakia to talk to them about American management methods, and in getting their people their people to visit the United States. This was really bridge-building, and it took place in 1967. The ones who opposed it were the hardliners. They saw the danger in this thing. They did not appreciate people like Warner and me who were facilitating, working for these things. But the managers, the progressive managers favored it, and some of the most progressive managers later, after the invasion, were among the last holdouts against the reconsolidation of Communist power. One in particular headed the Decin Engineering Works, up by the East German border, which produced forklift trucks. Miroslav Gregr, had been sent there to close it down because it was losing money. Instead of that, instead of closing it down, he began to advertise in the newspaper for more people to work there, and he focused on quality. He began to focus on selling his forklift tractors in Western Germany if they were good enough, and he did. He was a successful manager. He demonstrated that even under the Communist system, which was just beginning to be reformed - and a lot of people were criticizing him, but anyway he created a plant in Decin which was exporting to the West. Later he was one of the managers who studied with Jirasek at the management institute. Finally, in 1969, he was elected the head of the Czechoslovak Managers Association, which was newly formed. He then was asked about workers' councils which the Soviet occupiers opposed, and he said that they were not a problem. He said that "We'll work just as well with or without them. What I'm worried about is reconsolidation of power above me, not what goes on in my plant" So there were managers like that - although not enough. For most managers, of course, I can't speak, because there were thousands of entities there, and I imagine that most of the managers were not of that quality, but there were some who were, and it was those managers and those methods that the reform was trying to advance and make models for the rest.

Q: In looking at this, was the feeling that the Czech Communist Party, the hierarchy was probably some of the most rigid and unprogressive within the Communist Bloc?

SKOUG: In 1967 the top people were very hard, and the pressure that had come from the Russians in previous years had been to "loosen up, Baby." Even Brezhnev had been sent at one point by

Khrushchev to tell Novotny to not be so tough, not to reintroduce methods that weren't used in the Soviet Union and so forth. That changed because in about 1966 the Russians under Brezhnev began to harden towards their own people, but the top Czech leadership in 1967 was considered to be one of the hardest. At the same time, there were some opportunists there. For example, the vice-premier, Oldrych V. Cernik, became one of the leaders of the Dubcek system. In 1967 Dubcek himself was in the Presidium of the Party, and head of the Slovak communist party. He was already more liberal than was understood, but not so outspoken that he was intolerable to the hard line Communists. He was trained and had even grown up in the Soviet Union. So not all of them were as hard as they seemed. For one thing, the Czechoslovak communist party was enormous. It was a big party, one of the biggest in the world, relative to the population of the country. As Jirasek once told me, "Our party is like a national front. There are a lot of different views." It wasn't a monolithic party, but when Gustav Husak later consolidated power in 1969, one of the first things he did was to purge the party and cut its size. He cut out all the supposed liberals and social democrats who were in the Communist Party. As for the economic reform, they never reformed the economy. The economy was down and never got going. But what the reform did do, was to open up debate. Issues began to be discussed. Why are we producing this? It opened up questions that the Communist system doesn't like to see discussed. They like to have it decided by *Gosplan* or something at the top, by a few top people, and then the orders go out and, as Ulbricht once said, he wanted word to come back immediately from the farthest part of the republic, *Befehle ausgeführt!* Orders have been carried out. That's the way the hardliners thought. But if you have a reform, when you talk about a new system of management which is going to let managers decide how much of this to produce and where to sell it and so forth, freedom of choice slips in. Of course, they thought they were going to do all this within socialism. There would be no capitalism, but in theory still all these socialist firms would be trading and wheeling and dealing and competing with each other. It was an unrealistic objective, but at least as an objective it opened up debate. And the debate itself was the seed of the Prague Spring of 1968. One of the seeds of the undermining of the dictatorship was the economic reform and the discussions that went on, plus the fact that Otto Sik, although he'd been at Mauthausen with Novotny during the Second World War, came back with different views. Novotny was a Stalinist, and Sic was a social democrat within the communist party. Sic wanted freedom. He couldn't say it, but he kept insisting that for economic production we've got to have this, and everybody agreed production had to go up because it was slumping, had fallen. Their national income even fell. And so that wasn't acceptable.

Q: Was there the problem that often occurs in the Soviet system or the Chinese system - you know, we have an agreement, you don't pay me, and I won't work, more or less [I pretend to work, and you pretend to pay me]? There wasn't much in the way of incentive to really produce.

SKOUG: No, there wasn't, no. The incentive was to produce the wrong thing. Production of goods really wanted on the market was not stimulated by the system. The system prevented that from taking place, and they knew that. That was one of the things that motivated the reform. The reform was really over Novotny's dead body. He didn't want an economic reform, but he thought he had to accept one. There was no other way he could get around his falling production except to have it.

Other big problems were - the economy was only one of them - other big problems were the intellectuals, the playwrights, the movie producers. He'd got along, he'd managed them. Czechoslovakia had *The Shop on Main Street* and other critical films. People outside

Czechoslovakia couldn't understand how come such a rigid Communist country could be producing these plays, books, and movies.. Novotny had an understanding of sorts with these guys. They were good Communists. They were all in the party, except Havel, who wasn't a member. But most of the others were. And he rewarded them. This guy would be artist of the year and so forth, and they'd be given things. Talk about bribes - I mean, they'd be given a *dacha* somewhere. They didn't call it a *dacha*. They would be given material rewards, and they accepted the rewards. They accepted the honorifics. And their bellyaching was essentially that they wanted more freedom of expression, but as long as they got some freedom of expression they wouldn't challenge the system itself. And so this understanding or tolerance existed with the intellectuals, who were terribly important in Czechoslovakia because they had been among those who brought about the Czech renaissance in the 19th century. But finally they got hooked on the issue of Israel, of all things. Novotny was a determined follower of the Russians, and when the war between the Arabs and the Israelis broke out in 1967, the June War, Novotny immediately broke relations with Israel. And the Czechoslovak press took the Arab side completely. This took place just prior to the writers convention, and this time instead of sticking to more freedom of expression, they condemned the whole Novotny system. They made a broadside attack on Novotny, which of course leaked almost immediately. So the intellectuals were really in revolt against Novotny. He tried to crack down, but the more he cracked down, the more dangerous it got. At that time he still had some support within his system. For example, the Journalists Union later condemned the Writers Union for its audacity. Novotny was talking about a real purge, and they had some bloody purges in Czechoslovakia after 1948. That's what it looked like was going to happen again. Then, to compound matters, he went to Slovakia. He was considered a man who didn't like Slovaks, and the Slovaks and the Czechs had a very tenuous relationship. The Slovaks felt that the Czechs were clever fellows who dominated and manipulated them, and they didn't want to be dominated from Prague. Novotny did not have a light touch in dealing them. He made a speech in Martin, which was a center of Slovak nationalism, and he managed to insult the Slovaks. And after that, Dubcek, who had gone along with the tough measures that he had ordered against the writers, bucked him on the Slovaks because he was the leader of the Slovak party. Novotny then had Dubcek investigated by a "committee of five" to see if this wasn't "nationalism" - he didn't say "bourgeois nationalism," but that was the implication. Bourgeois nationalism was grounds for the death sentence. Dubcek in his memoirs tells about how he had to worry about the midnight knock on the door. This was happening in the fall of 1967.

Q: I'd like to stop here because I think we're coming to a very important stage and it's a good time to stop, before we do this. I'll put at the end where we are. We're talking about Novotny beginning to move into putting pressure on Dubcek and how the writers had revolted over his stand on Israel, because I think then we want to move into the whole process. And also, a question I didn't ask but we'll talk about next time if we could is about the Soviet presence there. I'm talking about when you first arrived.

Q: Today is the first day of November, 2000. Well, you were in Czechoslovakia from when to when, this time?

SKOUG: From January of 1967, about the time the economic reform started, to June of 1969, which was shortly after the fall of Dubcek and the accession of Husak to power.

Q: Okay, we were talking about dealing with the writers and all. I think this was before the -

SKOUG: Yes, I think we talked about the fact that although Novotny seemed to be firmly in control of the problem areas, and one of them was the writers, the writers strongly revolted against him in June of 1967, spurred on, I think, by the problem in the Middle East, where they took the side of Israel and felt that Novotny was one-sidedly pro-Arab, which was of course true. Another problem was Slovakia, where he had offended the Slovaks. It wasn't just a matter of bruising their pride; he had had a lot to do with the repression after 1948, and the Slovaks had suffered a great deal. The feeling was he didn't like Slovaks. Slovakia, surprisingly at that point, was a little more liberal, because Dubcek had something to say. He was the first secretary of the Slovak Communist Party and also sat on the Presidium of the Czechoslovak Party.

And then there was the economic reform, which by late 1967 was clearly showing problems, and yet it had awakened a lot of expectation, and more important, it had opened the way for people to speak frankly and clearly, within limitations, about economic problems, what needed to be done, what wasn't happening, whether due to this problem or that problem. This was a much more open discussion, even if it was within the Communist Party. The Communist Party was huge - one million members. In a small country that was a very substantial party. It was referred to by a Communist friend of mine as a national front organized as a Communist Party. Novotny knew that very well, and he was really crying for a purge of the Party.

So you had the writers, you had the economy, you had the Slovaks, and then you had the students after a mêlée with the Czech police, when the students had been demonstrating simply because they lacked light in their facilities. They weren't getting any response, and a Communist youth newspaper reporter was up there interviewing them when the lights went out. So they sat around playing guitars for a while, and then they decided they would go and demonstrate, and 1500 of them marched down Nerudova, which was the royal road leading to the Hradcany Palace, and they were shouting, calling, "We want light" and "We want work." You know what students will do when they get out. And it just so happened that the most contentious Central Committee meeting in Novotny's long tenure as first secretary of the Party was going on in the Hradcany. He was attacking Dubcek for nationalism at this point. In the bitter debate Dubcek was defending himself and the wraps were beginning to come off for the first time. Ota Sik criticized Novotny's system. Then they heard the students, yelling and shouting outside. The police asked the students, in effect, what's your purpose, and they said they wanted to see Novotny. So the police said, "Well, let's get a little delegation of you," to discuss this. The students laughed because in the past delegations like that had been accused of stirring up mobs and then been arrested. More police arrived and there was a confrontation. The students were being forced back up the hill, the police trying to keep the traffic open. Push came to shove. People started getting arrested, and then the police chased the students into their quarters, which were sacrosanct, even under the Communists supposedly. When the students sat down, the police went in and beat them up. And that led to a public inquiry.

So you had all those things going on by November, and there was a very important plenum of the Party in October. The next one would be December, and that's when Brezhnev showed up.

Q: A couple of questions before we reach that point. You mentioned the writers. Now how did you see the role of the writers within the Czech context?

SKOUG: Very large, because it was the Czech writers who had kept alive the Czech language, to the extent that it was kept alive, in the centuries of Austrian domination. And they were very much responsible for building the Czech National Museum and so forth. The development of Czechoslovak independence in 1918 had a great deal to do with Czechoslovak intellectuals. During the first World War they couldn't fight for their independence. Instead the Czechs sort of lay down on the job, as did Jaroslav Hasek's Good Soldier Svejk in the First World War. There was nothing for them to fight about. They were on the Austro-Hungarian side and they didn't want to fight. So the writers enjoy a very prestigious position in Czechoslovak society which even Novotny had to respect. He had to cajole them as well, giving them awards and petting them, and they had their own *dachas* - they didn't call them *dachas*, but essentially country villas. They were well taken care of. And for the most part they accepted this, went along with it, but insisted on their own freedom to criticize this or that aspect of society. When they really got in trouble was when they began to criticize Czech foreign policy in June 1967, and particularly the allegiance to the Soviet Union, which was untouchable.

Q: Well something I forgot - the 1967 War. I was in Yugoslavia at the time, and the Communists, including the Yugoslavs, sort of jumped on the side of the Arabs, but most of the people in these Communist countries, particularly the intellectuals and the people who were following it, they were sort of rooting for the Israelis, and it caused a lot of problems.

SKOUG: I think that was analogous.

Q: Well, now, during this time, up to the time we've come to, how was the embassy operating? How were contacts, and was there sort of a spirit of "What's going to happen here?"

SKOUG: Well, for a while we didn't recognize that there was a threat to the Novotny regime. He seemed so firm. But after June, word got out. Within the embassy one of the people who had the most contact with the Czechs was the press and cultural officer, Bob Warner. Bob, who had USIA funding, and his wife Isa were a very gracious couple. They lived out in the middle of Prague, and he could always get the Czech intellectuals, who would be sent to the Salzburg Seminar or something. He had funds available to get some of them to the United States. He was well liked, and he very quickly picked up what was going on in the Writers Union. I would say that I had probably the other major element of contacts because I had all commercial work and the economic reform. And I was lucky because those same principles I mentioned, of openness, willingness to defend this, willingness to accept criticism, admitting they were doing this wrong in the past - they were rather anxious to explain what the purpose of the reform was, and a lot of people wanted to talk to me. So it wasn't my blue eyes. My Czech language helped, but I had access to them. And then there was George Kaplan, the political chief, who was very shrewd and had served in Rumania. He spotted the weaknesses before anybody, by September. Then you began to have things like the death of Jordan. By the way, a Czech reporter called me about the Jordan case just about a week ago. He is doing a documentary film on Czechoslovak attitudes toward Jews and the Near East in the postwar era.

Q: *Could you explain what that was?*

SKOUG: Oh, yes, the Jordan case... Did we discuss this?

Q: *I don't recall it.*

SKOUG: Charles Jordan was a prominent American Jew, who had lived in Czechoslovakia prior to World War II and who was a senior official in JOINT, the Jewish joint distribution committee. He had been to Israel. In August 1967, he arrived in Czechoslovakia with his wife, Elizabeth. They were touring Eastern Europe. I've forgotten where he'd been. He'd already been in Rumania, but anyway, he was on tour to a number of Communist countries, and he planned to go also to Moscow. He visited the embassy. He spoke with Kaplan. He spoke with Ambassador Beam. And then that night he disappeared. We found out about it first thing in the morning, I think, when the wife, called up and said her husband had walked out to get a newspaper or a pack of cigarettes and had not returned. Well, we called, of course, for an investigation. The Department asked Ambassador Beam, who in the meantime had gone to Germany, to return to Czechoslovakia. For a while Jordan was missing. Then he turned up a couple of days later in the Vltava River drowned - no sign of physical violence. The Czechs were embarrassed - at least appeared to be embarrassed. We assumed that a visitor like that, who obviously had political connotations in a situation where Czechoslovakia had broken relations with Israel (even though this guy was an American, he was closely associated with Israel), he was being watched carefully no doubt by the Arabs, possibly by some terrorist organization. And so we pressed the Czechs to tell us what happened. The Czechs said they didn't know, that there had been loud voices, possibly a confrontation between the Jordans and so forth, raising the idea that Jordan had perhaps committed suicide or something, which seemed extremely unlikely. You don't jump into a river in Czechoslovakia, especially a river like the Vltava, for a swim. Somebody probably put him in the river, and the question was who it was, whether it was Arabs, the Czechoslovak secret police, or the KGB. I'm assume the KGB was involved since Jordan was an international figure and was planning to visit the USSR. Did they slip up and let this guy just wonder off... which is possible, but unlikely - or were they watching and thinking, well, the Arabs will rough him up or the Arabs will kidnap him and hold him or something, whatever? He disappeared, was found dead, autopsies conducted, couldn't find any violence, and the case has never been solved. We pressed it. Back in 1968, as I'll explain, we had a little more influence with the Dubcek Government than we'd had with Novotny, and they simply said, "We don't know."

Anyway, this was a shocking case. There had been a kidnaping, by the way, earlier in the year when a South Korean team played volley ball in Prague. The victim was a sportswriter following the South Korean volley ball team and he simply disappeared. Possibly he was South Korean intelligence. In any case, we never knew his fate. The Koreans weren't represented in Czechoslovakia. I later learned he'd been turned over to the North Koreans and probably was tortured to death. So that sort of thing, common in the 1950s, was still possible in Czechoslovakia in 1967, as the Kazan-Komarek case also showed. They were ready to play hardball, and by the fall of 1967, Miroslav Mamula, head of the Eighth Department of the Central Committee, which included security and defense matters, had organized a militant movement to protect Novotny

come what may and to find somebody responsible, whether it was an internal opponent or “Western spies.”

Q: Well, all these movements - the students, the writers and all - what was the Czech media and other organs of the administration doing towards the United States? Were we responsible for it all?

SKOUG: Well, the Czech media betrayed no sign that there was any disturbance going on, but they condemned *Literarni Noviny*, organ of the Writers Union. They condemned the writers. Let's distinguish between the journalists and the writers. The writers were playwrights and people who made films or wrote books and so forth, sort of the intellectual writers. They were the ones in revolt. The journalists were not in revolt. The journalists' organization condemned the writers for their challenge to society. They were completely dominated by what faithfully reflected the Party point of view. You could read one newspaper and you'd read them all. We used to read several newspapers, and there'd be virtually no difference. So in 1967 you could not look to the press or to the media. There were good people in the media, but they weren't able to do anything yet. They hadn't passed the liminal where they could begin. The explosion of 1968 was precisely press and radio, but at that point in 1967 they were still placid.

Q: Well, then, you were saying Brezhnev came. That was sort of a crucial point, was it?

SKOUG: That was very crucial.

Q: He came when?

SKOUG: I think it was December 11th.

Q: 1967.

SKOUG: 1967. And the Central Committee was about to meet, and Brezhnev hadn't really been invited. No one knew who invited him. Apparently Novotny had invited him, hoping that he would come and attend the plenum and warn that, you know, "The Soviet Union is watching you," and that would calm things down. But he didn't do that. Instead, he talked to Novotny, he spoke to Dubcek about this nationalism thing, and he spoke to Jiri Hendrych, who was the number-two man in the party, a faithful Communist and the head of the ideology department, the one who had been jousting with the writers and had condemned them and was considered, if anything, worse than Novotny. Dubcek had done a very clever thing. Dubcek had already challenged Novotny's double role, which was being president of the country, a very powerful office in Czechoslovakia because Thomas Masaryk's prestige built the presidency up, and he was also first secretary of the Party. And so this was sort of a duplication of powers or “accumulation of offices,” as it was called, and Dubcek had raised this question. He had artfully suggested to Hendrych that if Novotny had to step down as first secretary of the party, Hendrych himself would make a good first secretary. Hendrych happened to be on the five member Committee deciding whether Dubcek was a “nationalist,” and Hendrych voted he wasn't. And Hendrych told Brezhnev that he himself would make a good first secretary of the Party. When Brezhnev heard that, he decided that - well, who knows. Brezhnev said nothing, but one infers from his action that "It's up to you, dear

Czechoslovak comrades." So he left. And Novotny later said it would have been better if he hadn't come, because with Brezhnev in Moscow Novotny could at least have taken the position "I've been talking to Brezhnev, and he is very concerned with what's going on." Instead he comes, and says, "It's up to you, Comrades." So it was up to them.

The big battle was the December plenum of the Central Committee. Of course, we were not getting daily reports. There was no CNN, and there was no interviewing this guy and that guy. Kaplan was no longer in Prague. I had a number of friends, and they were telling me that there would be changes in the government. It was obvious. There were too many issues that they couldn't all be swept under the rug. So it became obvious, and we were reporting, that Novotny might be replaced as head of the Party by - we were thinking - Cernik. Cernik was a deputy premier, and he was thought to be one of the liberals. It didn't quite work out that way. There was opposition to Novotny., but there was no rival candidate. The conclusion of this historic committee was then postponed until the end of December. It was at this point that the threat reached its maximum. Dubcek went back to Bratislava at one time waiting for the knock on the door. He thought that maybe Novotny would say, "Heck with this stuff. Let's crack down." He didn't. He never quite had the nerve to let Mamala run rampant, although the troops were ready. Some of the troops mobilized. By January 3rd, 1968, Novotny was still fighting for his position, but on January 5th he had to give up. There had been so much opposition to him, without anybody forming a successor. Some people wanted Jozef Lenart. Lenart was another Slovak who was thought to be a liberal, but he wasn't. Anyway, finally by a process of elimination, the party leadership settled on Dubcek as the one compromise candidate everybody could accept, not because Dubcek stood out for his leadership at this point, but because he seemed to be acceptable to enough people who did not want Novotny.

Q: Well, what had Novotny done? Was it just that he was too powerful a leader and had too many enemies?

SKOUG: Yes, and he was associated with the purge trials of the '50s, which he tried to deny, but it's quite clear that he was. He was a very senior member of the Party. When Klement Gottwald died in 1953, Novotny was there to replace him. And so he'd been in power a long time. He'd made a lot of enemies. He'd been able to maintain power because he kept the country quiet, and that's what the Soviets liked. If anything, the Soviets wanted him to loosen up. On one occasion, when Khrushchev was still in power, he sent Brezhnev, and Brezhnev had told Novotny he should relax his style, let people out of prison - people like Josef Smrkovsky, who became one of the great men in 1968, possibly the greatest ally of Dubcek. He'd been in prison a long time. Even Ludvik Svoboda, the man who became president, had been in prison briefly at the time of the purge. The purges had really cleaned out the Party, and now these people wanted rehabilitation. In addition to that, of course, there were thousands and thousand of totally innocent people who had been purged, and they needed rehabilitation. Novotny was very slow on that. Novotny was slow on economic reform. The reformers wanted to do a lot more than he was willing to do. He finally agreed to it, but on the grounds or with the understanding that there would be no political implications - but he couldn't stop the political implications.

Q: Well, was it that Novotny was sort of out of touch, or was it just his type of leadership was passé?

SKOUG: Well, I think that he was aware that there was a lot of opposition. He made various threatening speeches saying liberalism is on the loose and we can't tolerate this, we can't tolerate this indolence in the population. He saw in a lot of this social criticism from the literary people an indication that the Czechs were not tough like Communists ought to be. The party was too big. The party was too soft. He wanted a more militant stance. And yet he lacked the authority. He lacked friends when it came to the push. When it came to the crisis, even people like Hendrych weren't willing to support him. So they were able to let him go. By the way, they didn't let him go entirely, because he stayed on as president of Czechoslovakia. As a matter of fact, when he laid down his office as first secretary of the Communist Party, unlike most people in a Communist-style takeover, Novotny wasn't trashed. He was thanked for his great service and so forth and was expected to stay on to do important things as president of the country. In 1968, Novotny continued the fight. He opposed Dubcek and quickly played on Moscow's suspicion that something was wrong in Czechoslovakia. Brezhnev, having made his mistake in December, 1967, was probably especially alert to this sort of thing because his colleagues in the Politburo would hold him responsible if things went wrong..

Q: *How did things develop?*

SKOUG: Well, Dubcek came to power. The Party published his life history, which we began to study. He had grown up in the Soviet Union, had been taken there as a small boy. He spoke Russian fluently. He'd only come back to Slovakia at the time just before the Second World War because the Soviets insisted that those exiled Communists like his father and mother must either become Soviet citizens or leave. And they chose to leave rather than become Soviet citizens. That's how Dubcek got back to Slovakia. He took part in the Slovak uprising against the Germans in 1944. His brother was killed in the fighting. He had the record of a lifelong Communist, the son of lifelong Communists, who had trained in the Soviet Union and ostensibly the Russians should have been very, very happy indeed. But really, they weren't so happy because they knew he had been there at the time of Khrushchev, associated with a lot of Russian critics. Khrushchev in domestic politics was something of a reformer, and Dubcek shared that spirit, and he later wrote that although he and Milos Jakes and others - I think possibly Lenart - were all in the Soviet Union at the same time studying there, "We may have read the same books, but we didn't come back with the same ideas." He later maintained that he came back with a more tolerant idea, and really the record bears him out, because in the fight for rehabilitation of former political prisoners, Dubcek was on the side of rehabilitation; Novotny was on the other side. Dubcek, as he became head of the party in Slovakia, permitted the Slovak Writers Union much greater freedom than the Czech Writers Union had, particularly after the crackdown. *Literarni Noviny*, which was the organ of the Czech writers, was placed under the Ministry of the Interior by Novotny in 1967, after which time no one would write for it. And they all began to publish from Slovakia, where Dubcek was. So it could be inferred that Dubcek was not a hardliner - he was very pro-Russian and he maintained that outlook until his death. He always thought the August 1968 intervention was a tragic mistake. He liked the Soviet Union. If only the Soviet Union had been able to understand that he was trying to make communism popular again, whereas Novotny had abused it. If you really opened the windows, people would rally to the cause. And that's what Dubcek, in his naïveté, believed, and he believed that he ought to be able to convince the Russians. There are sort of two theses about the first months of Dubcek, and of course Dubcek did not have a long time in power, but he did have

until the invasion about seven and a half months. During the first two months it was thought or sometimes said that the other Communist countries gave him a honeymoon, and the Czechoslovak population didn't see much difference between him and Novotny. I can assure you that neither of those are right, because almost immediately it was clear to any observer on the scene that there was a brand-new spirit in the country. A television program would appear without "Party spirit," without an ideological content. There was a documentary on the three houses which the Peceks prominent Czechoslovak coal barons had built in the 1930s. The television reporter simply pointed out that one of them was occupied by the American ambassador. Here's the American ambassador living in this Petschek house. The Soviet embassy is in another one, and the Chinese embassy was in the third one. And they didn't say "boo" about the exploiters being in one and the... It was just a documentary. Well, if somebody who didn't know communism had seen that, he would have said, "Well, it's like what you see on television." But you didn't see that on television in Communist countries or in the Novotny period. So very quickly there were real changes. And it was pointed out to us... There was an editorial in *Rude Pravo* right away-

Q: *Rude Pravo being the main-*

SKOUG: -being the *Pravda* of Czechoslovakia.

Q: *What does it mean - "Workers' Truth?"*

SKOUG: "Ruddy Truth," or "right," *pravo* is "right." It means "law" as well. This editorial said, in effect, the party needs to explain what it is doing because, for one thing, the *Rude Pravo* staff had rebelled against knowing nothing of what was going on in December. They themselves didn't know. They really couldn't explain, even though the press was totally muzzled. They didn't know because nobody told them that there was a revolt going on, so they demanded to know. Particularly they wanted to know whether somebody mobilize the armed forces to protect Novotny? And it later developed that, indeed, that had happened. Well, this was pointed out to us as a very significant editorial, and we advised the Department of State to look at it with special interest. It was indicative, and although Dubcek didn't run around making speeches at the beginning, wherever he appeared, his spontaneity came through. You could see that this was not another Communist *apparatchik*. We speculated in our first assessment on how much power he was really going to have because he was already talking about "humanism," and a little bit of reform, but we wondered what was going to happen to the leading role of the Party. Of course, this was an issue that never was resolved. The issue was there from the beginning.

Moreover, the states around him were all concerned. The first one was Hungary, and János Kadar played the role of cat's paw. János Kadar was used by Brezhnev, "You be the good cop." And then the bad cop would be Gomulka.

Q: *In Poland, yes.*

SKOUG: Gomulka would worry that he would lose control in Poland if the independent mood in Czechoslovakia spread North. And Kadar would take the position, you know, "Well, we reformers have to be very careful," and so forth. Dubcek sensed this right on because he was invited - summoned, you might say - to Moscow by the end of January, and he explained to them that

reform was needed after Novotny. He could see that his ideas of reform were greeted with great skepticism in the Soviet Politburo, which was going the other way. They had their own purge trials going on, a purge of writers and so forth. It was a hardening in the Soviet Union at the time when the Czechs were becoming more liberal. It was their misfortune they had missed a happier time when the Soviet Union might have been more tolerant.

Q: Well, did you sense a change in sort of the Czech attitude towards American diplomats? Were we opening up, or were we just sort of getting our information from tea leaves and newspapers and all?

SKOUG: No, they were much more willing to be open. For one thing, the civil air negotiations - I think I mentioned that in the last session, the civil air talks we had with the Czechs in 1967 - they resumed in Washington in early 1968, and I had a reception for the delegation before they left. They were happy to come. They talked about how they thought now things would be more propitious.

So they were decidedly more open, willing to talk. I can't say that the attitude towards the United States was altered on the gold/claims issue. That didn't change, because we - we, the British, and French, but really we - had the gold that the Germans had looted from Czechoslovakia, and we hadn't given it back because we were holding it for a satisfactory claims settlement, and there was a great dispute about this particular issue. And it didn't help when Jiri Hajek, who was a wishy-washy reformer, became foreign minister, because Hajek had been the one who had negotiated a draft claims agreement in 1961 with the United States which we weren't willing to follow through on. The Department of State was sure the Senate would never accept such a small figure for property expropriated without compensation by Prague. So he was very, very negative. We had an openness then, and the real area of openness was cooperation within the management area. Actually the Czech reform was called "the new system of management," and my best contact in Czechoslovakia was the director of the Management Institute of Czechoslovakia, which was set up to really train managers and implement the system of reform. They wanted American management methods and techniques. They wanted to meet American managers. They wanted to visit the United States and see American firms. And we, of course, were very, very happy to pursue it. So they opened Czechoslovakia to me. I had already visited some factories. I had much greater opportunities in the company of Jaroslav Jirasek and his colleagues at the Management Institute. And there were other officials - there were management officials at the Higher School of Economics at Prague University. They were similarly anxious. They weren't quite as well wired. Jirasek was closely associated with ex-Premier Lenart, and although he was still somewhat skeptical of the Dubcek reform - he was really concerned with management reform and I think he thought Dubcek was naive - still it became much more possible to cooperate with them in the management field. Very little was done in trade. We didn't have much trade anyway, and as I say, the gold claims issue made matters worse. The United States had given the Czechs a rather tough proposal in November 1967, greatly raising the amount of money we were asking, for the very sound reason that Congress and the creditors in the United States wouldn't accept the original bargain the Department of State had negotiated in about 1961 - two or three million. It was something like three cents on the dollar, and nobody would accept that. So we had to live with this problem, and it didn't get any better.

Q: As I recall - again I go back to my Yugoslav experience - around 1965 Congress had insisted that there be conducted in the field investigations by federal benefits people - particularly Social Security people - to see that people were still alive and all that. And we got a very reluctant agreement out of the Yugoslavs, but I understand the Czechs also agreed to that. Were you seeing any results of this sort of thing?

SKOUG: That sort of thing was negotiated in the middle of 1968 at the time we were trying to work out a major settlement. We made them an offer which included the gold and would tie in the claims... Beam wanted to tie it to MFN treatment for Czechoslovakia. We didn't do that. But anyway, part of the deal was that they would get the access to those monies, the Social Security monies and so forth or Veterans' Administration or whatever social claims checks citizens might have, and there was a stipulation that people would come from Washington to verify the legitimacy of the claimants. The Czechs didn't like it, but they accepted it. They were willing to have them come. Unfortunately, by the time this agreement was to be implemented, the Soviet forces were arriving in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Czech refugee or maybe not just refugee but sort of Czech or Slovak communities in the United States, immigrant communities? Did they play any role? I mean were they sort of coming in and getting some congressmen to make statements and all that?

SKOUG: No, compared, for example, to the Cuban situation, they were always very, very small. Congressman Vanik was not particularly involved. He was more involved in the Jackson-Vanik Amendment that affected the Soviet Union, but he wasn't really involved in Czechoslovakia. There was interest. Senator Pell, however, led the interest. Pell was kind of a dabbler in Czechoslovakia because he had served a tour of duty in Slovakia.

Q: He was very proud of having opened up Bratislava.

SKOUG: Yes, because he'd been in Bratislava before. But he was not willing to carry the heavy load because the heavy load, if he wanted a claims agreement, wasn't in negotiating with the Czechs so much as it was negotiating with the creditors and Congress. The creditors wanted substantial settlements. And that didn't change. As a matter of fact, that was tough. It was a general tendency, by the way, of the Dubcek government to keep the United States at arm's length because as the Soviet dissatisfaction and the East German-Polish dissatisfaction with events in Czechoslovakia began to rise, the Czechs saw keeping the United States at a distance a way to demonstrate to the Russians that they were loyal. They were not going the way of the Hungarians by any means. They would stand with the Warsaw Pact. There was never any question that they would be loyal to their obligations. And so they sort of welcomed a hard, formal relationship with the United States - no visiting trade mission, for example. They made that clear to me in February. "As long as the gold/claims issue remains, forget about having any trade mission here." Well, we didn't have a trade mission there, but we did send managers. We were able to work around it, but on anything that would catch public attention they wanted to be negative. Of course, they were top aid givers to the North Vietnamese, which didn't help, either; at the time, of course, the Vietnamese War was at a height, and next to the Russians and the Chinese, the Czechs were providing about as much help to the North Vietnamese as anyone. There was a major demonstration at the U.S. Embassy that went on for two days in the spring of 1968, in which a Vietnamese student tore down

the American flag from the embassy and they kept the embassy hermetically sealed for two days. The Czechs permitted that. They thought that would be good news in Moscow, at a time when they were beginning to have bad relations, which made it more difficult for us to be helpful to the Czechs, not that we had been very able to help them much anyway.

Q: Did the ambassador sort of say, "Look, this is a developing situation, and while we wish them well, we could just louse things up if we get too close." Were we sort of deliberately keeping back ourselves, or did it just happen because that's the way the Czechs were?

SKOUG: For one thing, Secretary Rusk was not an admirer of the Czechs, for one reason or another, possibly their attitude on Vietnam. Also, Secretary Rusk had a plan going for LBJ. In 1968, LBJ had renounced running again for office, but he wanted a swan-song visit to Leningrad (St. Petersburg - Leningrad in those days), where he would meet Soviet Premier Kosygin. Kosygin was thought to be an important negotiator at that point. He wasn't so important, but LBJ thought he was. LBJ was to meet Kosygin in Leningrad and they would talk about arms control. Johnson and Rusk had in mind a great arms agreement which would go down on LBJ's escutcheon as, you know, along with the Great Society here's the Great Agreement with the Russians.

So in a way the Czech situation got in the way of this. Rusk himself did not want, never wanted the situation heated up. He resisted any effort to publicly make a stand, and he was supported by most of the top people in the Department - not all of them, but most of them - who said that it would be better just to talk to the Russians quietly. They only did it once. Rusk had one meeting with Dobrynin where he warned them very gently that it would harm our relationship, that is, the U.S.-Soviet relationship, if the Soviets did anything untoward towards the Czechs. And of course Dobrynin said, "We have no intention of doing anything like that." That was it. That was all. As a matter of fact, Rusk was quite indignant when questioned in public about this. "We have not raised this with the Russians." "Have you raised such an issue?" "No, we have not raised it with the Russians."

Beam tried to make progress where he could. He tried to make progress on gold/claims, but that was absolutely stymied. There was no way in which our position could be married to theirs because the Czechs insisted on this foolish agreement that we had initialed in 1961 and on which we had reneged because it would never have gone through Congress. Now we had a new proposal on the table that they said was an insult, and so back and forth it went. And then the bilateral issues, the Foreign Ministry type of issues - we were at loggerheads. Where we weren't, as I say, was managers, culture, popular things. The Prague Spring was spontaneous. As soon as the Czechs realized that there was nobody holding on the lid, the lid began to come off. And as people tried - like explaining the Petschek house - the next thing was a question about "what is your view of democracy?" and so forth - public interviews - here the TV is asking men on the street what they thought. One of them was asked: "What is your view of socialist democracy?" and the fellow said, "Well, that's when you have free elections, when you can say this..." You know, he enumerated all the things about democracy, and then the interviewer said, "And socialist democracy?" And the man just smiled. He didn't say anything. He didn't say a word. What he meant, clearly, was that democracy needed no loaded adjective. And this was a spontaneous freedom of expression that really began to worry the East Germans and the Poles.

Q: How were we watching? I mean, were we just basically sitting there watching this, and were we going Oh-oh, this might get to be a little too free and easy, or were we just sort of basking in how this thing was working out?

SKOUG: Well, in my book I pointed out that I wrote in my journal that there was a pendulum swinging way out. It was going in one direction and the population wanted it to keep on going, but there was a counterforce, and eventually the pendulum would start the other way. Well, the counterforce was really outside the country. There was a counterforce in the country, too, but it was insufficient. Novotny tried to be that counterforce, but it didn't work. Dubcek finally... They removed Novotny from the presidency after he had made speeches challenging the reform, and they removed some of the hardliners. But still, Dubcek was a man who surrounded himself with all sorts of people, and it so happened that the presidium in which he found himself had a lot of people who finally went over to the Russian side in August. Just about a majority went over. He never surrounded himself with enough friends, and he had friends by the million - but they weren't in the Presidium.

Sure, we were aware, very much aware. The embassy was pretty well informed at this point. And very much aware that Dubcek could get in trouble and was in trouble with his neighbors. The question was, would he have the smarts to get out of it? And he tried to crack down. The May plenum of the Communist Party was considered sort of a "Thermidor," where they said there wouldn't be any political parties outside the National Front and the press would have to be controlled, have to remember that our allies had to be respected, and so forth. The Soviets liked it. The Soviets later said after the invasion, they thought after the May plenum that maybe things would be okay. Some of the Czech leaders - Josef Smrkovsky, who was the best of people around Dubcek and who was president of the National Assembly, took a National Assembly delegation to Moscow and the Soviet Union. He'd been criticized sharply, particularly by the East Germans, as a rabble-rouser and a radical, but he won Soviet respect, at least temporarily. But of course the basic fact was Dubcek did not want to crack down and was not able to crack down on what was happening spontaneously in Czechoslovakia. The questions was whether it was reform or revolution. You had all sorts of opinions being expressed. You had people like Vaclav Havel and others who were not Communists at all expressing views that if you don't have freedom for another political party-that is a democratic alternative-then what is the control on this democracy?

The leaders were using the term *democracy* so the liberals who were outside the party, or even some inside the party, began to explore what democracy really means. Democracy means the right to run against you. And pretty soon the hardliners were saying, "Now wait a minute. Who said that?" Then after several meetings with the Communist brethren, the Five who later invaded the country, from which the Romanians and the Yugoslavs were excluded (the Yugoslavs were frequently excluded, but the Romanians were also excluded this time), and these guys would gang up on Dubcek in meetings, and then the arranged for military maneuvers in Czechoslovakia. The Soviet forces maneuvered in Czechoslovakia in June and July, and at this point - this was when the public first turned to warning - there was the "2,000 Words Manifesto" of Ludvik Vaculik, the guy who had really attacked Novotny the year before at the Writers Congress. He came up with a manifesto called "2,000 Words," which was signed by a number of prominent Czech intellectuals, warning that they would go if necessary to the end to save the government if it saves itself, clearly implying that the Czechs must resist an invasion. Wow, that set off Brezhnev. He was furious

when he read "2,000 Words." Now the counterrevolutionaries are running wild he thought. It was at that point that the Soviets called a meeting in Warsaw, but the Czechs wouldn't go because they wanted to meet individually. They said that they'd meet the five angry brethren individually with each of the Five, but they weren't going to be summoned one more time to be spanked by the Five collectively. So in Warsaw the Five met, and came up with what was called later the "Warsaw Doctrine." This was "You can do this and you can do that, but this thing, socialism - *"To je vasi vec, to je nasi vec"* - 'that's your affair, but that's our affair too' - socialism. When you begin to fool around with socialism that's not just your affair. It was very clear. They were right on the table. The Brezhnev Doctrine at this point emerged in the Warsaw Letter. And the Warsaw Letter was addressed not to Dubcek but to the whole Central Committee because the Russians thought, with reason, that on the Central Committee and on the Presidium there were a lot of people who shared their concerns. But by this time, Dubcek had already been obliged... Dubcek was really not the leader of this - he was going along with it, but he was no means the leader of the Prague Spring. The real mass leadership within the Party called for a new Party Congress, which would be an extraordinary Congress. Dubcek had resisted calling an extraordinary Party Congress because he didn't want to rock the boat. They, the patriotic or liberal faction, wanted to rock the boat. They wanted to get rid of all these guys that were holding back on reform and who were taking the side of the enemy and so forth. They wanted to go forward with a real liberalization. So they set a date for the Congress, the 14th Congress. And they had elections to the 14th Congress. A lot of the hardliners were losing these elections, and so it was clear to them that if this Congress met, they'd be finished. And at the point when the Central Committee met to discuss the Warsaw Letter and to respond to it, which was in July of 1968, a lot of the people who were going to be elected to the Congress, which was set for September, were invited to the meeting so that Dubcek would have a majority, and Dubcek got himself a majority by hook or crook. And he completely cowed even the most extreme of the radicals so that the answer by the Czechoslovak Communist Party to the Five Communist Party for the Warsaw Letter (the response was about three times as long as the original letter) in effect said, "Yes, there are a lot of people out there, Americans and West Germans and so forth, who are trying to screw us up, but we know what we're doing. We can manage. Socialism is not in danger in this country. We're in charge here." And so forth. So they responded, in effect, by thumbing their nose while agreeing that there were still some anti-socialist forces around: "We've got them under control. Don't worry about us."

Q: During this period, with the Prague Spring and things opening up, was there a sort of an influx of the "glitterati," the intelligentsia, whatever you want to call it, the flower children of Western Europe and the United States coming to Prague to see what's happening? And the media too?

SKOUG: There weren't so many flower children. Of course, I'm a little bit out of touch because it was after I left Washington in January of 1967. When I left the United States, there weren't so many flower children.

Q: Not flower children, but I'm talking about the -

SKOUG: The people who later took over in 1968 in the United States, certainly they were not involved. They didn't come to Czechoslovakia.

Q: Were you getting good German socialists and the literary figures and all coming to see this blossoming. Or was it pretty much in a vacuum?

SKOUG: There were a lot of journalists coming in to see it. There were people like - this was a singular situation - Robert Vaughn, the movie actor came in. But he was making a movie. Of all things, they were making a movie of *The Bridge at Remagen*. The Bridge of Remagen had long disappeared down the Rhine, but there was a bridge in Czechoslovakia which looked just like it. And so they brought in some old tanks from the Second World War, and the actors were there. They went down to a Czech town on the Vltava river, Davle, and there they did a lot of scenes of the movie. Well, the Russians and the East Germans made much of this. "Here, look, they're already bringing in their weapons." And it became a big issue. When the invasion came, Robert Vaughn was the first to escape. Shirley Temple was there. There were a lot of people, a big community. It became short of chic to be in Czechoslovakia. It was the most interesting thing that had happened, certainly, since Hungary, and Hungary really was bloody, whereas Czechoslovakia was not. And so you could come there and see a situation where Communism was imploding, where people were lining up to buy newspapers because newspapers now said something, and the press was relatively free - not free, but it was a lot freer than it was anywhere else in the communist world. That's where the situation stood when the Czechs responded to the Warsaw Letter. At the time that happened, the Soviet forces were still around, and there was a lot of criticism of that. The Czech leadership had to apologize for the Russians being there, explain why they were there and so forth. Eventually the troops left, but they didn't really withdraw from the region. They just went away over to the side, to the border. I had a chance to see some of that. Senator Pell came to Prague in 1968, around July 4th, and he wanted to go to Košice. Košice was a town in the Hungarian part of Czechoslovakia in the part taken from Hungary after the First World War. It was very close to the Soviet Union. He just wanted to see what Košice was like. He didn't have a visa. And then he wanted to go on to Uzhgorod, a town about a mile from the border, which had been in Czechoslovakia prior to the Second World War but, became part of the Soviet Union. So we had to scurry around. The Russians, believe it or not, gave Pell a visa in one day, and Pell and I and Jim Lowenstein - you probably knew him -

Q: Jim and I served in Serbia together, served in Belgrade together.

SKOUG: Jim and I and Pell flew to Košice, and there we had a chance to see what the Prague Spring looked like a few miles from the Soviet Union. It looked like it looked in Prague, people dancing and the big beat, and so you couldn't imagine you were in a Communist country. There was freedom from of expression. There was the spirit, particularly among the youth, which the Prague Spring inspired throughout the whole country. The next day we went to Uzhgorod. We went to the border. And this border looked like the Iron Curtain - two Communist countries, but there was a Soviet motorized infantry regiment maneuvering. It had just come back from Czechoslovakia. You could hear them firing, firing all the time. You could see the barbed wire and the plowed earth. It was just like the Iron Curtain. Pell was traveling, as senators did in those days, with an official passport. I suppose Lowenstein had an official passport, too. I had a diplomatic passport, of course. Pell was carrying a small gray canvas bag. He had been using me as an interpreter in Eastern Slovakia, and then we got to the border and the Soviet border guard asked him to surrender that briefcase. He didn't have any immunity, so he did. He surrendered his briefcase without informing me. I didn't know it, didn't see it. And then we sat on the border for

nearly an hour. And finally Pell said, "You've got to get that briefcase back. It's got all my notes." He had had all these interviews with Czech leaders in Prague the previous day, and they'd got all the notes and were undoubtedly copying the whole damn thing. "You've got to get that back." Well, I knew that the more of an issue I made of it, they'd show more attention than ever. But anyway, fortunately, he got it back, got his canvas bag back. We went to Uzhgorod. We spent maybe 45 minutes in Uzhgorod eating lunch, and then he wanted to leave. That was his trip to the Soviet Union. I'm probably the only person who ever visited the Soviet Union for one hour. We left the Soviet Union, and I could see the guard almost passing out, the one who'd had us for an hour, and here we come going the other way. Well, I guess Senator Pell had plans to do things in Slovakia in the afternoon, so anyway, he went back. Well, then the next day we flew from Košice to Bratislava, where he wanted to see Bratislava, of course. He told me, as we were on the plane, that gray canvas bag had become lost again. When you report this, it's a small, gray, canvas bag." Well, the Czechs turned it over to him at Bratislava. But anyway, it was an experience, and one of the reasons the Soviets were probably so curious about this trip to Uzhgorod was that a couple of days later they selected Uzhgorod as one of the points where the whole Soviet Politburo and the Czech Presidium should meet. And the reason they called for this meeting, either in Cierna and Tisou or in Kiev or in Uzhgorod, was that they thought that Dubcek had a lot of opposition, and he did, in the Presidium - and their Politburo, of course, was fully united, and they would be able to overawe him because he wouldn't have enough of his friends around. The Russians thought, too, that the Czech Communist Party was divided. They thought that the Central Committee was divided. But the further down you went in Czechoslovak system, the less division there was. The Czech population was really fully united. The Czechoslovak Central Committee was not united, but it was stronger for Dubcek than the Presidium which, had five or six guys who were bad. And so the Czechs didn't accept Uzhgorod. They couldn't accept a place outside Czechoslovakia because they felt as soon as they got there, they might be arrested, and that could quite easily have been done, as had happened to Imre Nagy and Paul Molitor in Hungary in 1956.

Anyway, they finally decided on a border point Cierna and Tisou. Cierna is right at the border, near Kosice. They did meet there, the two Presidiums, and they reached an agreement, and then they went to Bratislava the next week with the Poles, East Germans, Hungarians, and Bulgarians to formalize their agreement. All problems had been resolved, and so forth. So that was the situation in early August, and it looked like maybe there had been some reconciliation, but it wasn't clear. We were worried. I remember going to the airport to see Bob and Iza Warner off on August 17. There, Karl Peterlik, a very well-informed Austrian diplomat who had been born in Prague, mentioned a rumor that Brezhnev had given Dubcek a small amount of time to get affairs cleaned up "or else." And I wrote in my journal, "Maybe the honeymoon is over." Well, that was the day that the KGB began to send people into the country preparatory to what happened three days later.

Q: Were we at the embassy waiting for the shoe to drop? Were we listening to what we were hearing from East Berlin and from Moscow and Warsaw and Budapest and all that?

SKOUG: Everyone was hedging their bets. The embassy in Moscow claimed that they had predicted this, but they hadn't. You know, you can write a telegram in ways that some parts will say, you know, "You're on collision course; the Soviets will not permit this to happen," but the Moscow embassy also predicted that they would wait for the 14th Congress to see what happened there. Well, the 14th Congress was over a month away. The hard-liners didn't want the 14th

Congress to meet. That was the thing. That's why the Soviet's acted when they did, to prevent it. And there was a Slovak party congress coming up in Bratislava, which would have thrown out a lot of hardliners there, even before the September date. Those two congresses had to be headed off. Well, you know, we were worried that there could be an invasion. I was in particular. I thought the chance of seeing Soviet soldiers in Prague was considerable, but no one could say, "I said it was going to happen." You said it was going to happen, but if, if, if. Everything was hedged. But we were much more concerned than they were in Washington, where for some reason Dean Rusk had decided that the whole threat had sort of blown over, and so forth. The conversations quoted in the documents coming out of Washington are horrendous. Where they got those ideas... They wanted to think that way because they wanted this meeting in Leningrad, they wanted that trip. And on August 19th or 20th, Dobrynin had attended a dinner on the *Sequoia*, the presidential yacht, and he had said, "Kosygin accepts this date." Of course, Dobrynin knew at this point that the Soviets were going to invade the country because they made their decision on the 17th to invade. He must have known this.

At the same time that they made the decision to invade, they made a decision to receive LBJ in the Soviet Union. We and the Russians agreed on an announcement, and it was going to be announced the following day, on the 21st of August, that Johnson was going to the Soviet Union. When Rusk got the word that they were invading - actually it was Johnson - Johnson got the word directly from Dobrynin on the night of the 20th, who announced that the Soviet government and its allies had entered Czechoslovak territory "At the request of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Johnson thanked him for bringing this important information, which he said he would read and study. He didn't react in fury. He didn't say, "What are you doing?" It was just "Thanks a lot." An unbelievable show. And Rusk's reaction was - what a slap - he called it "a rotten fish," or something. He had some term like that, "a slap in the face to the United States." "You slapped us in the face - we're going to get an invasion of Czechoslovakia. Well, it is not pleasant reading to see how official Washington responded to the news.

Q: Talk about your experiences during the invasion.

SKOUG. Well, I was awakened at two a.m. on the morning of the 21st by the duty officer, Ted Figura, who said, "The Russians are in Bratislava." Now it took me a while to clear up my head, and remember that the Russians had no business being in Bratislava.

Well, they'd reached Bratislava first, because that was one of the closest targets, but they were also coming to Prague. I could hear the drone of engines, which had just started. They began landing at about two in the morning at the Prague airport. They landed with perfect precision. These aircraft were bringing in the invasion force. It was hard to tell what was going on because the conspirators, who were considerable, had got control of Prague radio, and were refusing to publish a statement issued by the Czechoslovak leadership. It had been heard once, and that's how the United States was informed that the country was being invaded without the knowledge or consent of the Czechoslovak Government or Presidium or anybody. But then this message was stopped, so you couldn't hear anything on the radio which would tell you what was going on. In the middle of the night another officer and I went for a long walk in the area; we walked past the Czech government building where the Premier, Cernik, would have been. We were not able to walk as far as the Party building where Dubcek was because that was on the other side of the river and a long way away.

There were couples, a few of them strolling around. It was the middle of the night, but there were cars moving here or there. You couldn't tell what was going on. Already at this point Cernik had been grabbed by the Russians. He was the premier. Shortly thereafter, Dubcek and Smrkovsky were nabbed, and others that the Russians had on their list. They kidnapped all of them and took them separately from Czechoslovakia. They took them first to Poland and then they took them to the Soviet Union around Uzhgorod, as a matter of fact.

We walked the streets, came back, and by the time we got back to the embassy there were new guards and they weren't going to let us in. One of them blocked me with a powerful arm from going into the embassy, and then somebody who knew me said, "That's all right, he belongs to the embassy." They had put these guards, the conspirators had put these guards on there, people in the security services who were cooperating with them, to prevent a lot of Czechs from running into our embassy grounds. They didn't want them to escape in the embassy once the invasion started. Well, that's what it looked like in the middle of the night. Then I went for a walk the first thing in the morning, and you could see the impact of the tanks. The tanks were just arriving. The traffic was just arriving. I don't know about Belgrade, but Prague goes to work early in the morning.

Q: *Oh, yes, very early..*

SKOUG: And the streets are so narrow in Prague, and the streetcars couldn't pass the tanks. The tank would be here, and there'd be a streetcar and then a tank over there. Tanks were islands surrounded by irate Czechs shouting at them. "What are you doing here?" "Well, I have come here to save the Czechs," the drivers seemed to respond, Then the Czechs would say, "We don't need any saving." That was the immediate mood. But then things very quickly got harsher. When I had been out on the walk with my colleague, we had noticed that there was an airplane flying in circles right over the middle of Prague, right over Wenzel Square, Vaclavski Namesti, and the Czech radio was right there. What the drone was doing was guiding the forces coming from the airport towards the heart of the city. As the tanks came through the city in the night to take over the downtown area, they then went for the radios. And I did not see that particular thing. I had gone back to report from the embassy. The radios by this time had come on and they were broadcasting for all they were worth, and they were broadcasting that a group of students and civilians were trying to keep the tanks away from the building. You could hear the firing, the heavy machine gun firing, which shattered concrete walls. They later called the walls El Grechko's mural. Marshall Grechko was a prominent Soviet military figure.

Q: *Yes.*

SKOUG: They were firing on the radio station. And then finally there was a very poignant moment when the radio announcers said, "We're going to have to sign off the air now. When you hear the radio again, you'll hear other voices, but don't trust them." It was really quite something, and then you heard the Czech national anthem, which is particularly beautiful. And then there was just the firing, gunfire following, and there was silence on the radio. And then it came back on, but they were not the bad guys after all. The Czechs had been prepared. They thought the Americans or the West Germans might invade the country, and they had a whole elaborate scheme for broadcasting. For one thing, they broadcast from hidden facilities in the radio itself. The Russians didn't find them for a couple of days. And in addition, they began to broadcast from transmitters which were

mobile, and they began to pass from hand to hand, not only in Prague, but in 15 or 16 points throughout the country. And it was those radios that told the world that the Czechs were still resisting. Without that the embassy couldn't have reported it. The embassy could have reported the thousands of Czechs who took to the street in protest as it did, but it wouldn't have been so descriptive of the widespread nature of the resistance. But with the radio itself and as a Czech author points out, it became the government of the air, it became the government of the resistance, and of those who made it. When the radios told them to demonstrate at noon, they demonstrated. When the radios told them to do this, they did it. It showed how effective and how far the democratic processes had gone in a country that had been a democracy. There just was enough... They weren't dealing with people who didn't have any understanding of democracy.

Q: Well, then, when the Soviets and the East Germans and the Poles and the Hungarians came in, when you saw this, was this... saying, "All right, it's over now?"

SKOUG: Not because of the resistance. The amazing thing was that suddenly you saw on the city's walls the names of Czechs and Slovaks who were traitors. They were the ones who had betrayed Dubcek. Everybody rallied to Svoboda. *Svoboda* means 'freedom' or 'independence' in Czech. He was the president. He was a general who had been a hero in the Soviet Union, but he refused to give in to the conspirators at this point. So he was adulated at a level together with Dubcek - wrongly, because Svoboda was not really a good man; he just was an old soldier who went along with the population. He was dazed and he thought that somehow they could work this out. He flew to Moscow, and he did work it out in the Moscow Agreement, which was a total surrender. But for the moment he was a symbol of resistance, and the fact that he was resisting quickly became known. All of the Communist Party leadership had been kidnapped. A new leadership quickly arose, including guys I knew quite well.

I'll tell you one story. I got a call the second day or the third day of the invasion, while the resistance was going on led by these guys. By the way, the 14th Party Congress took place. These guys organized the Party Congress. All the delegates went in dressed as workers. It took place right under the nose of the Russians. And so the thing that they had come to prevent took place under their nose. Unfortunately, Gustav Husak and a lot of the Slovaks didn't get there. Husak didn't want to go, really, and he later used that as a protest for undoing the 14th Congress and saying it was not a Congress because the Slovaks weren't there. But be that as it may, the popular resistance was everywhere. It was obvious that people were resisting, and so it was obvious to the world, and of course we were even reporting that as was Czechoslovak radio. The radio was being picked up all over the country depending upon what resistance was taking place at this or that point. So no one could assume that the Russians had won. They had the country physically; it was beautiful. Their military operations couldn't have been better. They had worked it all out during their maneuvers, of course. The forces that had maneuvered, were the same forces that had come back. The ones that had been maneuvering, had gone over the border when the maneuvers ended, came back. They knew exactly what they were to do, but they didn't have a political plan. They had planned to have a workers-peasants government headed by Alois Indra, who was a key Party secretary close to Dubcek. As I say, they had five or six guys on the Presidium, and a few in the secretariat, who supported the invasion. But they lost their nerve when they saw how much resistance there was. Finally, they all trooped up to Svoboda, the president, and asked him to approve a government, and he refused. Instead of that Svoboda went to Moscow taking some of them with him. He was really

playing both sides, although the Czech people thought they'd won. They thought that they had won when the Soviets had to negotiate after having invaded the country and being unable to take it over. The Czechs really thought they had won. And of course at this point Dubcek and the others were released from their prisons where they were probably going to be shot, and they were brought to Moscow because Svoboda had insisted that his colleagues take part in the negotiations. Well, they didn't really take part. Dubcek certainly didn't. He was present, and according to his memoirs, he opposed... there are various accounts of this, but the bad guys had a majority, even on the Czech group that was negotiating with the Russians in Moscow. At the time the resistance was standing down the Russians in Czechoslovakia. The Russians would have had to employ force. Svoboda said he didn't want any bloodshed. I don't know what the Russians could have done if the Czechs hadn't given in, but the Czechs certainly could have driven a better bargain than they did. There was a... They caviled and gave in. They signed a very bad agreement. Their only thought was that, like Good Soldier Svejk, once they had got out of this thing they could somehow hoodwink the Russians, but they weren't dealing with Austrians. They were dealing with hard-liners in the Kremlin, who were not about to let the Czechs go. That would usher in a new phase, but the Soviet troops would remain. The resistance in Czechoslovakia thought they had won. When the delegation came back from Moscow, the Czechs turned out in the thousands. And then when they heard the speeches of Dubcek and Svoboda and Smrkovsky, they knew that they'd been totally sold out. That model collapsed on August 27th a really devastating day. That was seven days after the invasion.

Q: Well, while you were there, were East German, Polish, Hungarian troops evident?

SKOUG: Not in Prague. The East Germans were involved in their area, up around Decin, I guess. I think they were pulled back early because it was recognized that it wasn't a good idea to send German troops into Czechoslovakia. The Poles and the Hungarians and the Bulgarians were despised, but the Czechs knew who did it. They knew it was the Russians. They blamed the Russians. Not much about the others. Outside of Prague it might have felt different.

Q: Were there any problems with Soviet troops? You know, people going up and saying "Why are you here and that sort of thing."

SKOUG: Sure there were lots of incidents, and there were a number of people killed. The Soviets rode around town with their machine guns loaded, and in one case they went over a bump and killed a young woman. She was just standing there. She wasn't doing anything. There were several incidents like that. I myself saw a Czech grab a Soviet officer's submachine gun and run off. The Soviet ran after him. He would have been shot by his own people if he hadn't got his gun back. I heard a round of gunfire, but I don't know what happened because they were out of sight.

I was in the embassy on one occasion early in the invasion when a Soviet armored personnel carrier with a large cannon mounted on it came right to the embassy. It sat there a long time facing the embassy with a gun aimed at it. It didn't fire. The next thing that happened was that we spotted some Soviet soldiers who were on the grounds of the embassy, our grounds, high ground above the embassy which belonged to us. Whether they knew that was part of the embassy or not I don't know, but they were eating apples from one of the apple trees. Ambassador Beam sent our political counselor, first secretary of embassy, Mark Garrison, who was a Russian speaker, to tell them they

were eating American apples. Well, they didn't leave immediately, but eventually they did. But there were other problems. The security officer had a shotgun stolen from his apartment. You can understand why that would happen, I guess, but they broke in. They must have known it was an embassy apartment. It wasn't in the embassy. It was an officer living outside the embassy. And there were plenty of other incidents. They shot up the Swiss embassy very badly. No one was killed there. They came prepared to use their weapons. We could see them firing tracer bullets. A lot of them were in the yard. My apartment happened to front on the wall facing the high ground, and so the bullets were coming down there. We still had our daughter there and my wife made the decision not to leave. My wife made the decision. I didn't make it for her.

An interesting thing was the special train. We had a lot of people visiting. There was a geologists congress. There was a whole delegation of young people from somewhere out in Kansas. There were many, many visitors. I mentioned Shirley Temple was there, and the "Man from U.N.C.L.E." [Robert Vaughn] was there, and a number of Americans were there. The question was how to get them out. You'd organize a column of cars. Shirley Temple got out that way. But the cars couldn't take out anything like the number of people who were trapped in the city. And of course no one knew what was going to happen. They didn't know whether the Russians would begin firing or not, and so the hope was to get them out. I think this was the second day. I had an earlier opportunity to meet the vice-minister of transport because an American official, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Transport Robert Agger, had paid a visit to Czechoslovakia in June and I accompanied him. We had taken the transport minister's special train to Plzen and so had a bit of contact with their transport people. Many phones were out and other attempts to obtain transport proved negative. We had tried to get these people out by buses, but the Czechs wouldn't let them risk it. They said the Soviets would destroy their buses in no time. So the train was the only hope. You couldn't count on anybody being anywhere in particular. But I called the Ministry of Transport cold, and Tichy, the vice minister, answered the phone. I said there were a lot of Americans still here, could he possibly organize a special train? I thought he was going to say, "Don't you know there's a war on?" But he said, "Yes." He organized it, but he said, "It can't leave from the main station because the Soviets are occupying it." So it was agreed that this train would leave from another station, and the Consular Section then tried to get all Americans out, including the students from Kansas. Many foreigners also took this train, and I suppose maybe some Czechs too. Anyway, this train was loaded with people, and it left by night. And I was really worried about the train getting through because although the Soviets had not by this time occupied a lot of southern Bohemia, it would have required just one or two armored personnel carriers or tanks spotting a train moving to make them blow it to smithereens. And I was glad to hear on one of the local radios, the radio coming out of, I guess it was Ceske Budejovice, one of the southern Czech towns, that a train had just passed through there headed for the border with Austria. When it reached the border they had a long discussion there with border officials, but anyway all those people made it successfully. And I think the ambassador got a lot of praise for being able to evacuate people quickly.

Q: How did you feel about responses? You mentioned that neither Rusk nor Johnson had responded adequately when they heard that something was going to happen. How about later, some hours later and all?

SKOUG: The main concern was damage control. Messages went out saying that this should not lead to any problems in international bodies where we were talking to the Russians about

disarmament or something. In other words, they didn't want this complication to interfere with other things going on. It was not a good show. The only one who did anything was George Ball, who was our representative to the United Nations. He gave it to the Russians, but with a lot of humor. In fact, Dobrynin complained about Ball's remarks as not in the spirit of U.S.-Soviet relations and so forth. He's the only one who made the Russians squirm a little. Rusk even emphasized in his meetings with foreign diplomats that we had had our problems with the Czechs under Dubcek and we were just taking this position to show the way we would support any small country. This cool attitude was his reaction to the Czechoslovak government's attempt to curry favor with the Russians by being tough with us. They did nothing to seek our sympathy. They didn't think they were going to be invaded. They didn't think they needed us. If we were going to be of any help, they said we could give them back their gold. That was essentially their position. But our rather limp reaction, of course, overlooked the fact that there were millions of Czechs who were going to suffer from Soviet action. It wasn't just Dubcek and a few people around him who were going to suffer: it was the Czechoslovak population, which lost everything in the invasion. But there was never an American statement about it, or any other Western country, for that matter. We'll see when we go into the subject on Germany, that the Germans didn't react any better. Our first concern was that the Germans not overreact, make sure the Germans don't put anybody near the border. The whole thing was damage control. NATO through embassies in NATO countries, was warned not to let this heat things up. It was business as usual.

Q: Was the Consular Section besieged by people trying to get the hell out of there? What about the exodus?

SKOUG: Well, that's what I say. There were two main means for doing this, and the Americans who wanted to leave. One was the automobile caravan, which was stopped for a while but then went through - a young embassy officer driving the first car -

Q: I want to talk about Czechs now.

SKOUG: Oh, Czechs. Not many tried to enter our compound. A lot of them were outside of Czechoslovakia on summer vacation, and they had the choice on whether to come back or not. I know some young people really hesitated to return. One fellow who was with a Czech company called "Made in Publicity," believe it or not, said that if it had been just he and his wife (he was probably in his middle 40s), they would have stayed out. They spoke German and would have made it. But he had two boys 16. That led him to choose to return. I'd say most Czechs came back. Some stayed out, particularly those like Ota Sik. Sik realized that he would be arrested, he would go to jail. People who were clearly associated with the freedom movement probably stayed out. Many of them did, or defected thereafter. There was for a short period of time open borders, where any Czech who wanted to flee could. Obviously some people did, but I can't say that a great many did. I guess the great majority loved their country and wanted to remain. So outside of a few prominent people, I think most Czechs did remain. They just had to take it.

Q: Well, then, what happened?

SKOUG: Well, that set up what I described in my book, divided into four sections; one, Novotny, two, the Prague Spring, three, the invasion, and four, the period after the invasion, when the

Czechs did their best to retain what freedoms they could. In this last phase the population, the literati, the communications media and some trade union leaders, resisted, and the Soviets gradually applied pressure, using the Slovaks. And they used Husak shamelessly. The first thing they did was to nullify the 14th congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party because enough Slovaks weren't there. Then the battle in the fall of the year was essentially over people in radio and television losing jobs, freedom of the press slowly being cut off, Party Central Committee meetings becoming tougher and tougher, a crucial meeting finally being arranged in Kiev without all the top leadership. That is, they summoned Dubcek but isolated him by not letting him bring Smrkovsky. They warned in Kiev that Smrkovsky was the leader of the radicals, that he was holding together the students and the union leaders. Smrkovsky was the other guy who, like Dubcek, was really genuinely pro-Russian. He'd been a radical at the time of the 1948 coup. He was a head of the Young Communist Group. He had been bloody minded at the time of the Prague Coup in 1948. There are some horrible statements he made then. But later he went to jail. He was in jail for quite a while, and he came out of jail a changed man. He had a lot to do with Dubcek convincing people that the Russians wouldn't invade the country to save Novotny in December, 1967, and as I say, as head of the national assembly, he went to the Soviet Union in June 1968. He tried to conciliate them. Although he was the most popular spokesman with youth because he was so sincere, he tried to convince them the West Germans were the threat, and not the Soviet Union, and they wouldn't accept that. So here was a man genuinely pro-Russian, but since he was more pro-Czech, he became a main target. The Czechs had rallied around their great four: Dubcek, the head of the Party; Svoboda, the president of the country; Cernik, the premier; and Smrkovsky, the head of the National Assembly. Well, the Russians wanted to divide and conquer. The one that really wanted out of there first was Smrkovsky. In this they had the help of Husak. Husak in December, 1968, announced that it wasn't fair, that the division of power between Czechs and Slovaks should be equally divided. There was a change in the Constitution coming into effect on January 1st, 1969, which would place Slovakia and the Czech lands on a parallel basis, but he said it would be wrong to leave three Czechs and only one Slovak in the top leadership. The only Slovak at the top was Dubcek. Svoboda, Cernik, and Smrkovsky were all Czechs. Therefore, a Slovak had to be chairman of the Federal Assembly, which replaced the National Assembly, and Smrkovsky was to be downgraded. Well, a big fight went on because people knew what that meant: they aren't dumb in that part of the world, and a lot of the trade unions, which were by this time shifted into the van of resistance, the trade unions and the students, fought very hard to save Smrkovsky. There were some really abusive sessions where Smrkovsky was denounced as a traitor, and eventually he was beaten down and forced to resign. So at that point Dubcek had lost his best ally. Dubcek wept. That's the sort of man he was. He could cry, but didn't have the capacity to deal with this. He was trying to preserve what he could of the Prague Spring, but slowly it was being shut down. The hard guys were Husak and Lubomir Strougal, who was a veteran Communist. Strougal became the head of the Communist Party in the Czech lands; Husak became the head of the Communist Party in Slovakia. Dubcek was sitting above them technically, but really they had the power. He was sort of a front man. The Russians hadn't got to the point where they could get rid of him, but they were pressing for it, until January 1969, when a young man named Jan Palach, who was a student, burned himself to death. He burned himself and died a few days later. That was a shock. No Czech had done that. That was common, I guess, in Vietnam or in the Far East, but it wasn't common in Czechoslovakia. But he got the attention of the whole country. And of course the hard-liners were furious, but the funeral of Palach was something to behold. It was so quiet, and they were worrying about provocation - there was no provocation. You

could hear the birds singing. There were thousands and thousands of people marching behind the funeral bier for this man. Well, that gave the hard-liners pause, but not much. They were still waiting. They had to find a means to bring down Dubcek. The means were provided in a strange way. There was a hockey match. Ironically, the European hockey tournament was supposed to be held in Prague, but they canceled it or transferred it to Stockholm because they didn't feel that they could provide the right atmosphere - this was after the invasion. They didn't feel that the Czechs would be very receptive to a Soviet hockey team. They expected that this would be bad, so they got the tournament transferred to Stockholm. The Czechs played the Russians, and the Czechs, with the whole country watching, defeated the Russians two to nothing. And the television played this up by showing the defeated Russians. It did everything that a clever television crew can do to accentuate the defeat. The Czechs refused to shake the Russians' hands. They did all the things that the people wanted, that the audience wanted. Well, that night there was a demonstration in Old Town Square, and some Czechs were arrested. This fact was mentioned briefly in the paper. This was one of the interesting things. It never would have been printed in the paper in the bad days of Novotny. What the arrested demonstrators said was: we were arrested because we said the Soviets didn't bring their tanks to Stockholm and so we beat them. You could read in the paper what the defendant was saying. Well, that let any intelligent person know that there had been a demonstration. The Czechs had to play the Russians a second time for the championship, and the Czechs beat them again. And this time I, like any observant Czech, knew what was going to happen. As soon as the last strains of the Czech national anthem being played in Stockholm were over, my television set was off, and I was running for the downtown area. Extra streetcars had been laid on for this for some reason. *Everyone* came to the heart of Prague. The score was five to three, and this was shouted over and over, with someone pounding out the numbers on buckets. People were shouting, "Five to three" everywhere. What it meant was "the hell with the Russians!" You had to know it. It wasn't a sports demonstration; it was a demonstration of national pride by over one hundred thousand people, and it went on for hours. In Vaclavski Namesti, you could hardly move.

Finally, there were a couple of shouts, "On to the Soviet Embassy," but it was miles away. These were totally nonviolent people. Czechs are totally nonviolent. But as I went back, started to walk home, I heard the tinkle of glass, and here at the building of Aeroflot/Intourist, a big glass area at the base of Vaclavski Namesti, big burly guys were standing there at their leisure throwing paving blocks through the windows. Nobody did anything. No police, no nothing. Then they went in there and they were trashing the place. I said to myself, That's a provocation. These guys are not demonstrators; they're hoodlums. I tried to convince some of the people in the American Embassy of that, and I couldn't convince my own boss, Mark Garrison, who asked in jest: "Were they wearing stb [Statni Bezpecnost (State Security)] shirts?" Well, they weren't, but that's where they got their money. Later it turned out - and I learned later and Dubcek confirmed - it was a plot by the stb leadership in Czech lands to provide the Russians with a pretext to force out Dubcek. So immediately the Soviets said, "Now we know where the counterrevolutionaries are; they're the ones that smashed Aeroflot and Intourist and so forth." So that's what brought Dubcek down. That was it. Dubcek was not in control of the situation, so he had to resign as chairman of the Party. Husak replaced him. Svoboda made the speech "I know Gus Husak, he's a wonderful guy, and now we're going to settle all our problems with the Soviets and everything's going to be harmony." At that point, that was the final death as far as I was concerned. The chief of the political-economic section, Mark Garrison, didn't think so, though. The reporting from the embassy was very

cautious. He saw it as possibly a clever move by Husak to preserve the gains of the Prague Spring, while at the same time being careful to go along with the Soviets. In Washington, INR also speculated that Husak would resist the Russians, but that wasn't the case, unfortunately.

Q: What was Garrison's background?

SKOUG: He had been in Bulgaria and served the office of East European Affairs. Later he served twice in Moscow, the second time as DCM. He's a good friend and a very professional officer, but he read events with an optimism that I did not share. Even Ambassador Beam, in his book on his career describes the Aeroflot incident as one where some people said it was a provocation. Perhaps I wasn't very convincing, anyway. A lot of the incredulity was there. Many experts on Czechoslovakia weren't willing to accept it at the time. They accept it now. It is absolutely known now, but for a long time it wasn't known because they didn't have the evidence proving that it was a provocation. And a lot of them couldn't bring themselves to say, yes, clearly that's a provocation.

Q: Were we doing anything to help get Czechs who seemed to be in danger out of the country?

SKOUG: Yes, somehow I'm forgetting one incident. A professor of management in the School of Economics name Vopicka - or a person saying he was Vopicka - called me, I think the third day or the fourth day of the invasion. He said that he'd like to talk to me and asked that I meet him at the Alcron Hotel for breakfast. So I said I'd be glad to. When I got there, it wasn't Vopicka at all. He'd already gone to the United States. It was another fellow, a colleague of his in management but also a senior official in the Communist Party who had been leading the resistance when they took the top people off. When they kidnapped the top people, the secondary Communists were working in the resistance to the invasion. He was one of those who were running the part and now was afraid for his life when he saw the way the wind was blowing. "I could go to Austria," he said, "if I stand in the line outside the Austrian legation for a visa, but it's just miles long. If I stand in that line, they'll see me there in the line." So on that occasion I went to my friend Karl Peterlik in the Austrian legation, and I told him, "Here's a guy who needs our help." So they said, "Well, send him around." We got him in there, and he got to Austria. There must have been many cases like that, of people getting out that way. I know of that one because it happened to me personally. I can't think of any other examples of actually intervening with other countries.

Q: Sometimes when you have something like this happening you find that it's a bit hard to control the junior officers who have made friends with students, and often the ones who may be standing out a little more, but it sounds like in Czechoslovakia your ties weren't that close - or was there a... and the junior officers may go beyond bounds in helping people get out and all that. Did this happen here?

SKOUG: Well, in the first place, we didn't have many junior officers, and you didn't usually put too junior people in a Communist country. They would have had to have some other assignment. No, our staff was very mature, very professional. I don't think that anyone got out of bounds, not that I'm aware of.

I met a young man named Vaclav Klaus, in this period after the invasion when things were going badly but when Czechs were continuing to resist. Vaclav Klaus was leader of a group called the

club of young Czechoslovakian economists. He invited me to attend a meeting of this organization in Lublice Castle outside of Prague. When I offered to take him there in my car, he accepted my offer. So I drove him to the meeting, which hardliners must have taken note of. The incredible thing was the courage of the Czech intellectuals, knowing what was happening. Vaclav Havel, for example - I heard him at a reception hosted by John Baker, the DCM. Havel was talking about the failure of Communist Party leadership in Moscow and the failure to lead a resistance to the destruction of the Prague Spring. I was listening, and I thought, "This man is going to jail." Well, of course, he did go to jail. But he wasn't afraid. He continued courageously to maintain his point of view. Years later, he is president of a free Czechoslovakia.

One of my friends was Jan Pleva, who was one of Sik's associates at the Economic Institute of the Communist Party, the ones who had sponsored the economic reform, a dedicated social democrat. He may have been a Communist. He assuredly a dedicated socialist - he didn't want an inch of free enterprise. I asked him, "How about an enterprise with five people?" He said, "It would be better if it were a cooperative." But he was totally for democracy, freedom of expression. He was a superb source, completely candid and never given to naive optimism. He invited me to his apartment, and I had dinner with him and his wife and his small daughter. He really paid the price. I have him in the appendix of my book, because they totally destroyed his career. The poor guy died there. It's too sad a story.

There was another case. I told you about the Management Institute and it's chief, Jaroslav Jirasek, and about a star pupil, Miroslav Gregr, head of the Decin engineering works. Well, Jirasek's aide drove me up to see Gregr's fork-lift truck factory around the German border. It was in January of 1969, just about the time of Palach burning himself to death. Gregr was probably the best manager in Czechoslovakia, a graduate of Jirasek's Institute. I mentioned previously that he'd been sent to close up this fork-lift truck factory as inefficient. He found it could be efficient. He turned it into an enterprise that sold fork-lift trucks to Germany for hard currency. He advertised in the paper for additional workers, and he got them. He did the sort of things that, let's say, most Communist managers would not know how to do. Well, anyway, I went up, and he took me through his factory. I didn't see a single political slogan. All I could see was the Czechoslovak flag and a statement from Seneca: I've forgotten precisely what the quotation was, but it was something like, "only a free life is worth living" - something like that. That's what the factory looked like. They had prepared a table for lunch, and as I was about to sit down beside Gregr and four or five other officials, Gregr said, "That's where Ambassador Chervonyenko sat." They hated the Russian ambassador because they thought that he had helped bring on the invasion - which he had. Ambassador Chervonyenko sat in this chair when he was here. So then I pretended I was too modest to sit in it. They said, "That's all right. It's been fumigated." They were wonderful people, the Czechs are. I felt very sorry for them because there was really nothing we could do for them. We couldn't do much for them, if anything. Jirasek, by the way, came up to Decin separately so that he could accompany me to Prague. He was pressing a compromise gold/claims settlement which he later got the Foreign Ministry to endorse, but alas it was too late. Washington was no longer open at that point.

Q: How did the Voice of America react to this, from your perspective? After the 1956 Hungarian thing, I imagine they were very chary.

SKOUG: I think they pretty much told it as it was. As a matter of fact, the embassy sent a couple cables criticizing the Voice of America for being too negative on Husak. I think VOA did a good job. RFE was a bigger factor.

Q: RFE is Radio Free Europe.

SKOUG: Yes, Radio Free Europe was very much welcomed by Czech radio because, as Cestmir Suchy of Prague radio later told me he would hate to see it jammed again, because it addressed issues and then he could say Prague radio had to address those issues, too. They could address an issue with the pretext that RFE had mentioned it-to the common benefit. It allowed the Czechs more freedom to discuss things. No, the radios did a good job, I think.

Q: Well, then, you left there... How did things develop by the time you were getting to leave?

SKOUG: Well, by the time that I left, Husak was first secretary of the Party, Dubcek was still on the Presidium, but he was totally without power. When he would make a presentation, the population would applaud him but then be silent when the hard-line message began. They always talked about the *vychodisko*, "the way out." "We have to find the *vychodisko*." Nobody believed that. So they applauded him, the symbol. They felt sorry for him, they pitied him, but he was broken. The resistance by this time was broken. One of the last deeds was a demonstration by students about Yugoslavia. Under Soviet pressure, the Czechs boycotted the League of Yugoslav Communists meeting that took place in 1969. The Yugoslavs had been one of the real backers of the Czech régime. The Czechs in turn were forced to thumb their nose at them, and the students objected to that. I still remember the demonstration. They were shouting "Tito Yes, Brezhnev No" - They chanted Husak's name in a blend of dread and loathing. Anyway, the resistance really was not totally over because in July or actually in August, I think at the anniversary of the invasion, there were some demonstrations, and some people were beaten up, put in jail. I don't know if anybody was killed. There was violence. There was still violence going on in the latter part of 1969, but it was over, and by the end of the year Husak had endorsed the invasion, said it was necessary. The new leaders had done all the things that they said they never would do. They completely had given in. It was back in the box. As a matter of fact, Embassy Moscow reported in late 1969 that it could hardly have worked out better for the USSR. That's what people thought for a long time, but I don't think that that was the final result. I think the Russians paid a price for using force on the Czechs. They still had problems in Poland and East Germany. They replaced Ulbricht the next year with Honnecker. They replaced Gomulka at the same time. And still they weren't really in control because the Polish resistance at that point began to pick up. Outside, they did get their world conference, which condemned China, but by and large the only effect was that their quarrel with China was self-defeating for them. It's true that the West overlooked the crushing of Czechoslovakia. The Four Power agreement on Berlin was signed. The Conference on European Security took place, which the Russians wanted. But the Conference on European Security set up a human rights committee, which began to look into human rights in Eastern Europe. So one could say that the Soviets were not so successful. And later on, finally, I can say it must have had some effect on the Velvet Revolution.

Q: Sure, it meant that the Soviets were very shy at trying to do anything.

SKOUG: Gorbachev was not going to be caught doing what... He had, strangely enough, gone to school together with Zdenek Mlynar, one of the leading Czech reform Communists. He was in the Moscow negotiations of August 1968, where he's a main source, as a matter of fact, for Svoboda giving in. Mlynar, who had been with the resistance, wrote why they gave in. "We were all believing Communists." They finally all signed the "agreement." He wrote Dubcek's speech for him on the return from Moscow. I don't know how much effect he had on Gorbachev back when they were students together. Gorbachev must have said, Well, if a guy like Mlynar was on Dubcek's side... Perhaps Gorbachev thought in 1989 that it was going to be like Dubcek in 1968. It wasn't of course. Maybe he even thought he could reform the Soviet Union. Then you'd become more popular and you wouldn't lose support. But that chance, if the Czechoslovak Communist Party ever had a chance to do that, and I question it, but if they ever had a chance, it was lost in 1968 when the Russians came in. Because you never could have had a Prague Spring a second time with Dubcek.

JULIAN M. NIEMCZYK
Air Attaché
Prague (1967-1969)

Julian M. Niemczyk was born in 1920 in Oklahoma, the son of an Army officer. He went to Oklahoma University and then went into the Army during World War II, eventually being assigned to the OSS serving in Burma and China. He remained in the Air Force and served in Japan and the Philippines and eventually Warsaw as an air attaché. He was Defense Attaché in Prague during the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Becoming active in political life he was appointed as ambassador to Czechoslovakia in 1986. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

NIEMCZYK: I thrive in the heat and in the middle of the Mediterranean...my wife is Irish and is allergic to sunshine but she went along with it as a trooper, you know. We really looked forward to Crete. I knew I was going, had orders in my hand, and was being briefed. I was studying up on Greece and Italian, and talked to people who had been there previously. I learned that the commander lived in two connecting trailers, that was the only shortcoming in my mind. There was an airplane there to go to Greece for commissaries and supplies, to meet with the Ambassadors and the Armed Forces hierarchy and do the service for the Air Force Systems Security Command and NSA and the whole ball of wax. I think I did a little bit of training or surely studying for that. I am a little vague on how to fill in this time that I am about to get to.

The Air Force and I received word from the State Department that the Defense Attaché, who was an Air Force colonel, died suddenly in the courtyard of the American Embassy in Prague from a massive heart attack. Ambassador Jake Beam had asked for Colonel Niemczyk by name if he was available to come to Prague as the Defense Attaché, having served with him in Warsaw eight or nine years earlier. He knew me, I knew him, we worked together in the subordinate/superior status. His wife and my wife had a very congenial Embassy working arrangement. They knew each other. Well, they put the decision up to me. My wife and I really kicked this one around a long, long time.

I looked at it two ways. One, that if he wanted me I would be honored, I guess. I hated to see this command float away. But also, if he really wanted it, he probably could have gotten me anyway. So I said yes. Well that took me out of the command situation, but as you now know, it was an all's-well-that-ends-well story, because it was important going there for two and a half years, '67,'68,'69, was a contributing factor to the selection still years later for the appointment as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia.

Q: Absolutely crucial time in our relations. What happened in Czechoslovakia still is one of those key points.

NIEMCZYK: I didn't know that. Tea leaves or crystal ball were not there. But, again, we gave up Crete with mixed feelings but had good feelings about rejoining a career Foreign Service officer with whom we had served before.

We arrived, February/March, 1967, not knowing what was going to happen. We watched the calendar year 1967 pass with a lot of happenings in the political arena.

Q: To set this up, when you arrived there could you give an account of where Czechoslovakia was as we saw it at that time?

NIEMCZYK: My recollection was that Czechoslovakia was still low priority on the State Department's list. I may sound contradictory here, but Jake Beam, having been sent there, somebody, it may have been a condition for preparing Jake Beam for an ultimate assignment to Moscow, or it may have been that somebody was seeing things that others were not seeing with respect to the geographic, geopolitical stance of Czechoslovakia in this Warsaw Pact location, jutting into Central Western Europe as it was. Later having been CEO of a private sector organization called People-to-People International, I found it unbelievable that so many Americans did not realize that Prague was more westerly than Vienna, Austria. So back to your question, forward looking people in our government may have seen more importance than I did at the time. We knew, however, that it was fully taken over by Soviet Communists. The country probably was a little better off than Poland to the north in terms of commodities, livelihood and things of that sort. But things were getting tougher and tougher.

But along came a ray of light in early '68 with the Prague Spring and with what Dubcek was trying to do. From there on, the first nine, ten or eleven months had been a totally different, difficult grim period and the Prague Spring and Dubcek brought a totally different light for the people on the street. Once again though, like in Warsaw, as military, although I was in a position where I was out traveling around, looking for missiles and airplanes, for the same reasons I mentioned in Warsaw I could not, did not pursue relationships with Czechs and Slovaks.

Q: How did we view the Czech military? Obviously we are always evaluating the fact that we could have a war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. My recollection was that the Czechs at least were certainly on the intelligent side considered to be along with the East Germans, the number one operators in the intelligence field for the Soviets. So from your perspective at that time how did we view the Czech military?

NIEMCZYK: They were viewed as high caliber, very capable in everything they did at that time. And they had the Russians standing right behind them. A good air force and army. But there was always a feeling that if the balloon ever went up they would not support the Soviets too strongly, even that far back. But on display and participating as a Warsaw Pact nation, they were out in front doing their job until the Prague Spring and things that happened to their leaders, Dubcek, particularly. The people in the military had families and relatives who were out there trying to make a livelihood and live a long life. The military, like their STB, the secret police, was brought into this orbit of Moscow Russian domain and had to do their thing for a livelihood. But the Prague Spring brought about tremendous change.

Q: Could you explain what the Prague Spring, from our point of view, meant?

NIEMCZYK: It meant a bright future for the 15 million Czechs and Slovaks. A move from hard-line Communist control to a little more freedom. A little more democratic way of life, perhaps. And a lot of hope. For the first time you would see a few smiles on the faces of the people in the street. You didn't see that before. We would travel in Slovakia, Bohemia and Moravia, the Western Czech Lands, and would see...I am a Catholic and my wife and I made it a point to go to a different church every Sunday. Sometimes we would end up going back to some of them because of the beauty of the church, or perhaps an excellent choral group. Sometimes there was a small symphony at times with brass, reeds, violins. That would bring the people even though in the winter it was stone cold. So you had the Catholic church there and the sermons by the priests going a little bit beyond where they were going in the past. Then the treatment of Dubcek by the leaders in the Soviet Union.

You asked me earlier what the military attachés did in Poland. Here in Czechoslovakia there were so many, what we would call false alarms. There would be rumors of invasion starting about May, 1968 and the invasion wasn't until August. But there were rumors of invasion. There had been overflights of planes.

Q: This was Soviet pressure on the liberalization of the Dubcek regime?

NIEMCZYK: That is correct. Now recalling that Czechoslovakia was part of the Warsaw Pact to have these things happen on their border also contributed to the concern of the Czechs and the Slovaks. For example, we would hear either from DIA or the State Department that the Poles were gathering on the border north of Ostrava, or some place like that. Or we would hear that the East Germans were moving in the direction of the border. This was after Dubcek had started his move toward liberalization. So we would go out and go up toward the borders or down toward Hungary and would check these things out. Sometimes they would be false alarms.

Then the Soviets undertook the tactic of holding a field exercise in Czechoslovakia. They would bring in elements of Polish military and East Germans. They would stay for seven days and learn the roads, towns, the villages, etc. The attachés would go out and try to see the forces and the markings on the vehicles and things of that sort, and report back and verify.

Then, a week or two later, there would be another report of Soviets coming in through Slovakia and an element of Hungarians coming up across the border. Lo and behold that would happen.

Field exercise, the announcement would be made by the Soviet Warsaw Pact element. And the Czechoslovak officials, and we are going to the military now...the officials particularly but the military became disenchanted, if not annoyed and disappointed.

Q: Incidentally, was the Czechoslovak military fully made members of the greater Soviet bloc or did they have their own personal feelings that you were able to gather towards the Poles, and particularly towards the East Germans?

NIEMCZYK: Up until January, February, March of 1968, they were prepared to do their part with the Warsaw Pact. But with the things that they would see and their uncles, their parents and grandparents if they were in the military, and all of the lies that were told in the school about the history, so many things came about to cause them, the military, to be somewhat skeptical. The treatment surely of their leaders. But all of these invasions, temporary "field exercises," caused them to be disenchanted beyond that.

But, throughout all these periods of the field exercises they would come in to learn the highways, the towns, the routes, etc. It really kept us, the NATO attachés, on the road running these things down. I am sure it kept the communication system people picking up whatever they picked up from tank commanders and aircraft in the air and things of that sort.

And then came the invasion, late at night, starting about 9 or 10 o'clock on August 20. We could hear all this noise in the air.

Let me go back and say that there were rumors and rumors of invasions and I guess at this point a lot of people expected it but no one could predict it, not even the CIA, or NSA, or the attachés in East Germany at the Military Liaison Mission, Poland, Hungary, etc.

Q: Something like this at a certain point requires someone to say, "Do it." And that is the hardest thing in the world to predict.

NIEMCZYK: So we heard this heavy armada of aircraft which went into the International Airfield which was closed down, bringing in soldiers, paratroopers. Tanks started rolling in after midnight and they arrived in Prague at 5 in the morning from East Germany and Poland. They were in Bratislava at midnight and we were having phone calls to our Embassy from Slovaks in Bratislava. We had a consulate, but it was closed. I was instrumental in getting it open twenty years later.

Q: Senator Pell opened the place as a young vice consul.

NIEMCZYK: So we had these calls from Bratislava saying that Soviet and Hungarian forces had crossed the river in Bratislava and were heading wherever. So early next morning, we went to the Embassy and spent a lot of the night there. I went to my home the next day. My home as Defense Attaché was on a street called Na Zatorce and at the end of the street was the Soviet Embassy compound, which was huge. About a block up the street was the residence of the Soviet Ambassador. When I got home in the morning, the Soviet Ambassador's residence had been surrounded by tanks. My little quiet street of Na Zatorce had tanks and armored cars backed up over the curb tearing up the sidewalk. My driveway was closed connecting a circle around the

Soviet Embassy. So it was quite a fortification there with my place being right in the middle.

The Czechoslovak underground went to work in a hurry with radios and printing out various posters that were posted on downtown columns and doors. I managed to get one which is in my den room right now. The Underground would put them up at night and the Soviet soldiers would take them down in the morning. They were posters using symbols of traffic signs. One would say, "Watch out for children." One had "No entry." One had "Tanks" with a red line. Then at the bottom in Cyrillic they had Moscow, Sofia, Warsaw, Dresden and Budapest. These were printed and I managed to get one of these and frame it.

You know the story of the Romanians not participating, but out of that story comes a story for us, the military. This Romanian military attaché all of a sudden started talking to us in the gardens over in the corner giving us his impressions as did the Yugoslav about the invasion.

It would have been unrealistic, suicidal sort of thing for the Czechoslovak armed forces to try to do anything against massive Warsaw Pact invasion. The Czechs and the Poles, although Slavs, have never been very close. The Czechs and Slovaks were hurt and upset about this invasion but were really hurt about their Polish brethren participating. If Romania could choose not to participate, why didn't you, the Poles, decline to participate. There were many stories along those lines.

In 48 hours, Ambassador Beam had permitted the newspaper people who were down at the various hotels, including a friend of mine Tad Schultz, into the Embassy. They slept on couches, cots, sleeping bags, etc. Not knowing whether this would be another Budapest, Jake Beam, decided to evacuate dependents and children. All the officers' wives, except his, the DCM, the Army attaché's and mine were to leave. He asked me to form a 100 car convoy... 50 to Nürnberg and 50 to Vienna...to take them out of the country for fear that this would be another Budapest. It took 11 or 12 days to determine this.

In these cars we put Canadians, British, Americans and some civilians who were caught in this. One of whom was Shirley Temple Black who was there on some sort of a mission hoping to see Dubcek the morning of the 21st.

Q: For the record, Shirley Temple Black is presently Ambassador to Czechoslovakia.

NIEMCZYK: She was my successor. We became friends then. I got to know her even more at the Department of State's Ambassador-designate seminar when she was one of three former Ambassadors who participated in it.

There was a reception at the DCM's home for her. There was a reception at the Ambassador's residence, which is magnificent and very representational. Word has it that out of the 140 or so Embassies worldwide, there are 6 that are State Department's prime, prime property for Ambassadors. That is one of them. London, the Winfield House; Paris; Rome, maybe; Prague surely. So Shirley had a chance to look that over 20 years early. She has written about being there during the invasion. She was evacuated with this group.

Twelve or 14 days later it became apparent...there were something like a 100 people killed, that is

100 too many, but not thousands and not like the Hungarian uprising. There was no uprising, there was no opposition.

Like in 1948, that caused a lot of Czechs and Slovaks to leave and go elsewhere like the United States or London. The Soviets came in with all these other Warsaw Pact countries. They stayed about 60 days. The East Germans, Poles, Hungarians and Bulgarians then slowly withdrew. The Soviets left 60,000 and set up encampments, kicking out Czechoslovaks from various barracks taking them over. The Czechoslovaks were relocated. That created a problem and an aggravation on the part of the Czechoslovak military, naturally.

Husak became President; Jakes, a terrible man, replaced Dubcek; Bielak became Chairman of the Communist Party. Bielak was anti-American, although his father left Czechoslovakia and went to Chicago with Bielak as a child. Then his father returned to Czechoslovakia.

Dubcek's situation continued to deteriorate until they ousted him. For a while he was with the Forestry Ministry and then I think they made him Ambassador to Turkey or some place for a year. Then he came back and was exiled in his own country in terms of any position. He was just another citizen waiting it out.

So 1968 was a very bleak year. The apex of hope went high through March, April, May; things started to come up causing concern in May, June and July; the invasion in August; and then September brought grim and back to the old attitude with people on the streets unhappy. 1969 came and there was just more of the same. I left in July, 1969.

Q: Did you find that the Czech military had changed? After this trauma I would have thought that the Czech military would have been more approachable?

NIEMCZYK: They were and they became even more approachable for a period of time.

Q: Was the feeling within our military at that time that the Warsaw Pact had solved an immediate problem but had caused a much greater one for later on as far as unity of the Pact was concerned?

NIEMCZYK: Clearly that was the case the seven to ten months after the invasion that I was there. You just had the feeling as you would see the leaders at receptions, or something. We started getting more invitations. Czech and Slovak military started accepting our invitations, more so than they did before the invasion. You could feel clearly a change. They would talk with us a little bit more about the dreadful case of the Poles agreeing when the Romanians didn't. Then I left. I guess there was another tightening up during the 18 or 20 years that I was away, which I can pick up another time.

Q: Okay. Maybe we ought to call it quits at this point. I would like to talk a bit about atmosphere at the Embassy and relations, etc. the next time, before we move to the next phase.

NIEMCZYK: Something I should tell you in closing. The day after the invasion...the American Embassy is in a 300 year-old palace.

Q: What is the name of the palace?

NIEMCZYK: The Schönbrunn Palace. It has a front with four wings to it. When I was there as a military attaché, we had about 14 families living in apartments. Now there are only 7 and there is another story there. Behind the Embassy and property owned by the United States, is a three-tiered garden, the top of which is something called the Gloriette. It is an open structure made of brick with a red tile ceiling. Jake Beam decided he would put a flag mast there. It is high on the Petrin Hill range. He put a flag pole up about the fourth day of the invasion and hoisted the American flag. We had one in front of the Embassy, but this flag could be seen from the Hradcany Castle and all over this area of Mala Strana where our Embassy was located. We were never told to take it down, it is flying today. It is put up by the Marines in the morning and taken down at night. That flag flew throughout the Soviet occupation.

Q: Very good. Let's stop now.

Q: Today is April 21, 1992. This is a continuing interview with Ambassador Niemczyk. Mr. Ambassador, what was it like working and living in Prague during the time you were there as Defense Attaché?

NIEMCZYK: Naturally it was much more difficult than later when I was Ambassador. My daily life was encountered by and encumbered with constant surveillance by the Czechoslovak secret police, the STB. They were watching my home, they were checking me as I left the Embassy compound. During our travels with the NATO attachés, particularly the British and the Canadian, in spite of our efforts to get up early in the morning and leave before daybreak, we would always have two or three cars in surveillance. Periodically throughout the trip we could lose them, only to be picked up some time later when we went through minor or a major city. The gear that we took on these trips always included bedrolls and tent so if we did lose them, rather than checking into a hotel, which was much more comfortable, we would sleep in the woods, without surveillance, and then go about our business.

Our home life was very good. Our home was on a street where there were four or five ambassadors which was pleasant. It enabled me to get in touch with those ambassadors of various countries. Living was quite satisfactory. At time pleasant, short of the listening devices which we knew were always present. Commodities were satisfactory. I am talking about food stuffs. We seldom bought clothing there, rather making periodical trips to West Germany to a PX for such items. My wife and I registered pleasantness, sadness, apprehension, improving circumstances and then total collapse with Prague Spring with what Dubcek was trying to do, and then ultimately with the Soviet Warsaw Pact invasion everything fell apart and that was when we shared the sadness and unhappiness of the Czechoslovak people.

Q: A final thing on your period as Defense Attaché in Prague, after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, what was the NATO military impression of how it was done, how it was managed as a military operation?

NIEMCZYK: Highly successful. Very well conducted. But you have to keep in mind that in the months of March, April, May, June and even July, we would observe, read in the paper or hear on

the radio, that there would be an exercise on the 15th of April and would last three or seven days and would involve East German troops. So the East German troops would cross the border and set up their CPXs and do their thing and in a week or so leave. Then a month or three weeks later a group of Poles would be joined by Soviet forces on an exercise in Czechoslovakia...I could cite six or seven of these exercises which were all false alarms toward invasions. We were running around every time we would hear of an exercise and trying to check it out. The Hungarians from the south had an exercise.

This permitted all of these Warsaw Pact forces that did participate to learn the highways, the major routes, some of the towns, etc. When the balloon went up, a lot of people had reason to believe it was coming, but no one knew when. The satellites were picking up all the military grouping along the borders. We were reporting on what was going on inside Czechoslovakia. The service attachés in other Warsaw Pact countries were doing the same. And then it happened. I will never forget. I got a nasty cable some days after the invasion from the Defense Department, DIA, saying, "Look, you are reporting now what has happened and it is very good, but why didn't you tell us a little bit more about this?" I fired back a cable saying, "Look, I am here in the invaded country. Why don't you ask this question of my counterparts in Poland and Hungary and US Military Liaison Mission in Potsdam the question? They were the ones that should have been out in their cars, as I was, looking at the posture of these forces that were about to crank up their engines and move."

Q: You never win in one of those.

NIEMCZYK: No, I never really won, but I was able to reply.

Q: In your thinking, and in the military thinking, did this speak for how there might be an attack on West Germany, for example, and NATO, or were the circumstances such that this really wasn't a good exercise to see how they might launch an attack against the West?

NIEMCZYK: I said that they pulled it off in a very organized fashion. It went very well, but they had many dry runs to do it through these exercises. Of course, when they did it there was absolutely no resistance by the Czechoslovak armed forces. So to answer your question, I don't think they would have been as successful and had as easy an operation against elements in West Germany because there would be response by the NATO forces in West Germany. So I don't think anyone could use the invasion of Czechoslovakia as a measure as to what the outcome or the prospects might have been had they at some point during this critical Cold War period been an invasion across the borders into West Germany.

Q: When did you leave Prague?

NIEMCZYK: I left Prague in August, 1969, so I witnessed a year of this somber period following the invasion. I returned to Washington, DC.

JOHN A. BAKER, JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission

Prague (1968-1970)

John A. Baker, Jr. was born and raised in Connecticut. His career in the Foreign Service included overseas posts in Yugoslavia, Germany, the Soviet Union, Italy and Czechoslovakia. Mr. Baker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: We are really at the point now of the 1968-70 period when you went to Prague as Deputy Chief of Mission. How did you get that assignment?

BAKER: During the previous year, following a fairly exhausting four years at the US Mission to the UN, I was able to get a mid-career training assignment. Since I had to move some place anyway from Connecticut where I was living I was able to arrange to get assigned to the Center for International Affairs at Harvard as a Fellow rather than go to the War College or some other program. During that year at Harvard, which was a very interesting one I might add, and one during which I attended the famous Henry Kissinger National Security Seminar, I was thinking, of course, of my follow on assignment.

My strategy was really to get some exposure to the Middle East and I was doing a paper, as one had to do for that program, on Soviet policy in the Middle East in the period leading up to the Six Day War. I thought that might enhance my otherwise rather slim credentials for the Middle East.

I wrote to our Ambassador in Lebanon, because that is a place that you don't really have to have Arabic to start, I had French, and offered my services as DCM there because I knew the posting of the incumbent was about to end in the summer of 1968. At the same time I also wrote to our Ambassador at Prague, Jake Beam, whom I had known in my initial assignment in Yugoslavia in 1951, where he was at that time Counselor. I didn't know, of course, one never does, whether either one of these would come through.

But along about March I did get an indication from Ambassador Beam that he would like me to come there and, seizing the bird in the hand, I accepted. About a month later I got a similar offer to go to Lebanon, which by then I had to decline.

So I quickly signed up for a not too effective Czech language course in Harvard, as I wasn't able to go down to the Foreign Service Institute, and tried to prepare myself to understand what was happening in what was then being described as the Prague Spring. Then I arrived with my family towards the end of June, 1968 in Prague as Deputy Chief of Mission.

Right in that very week that I arrived there was published a manifesto entitled, "Two Thousand Words" which was written by an intellectual who was one of the people who was pushing the reform Communist program of Dubcek further and faster. Many intellectuals, both non-Communists and Communists, were enthusiastic about the action program which Dubcek had launched in the spring of 1968 which pointed to various economic and political reforms and were urging in this eloquent "Two Thousand Words" a more rapid pace towards real democracy in Czechoslovakia.

Obviously this piece, along with other things that were happening, began to get reaction in Russia

and there would be comments in the Russian press critical of what was regarded as a revisionist, Zionist conspiracy to extract Czechoslovakia from the Socialist family of nations.

During July there were a number of events that seemed to accelerate the tension between the Czechoslovak leadership and the Warsaw Pact countries. As I recall, one of the events was a meeting which the Warsaw Pact countries held in Warsaw, and they rather belatedly invited the Czechoslovak party leaders to come but the way the meeting was described and couched, sounded very much like a sort of sitting in judgment on what was occurring in Czechoslovakia, and the Czechoslovak leaders declined to be sort of bad boys appearing before their peers or elders in this situation. So they didn't go to Warsaw. As a result, the communique that came out of there was not very much to their liking. Nevertheless, it was meant to stand as a warning to them that their comrades in the Eastern bloc felt they were going too far.

Q: At this time, you were the new boy on the block, these things were happening, how was the Embassy, Beam, but also from the emanations you were getting from our Embassies in Moscow and Warsaw, how were they reading how this thing was going and how did they see the future at this time?

BAKER: Well, the Embassy was reading and reporting these reports very closely, and I think quite effectively. We had an excellent political/economic section that was led by an officer named Mark Garrison, who later went on to Moscow in a similar role and was later DCM there. They produced at least one telegraphic report daily on all these events, including a lot of information that we gathered from a growing number of quite candid Czechoslovak contacts, because the whole atmosphere was much less restrictive in the Dubcek, Prague Spring, atmosphere.

The thrust of these reports was that there was a rising tension between what was happening in Czechoslovakia and what one normally expected as the limits that were placed on what an Eastern European state could be expected to do within the Soviet Bloc. So, I think, those of us who had had experience in Russia, or elsewhere in Eastern Europe, felt that this was a somewhat worrisome situation. As much as we were sympathetic to what Dubcek and others were trying to do, we were obviously concerned as to where that might end.

Q: Were we in a way trying to dampen down the Czechs...sort of passing the word to be careful and don't poke a stick at this bear too much, or were we just sort of observing?

BAKER: Well, there were some of us who thought that it might be helpful if we were to express a little caution. There was one instance that I recall personally in which I took that view. This occurred about the 5th of August and took place after the famous meetings with the Soviet leadership on the Czechoslovak-Russian border at Cierna and Tisov where almost the entire Soviet Politburo met almost the entire Czechoslovak Politburo. Then there was the subsequent meeting in Bratislava where the other Warsaw Pact countries were summoned to endorse the understandings that were thought to have been reached at Cierna.

Those two meetings were interpreted by a large part of the world press as the at least temporary reconciliation of the Czechoslovak leadership with the other Communist countries and particularly with the Soviets. People more or less assumed that the Czechoslovak leadership had agreed to take

it a little slow and curb some of the more enthusiastic democrats. Nevertheless, the week immediately following that the Czech press carried on almost without change and were publishing articles that dredged up some rather critical periods of Russian pressure on the Czechoslovak republic and incidents that occurred in the late forties that led to the takeover by the Communists.

About that time a group of American newsmen arrived for a visit and the Ambassador entertained them at lunch and I was invited. There were some Czech newsmen there too. After lunch we went out on the terrace because one could never be sure of what would happen to what one said in the dining room and we talked further with the American and Czechoslovak journalists. I actually raised this issue with one of them and said, "What do you think about this wave of expressive articles occurring right after those two diplomatic meetings? Aren't you concerned as to whether this will stir up people in Russia who are worried about what is happening here?" They said, "We cannot think that way. Once we start thinking that way we will then be guilty of self-censorship. And once we start self-censoring ourselves, we are doing the job of the Soviets and we are undermining the progress towards freedom of expression which we advocate and which we have partially obtained and want to solidify. So we really feel that it would be playing against our interests to curtail, either on our own initiative or on our editors' initiatives, what we are saying." I remember very clearly the man who said that because I met him a year to two later when he was in exile. After that meeting, the next time I talked to Ambassador Beam I said, "You know these people don't seem to understand that some restraint may be called for at this time. Do you think there is anything that we could usefully do?" He said, "I agree with you, but I don't think it would be appropriate for us to intervene in this matter. The Czechs and Slovaks certainly ought to know the Soviets mentality and the dangers from the Soviet side as well or better than we do. After all they have been raised in that system and that neighborhood. We do not want to become a party to a process of shutting down or appearing to favor shutting down the latitude that they have begun to win here." So, I took that as a general policy with respect to that problem. We, as far as I know didn't put out any cautionary advice at that time.

Q: I am thinking of the dynamics of an embassy. You usually have junior officers who when things start to move almost get ahead of the game, get excited and want to get involved. Were you sort of having to rein them in?

BAKER: No, not really. At that period the atmosphere was such that Embassy officers, although they may very well have still been surveilled from time to time, had a lot of access. They could go to public events and meet people at public events and could develop personal contacts with them and that has always been my perception of what embassy officers ought to do if the circumstances permit. In fact, just for doing that in 1958 in Moscow, I was expelled from the country because the Soviets didn't share our view of what a diplomat normally does. So you have to consider that I am on the more aggressive edge of this issue. I wasn't restraining them.

In some of the reporting, some of the enthusiasm of drawing dramatic conclusions and so on from this or that would sometimes show itself and I very occasionally would have to edit that down, but the material that came to me having passed through Mark Garrison and his very competent editing very rarely in my view required very much tinkering. I thought that he managed the officers in that section very skillfully.

Q: Did you have any contact at that time in Prague with the Soviets?

BAKER: Very little contact. In fact, I don't remember any at all in the pre-invasion period except for the fact that you would see them at National Day events. My own feeling was that it would not be terribly well viewed by the Czechoslovaks to see us embracing the Soviets in a cheerful fashion at the time that the Soviets were exerting a considerable amount of pressure on them. So I never sought the Soviet representatives out at these events. If, by any chance, I happened to run into one or one introduced himself to me, I would just chat briefly and then move on. So, no, there was no particular contact. And I don't recall much contact with other Socialist state diplomats. Maybe a little bit with the Poles and I had very frequent and regular and friendly contact with a Yugoslav journalist there from their state agency Tanjug, who had been in Prague a number of years and was extraordinarily well informed. I guess he was the only person at that time from the Eastern European collection of people that I recall seeing regularly.

Q: How did we look upon the situation? Were we looking at the possibility of a scenario of what actually did happen, that the Soviets would gather together and just snuff this out, and if it happened, were we concerned about what our reaction would be?

BAKER: We were certainly looking at that possibility very acutely because all this time Soviet forces were exercising close to the borders of Czechoslovakia in Poland and East Germany particularly, and also in the western Ukraine. I don't remember as much about them in Hungary. I think the Hungarians were trying to as much as they could to stand down from this conflict. But certainly there were plenty of Russian troops in position to do what they did. And we certainly knew they were there. Of course they could have been there simply representing a threat or they could have been there to carry out an actual invasion. I think my own conclusion was, when we went back over these events, that the Soviets themselves didn't decide which purpose they were there for until about four or five days before the actual invasion. They hoped to bring enough pressure to bear on Dubcek and the Czechoslovak leaders with a threat so that they would achieve a rollback of the revisionist course or sufficient limitations of it so that they could live with it and that they only decided to invade when they reached the conclusion that they weren't going to be able to do that.

Q: Was it pretty much the feeling at the Embassy, although obviously a decision like that would be made at the American President's level, that no matter what happened we would only be passive bystanders?

BAKER: I think that was pretty well understood and in fact it looked as if the US government was leaning over backwards to illustrate that it was not trying to exploit in any way the Czechoslovak reform movement. For example, an exercise that we normally ran in Bavaria at that time of year, a major exercise, we canceled because we didn't want to give any people an excuse to say that we were gearing up to do some kind of a military response to whatever the Soviets might do.

And we didn't want anyone to think that we were actively encouraging the Czechoslovaks to break out of the Warsaw Pact, or what ever, because we thought if it looked like there was some American involvement over there that would further stimulate the forces for intervention on the Russian side. The Russians would say, "Hey, we had better move in and shut this off before it gets

to the point where we can't regain it." Generally, I think, because of that posture there was an assumption that we were not trying to pry Czechoslovakia away but we were simply taking a benign posture towards their own internal process. And the signals that we got from the Czechoslovak leaders was that that was basically the kind of position they wanted us to take. They were not trying to draw closer to us or give the appearance that they were drawing closer to us.

Q: How did the events of late August, 1968 play out?

BAKER: I had my own little personal saga in that regard. In early August of 1968, right after that lunch that I described to you, I hastened back to the United States on compassionate leave because my father had died. He had been quite ill at the time I left and it was not totally a surprise, but I did want to go back for the funeral. And I did and stayed a day or two more after which I thought I should then turn right around and come back because of the fact that it seemed to me that there was a good possibility that the situation would deteriorate. I didn't go down to Washington. I talked with the people there on the phone and said I was back but would be going back to Prague because I thought there could be an intervention.

The people in the Department said that I was a good soldier but they really didn't think that was going to happen. The Warsaw Pact meeting in Bratislava had more or less cooled that off. All our intelligence seemed to suggest that the worst of the crisis was over.

So I went back and a few days later around the 12th or 14th of August there were a couple of quite dramatic visits to Prague. One by Tito, and one by Ceausescu, the Romanian leader. And then there was the somewhat aborted visit by Ulbricht who wanted to balance those two more independent Communist leaders by bringing a more orthodox viewpoint.

Q: He was the leader and very strict Stalinist from East Germany.

BAKER: And he was one of the ones most alarmed by the course of events in Czechoslovakia. The Czechs said, "Okay, you can come but you can only come to Karlovy Vary and we will have a little party with you there." They didn't want him getting the kind of hostile treatment he might have gotten from the public in Prague.

Well, those events were further signals, I guess, to the conservatives in Russia that the Czechs were not going the way they hoped after the Bratislava meeting and Ulbricht probably sent in a rather alarmed report on his relative brush off when he went to Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, people in the diplomatic corps, because it was the middle of August, were going off on holiday. Our military attaché came in on the Saturday morning about the 16th or 17th of August and said that he was going on a holiday. We were sitting up in the communications area, where we often do on a Saturday morning to see what the cable traffic was. The Ambassador was there. He turned to me and said, "The Colonel here is going to go on holiday." I said, "Well, what about it?" "Well, what do you think? Do you think there is going to be any trouble?" I said, "Well, I don't know if there is going to be any trouble, but my own judgment is that if there is going to be trouble it will happen within the next ten or twelve days because the Czechoslovak Communist Party has scheduled a congress for the end of August. At the congress they will get rid of most of

the people who are friends of the Russian leadership. So if the Russians aren't satisfied with the current leadership and don't think they are going to be responsive enough, this may be the time they move. Of course, it is also the time in terms of weather and the position of their forces."

The Ambassador didn't disagree with that, but when I resurfaced again a few hours later I said, "Well, what did you decide?" He said, "Well, the Colonel said his colleagues were going so I said okay, go ahead." So that was the way that came out.

About three or four days later I was awakened by the sound of heavy aircraft coming in over the city. Not long after that a bang on my door by the Ambassador -- we lived up in the Embassy Residence compound -- who said, "I'm on my way down to the Embassy, do you want to come down with me? The Soviets are here." That is what happened. He, I think, received a couple of days before the invasion a pretty strong indication from a source of his in Prague, another ambassador, that the Soviets were going to move. He sent this in back channel to alert the Department. He thought that this was a valid report. I never saw the message so I don't know exactly what he put in it. It wasn't as if he was totally surprised by what happened. But Washington certainly acted as if they were.

Q: What did you do at the Embassy during this period when the Soviets were taking over?

BAKER: The first two or three days we had a substantial evacuation problem of the Americans who were in the city. There was a huge geological convention at which about 400 Americans were present and other assorted individuals like Shirley Temple Black, who I think was there for the multiple sclerosis drive, and a number of journalists. All of these people were concerned for their safety. Of course the journalists were concerned for how they would communicate the story because their normal means of communication were blocked. So the Embassy was filled with people and phone calls and we had a sort of crisis center set up to handle all this. We told everybody to sit tight in their hotels and we would try to arrange orderly evacuation procedures. At the same time, in order to get a sense of what was happening in the city, we went out on two man patrols all day for two or three days until the Soviet forces were stabilizing the situation. I remember going down town with another officer the first day that the Soviets were in there and there was a little small arms fire here and there and a rather noisy encounter up near the television station in downtown Prague where the Soviets had taken a couple of tanks up the street and were being harassed by Czechs who had set fire to the gasoline drums on the back of the tanks. So there were some explosions. I don't know if they fired their cannons into the buildings...there were reports that some of them had.

So we would see these Soviet tank crewmen on top of their tanks rattling down the streets more or less trying to intimidate a crowd that didn't appear to be very intimidated. The Czechs basically were distressed with what had happened and were determined not to be cowed and I think pretty much convinced that the Russians were not trying to do their job in a cruel fashion. They were trying to take over with a minimum application of force and a maximum show of force. So there were occasional casualties in Prague on those first few days, but there wasn't any bloody massacre. There were a lot of people out in the streets, a lot of young people charging around in backs of trucks waving Czechoslovak flags, a few of which had been dipped in blood from the few victims that had been hit. So it was not what I would describe as a war encounter, it was simply a rapid

occupation by an overwhelming display of force, including a lot of armored vehicles and tanks.

Q: Did the Embassy have any contact with any of these occupying forces or did we stay away from them?

BAKER: The main contact was through vehicle inspections. The Czechoslovak opponents of the invasion were unwilling to cease and desist altogether, even when the radio station and television station were taken over by the occupation forces, Czech radio people seized enough radio equipment so that they could broadcast from mobile places around the country. So they continued to broadcast news of what was happening continually moving their transmitters around the country to stay on the air. The Russians were trying to locate and shut down these broadcasts. So they were looking for cars that were carrying radio engineering equipment. The best place to intercept cars going from one part of the country to another was on the bridges across the Vltava River that flows through Prague.

So some of our personnel who for one reason or another had to drive across these bridges had their cars stopped and inspected and asked to open the trunks, etc. When they protested that they were diplomatic and pointed out the diplomatic plates, they were rebuffed apparently because the soldiers, not knowing the Latin alphabet, couldn't distinguish a diplomatic plate from a normal plate. So they were stopped just like everybody else.

So we racked up a string of incidents where our diplomatic immunity had been violated and a few days after the invasion the ambassador asked me to go to the Soviet Embassy and lodge a protest about the violations of our diplomatic rights. I did so and presented myself to my opposite number and he received me with a good deal of courtesy offering me coffee or a drink. I declined all that and said what my business was and made as forceful a complaint as I could and then left.

That was I thought the end of it. But the next morning, when I got into my office and looked out the window, there was a Soviet truck, like an American 2 ½ ton truck with a 50 calibre machine gun on top of it pointing right at my office window. I didn't feel very comfortable with that so I went outside and found the guy who was with the truck and asked to speak with the officer in command. This captain showed up and I said, "Can you explain to me what your vehicle is doing here?" He said, "I have been told that there have been inadvertent violations of the diplomatic rights of the American Embassy and I have been told to be positioned here to be sure that no further violations take place." I said, "Well, that is very considerate of you, but for heavens sake why do you have your 50 caliber machine gun pointed at an Embassy window?" He had no explanation for that. I said, "I would strongly request that either you withdraw your truck to the end of the street or at least reposition your machine gun." Some hours later the truck was gone. It looked like it was a tail twisting exercise by my opposite number.

Q: After the new Czech government, who were the hard liners who took over, how were relations with them...from 1968 until you left in 1970? Did things just go down hill?

BAKER: Our relations were very constrained and limited. The totally hard line group actually didn't take over until the following April, after a rather devastating riot which took place in Prague and other cities in the wake of the Czech hockey team's victory over the Soviet's in the Stockholm

final of the cup. The indignities that were wreaked on Aeroflot and various Soviet installations in that riot brought a rapid visit from the Soviet Chief of Staff and, not long after that, a change in the Czechoslovak government.

So over that winter what was happening was a gradual slicing off, salami style, of the original Dubcek group. Dubcek was not removed, he was shifted to be president of parliament, where he couldn't do a whole lot of harm. The prime minister remained for some months, but the interior minister was changed and some people were forced out all together. It looked as if the Russians, having realized that they had made a military success but a political disaster, were trying to mitigate the consequences by a fairly gradual turning down of the screw. The man they sent to do that and was doing that reasonably cleverly, was a diplomat named Kuznetsov, who had been a deputy foreign minister and an experienced member of the Central Committee of the Party.

But there was no question about who was in charge in this process. The post-invasion government was not going to challenge the Russians in a serious way, although they tried to resist some of the new arrangements that were foisted on them.

But the things that we would have wanted to do with the Czechoslovak government, like proceed with a consular convention and set up cultural offices or settle the claims agreement, were put aside because we knew this was not a government that we could do that with. So there really wasn't much business to be done with that government. We had occasional calls on the Foreign Ministry and problems about citizens who ran into trouble, but it became a very low level type of relationship. So much so that when the Nixon Administration was elected and chose to send Jake Beam to Moscow as Ambassador, they did not feel any sense of urgency about replacing him there. It was about six months before his successor, Mac Toon, arrived in July, 1969.

Q: How about living there? Was it a problem? Did you feel that all of the security apparatus had descended on you again?

BAKER: Yes, the atmosphere changed steadily, not immediately. Of course, after the first two or three weeks of the invasion, one was impressed by the military presence in the city. For example, I drove from my house, which was in a residential area, down the winding Serpentine to what was called Mala Strana, down near the river where our Embassy was. I would be doing a slalom each morning between about a dozen Soviet tanks that were placed along the Serpentine. So that gave you a certain sense of where you were at. Two or three weeks after the invasion the Russians withdrew their personnel outside the city so there wasn't a whole lot of evidence of Russian presence as the situation stabilized and as the Russians were satisfied that the Czech government and police were going to do their bidding. Gradually, the people I knew and had begun to have normal friendly relationships with began to indicate to me that they were under pressure to terminate the relationship. Nobody was harassing me personally. Although I think the surveillance did pick up, it wasn't terribly ostentatious. The main signal I got was what I heard from my Czech contacts who said, "They know that I have been seeing you and say that I would be better off if I didn't." That sort of thing. A few of them who were not in positions where they could be damaged, people who were artists or musicians or something like that, seemed to be able to maintain their contact with me. Most of them who had any kind of position in research institutes or government bodies or organizations, sort of disappeared. So, one didn't feel oppressed by measures that were

taken against me or my family or the Embassy personally, but by the general atmosphere of suspicion and withdrawal that prevailed and really locked in after April, 1969.

Q: How did we view Czechoslovakia after this as far as its role as an espionage center which seemed to be one of the more efficient of the creatures of the Soviet Union? Was there training of terrorists that was going on that we were aware of?

BAKER: I don't think we were really aware of that, at least I wasn't. There may have been other people in the Embassy who were. But it was not a matter that came across my desk. The Soviets resumed using Czech diplomats as intelligence agents as they probably did, and in some cases may never have stopped. Most of that was aimed at targets outside of Czechoslovakia.

Q: So it didn't really get you involved.

BAKER: No. What struck us in the period after the invasion was that President Johnson, who was ending his presidency, was anxious to reach an arms control agreement with the Soviets and initially did not appear as if he even wanted to pause in his pursuit of an understanding with the Russians despite this rather brutal act in the middle of Europe. I think that distressed some of us. Eventually he was prevailed upon to stand down from that. But generally speaking, I think I felt at that time and some time afterwards, that for various reasons, and I guess Vietnam was one of them, we were too ready too soon to let it go and not allow it to be an obstruction to the U.S.-Soviet relationship.

Q: You left Prague in 1970?

BAKER: Yes, in August, 1970. I was expecting to stay there another year but there were changes back in the European Bureau and I was apparently somebody's idea of somebody who could come back and run Eastern European stuff out of the Department.

Q: Had the Czechs, as far as relations were concerned, by this time sort of sunk back into a deep freeze?

BAKER: Yes. During that whole period, 1970-74, when Czechoslovakia was one of the countries I had to deal with, I didn't spend much time on Czechoslovakia. There were no visits there until Secretary Rogers, for some reason, decided that that was a blank spot on his map and wanted to go. Somewhat over our objections he made a one-day stop there. We didn't think the relationship deserved that attention. So I didn't spend much time on Czechoslovakia during that period or on Bulgaria, which was a rather orthodox Communist government. I had good country officers there and the kinds of issues and problems we had were quite within their capabilities.

THEODORE E. RUSSELL
Rotation Officer
Prague (1968-1971)

Theodore E. Russell was born in India in 1936 and educated at Yale and the Fletcher School at Tufts. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963. His career included posts in Naples, Prague, Trieste, Rome and Copenhagen and he was named ambassador to Slovakia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Well '67-'68 you were taking language training, Czech. My experience taking Serbian was boy did I learn about how Serbs think because the two teachers were Serb teachers. This was back some time but I think they are still doing it. Did you pick up in the language training much about the Czech way of thinking at all? I mean just not the language but get a feel from the teachers.

RUSSELL: Yes, and also of course we had area studies, which were well conducted. I have forgotten the names of the people associated with that, but FSI did a good job on area studies. However, the area studies course was probably not as demanding as it should have been. However, the Czech language instructor was a real drill sergeant. In fact the rumor was that he had been a border guard. I mean he was really tough, and was an excellent teacher. I am not a natural linguist. My MLAT language aptitude score was 61 or something like that. So it has to be drilled into me and I have to practice. It has to be semi automatic, because if I stop to think what is rule #3.8 about that case ending, I just won't do well. So this guy drilled us and drilled us. When I came out of there I got a 3, 3+. I spoke pretty good Czech when I went over there, except for practical stuff. My wife still ribs me. We arrived and were put in a hotel. I didn't know half the things on the menu. We hadn't studied menus much; we studied more political and economic language as well as the vocabulary for car repair. So I took Czech for a year and area studies. But FSI in those days, I don't know what they do now, they made no accommodation whatsoever for a spouse to be able to take courses with the FSO. That was a huge disadvantage and something that made the assignment less pleasurable for my wife because she had no time to learn Czech at all.

Q: I know when I took Serbian, this was in '61-'62, some of our wives, Muriel Eagleburger, Ellen Anderson, and I think Dora Lowenstein and my wife all hired a former Ambassador from the old Serb kingdom of Yugoslavia on 16th street. They went over there and they took it because FSI wouldn't do it.

RUSSELL: I don't believe they even offered the spouse the training on a space available system.

Q: There was one wife; I think Pat Johnston was taking Serbian, Dick Johnston's wife. Well you were in Czechoslovakia from '6...

RUSSELL: '68-'71.

Q: What was your job when you went there?

RUSSELL: Okay, again, just like in Naples, I was still a junior officer, so I was put on a rotational assignment, which was perfect. The first year I was head of the visa section. The second year I was head of the consular section. The third year I was Political Officer. That was the track.

Q: Who was Ambassador when you arrived?

RUSSELL: Jake Beam, a splendid, brilliant gentleman. A guy we all liked and admired enormously. In fact, I was in Prague during the revolution later in 1989, and I sent him a message, I guess through the desk, saying a liberty bell now stands on the hill where the statue of Stalin used to stand. They had erected something that looked like a liberty bell. He sent me something shortly before he died. He was a super guy. Then Malcolm Toon came in 1969.

Q: Two real professionals.

RUSSELL: Two fabulous professionals, absolutely fabulous.

Q: Well when you arrived in '68 what was the political situation? When did you arrive in '68? This is rather important.

RUSSELL: Yes, I arrived in June; that was during the Prague Spring. There was a feeling of great euphoria. It was a situation where in an extremely cynical country, I mean the Czechs are a bit cynical anyway, but under communism they were totally cynical and with reason, there were slogans like “he who doesn't steal from the state steals from his family” and “we pretend to work, and they pretend to pay us”, so that in this society, women were actually donating their jewelry to the state because they were so euphoric about what Dubcek and the reformers were trying to do. People were smiling. Charles Bridge had, not exactly happy throngs, but people who normally looked sullen, and later came to look sullen again, were smiling. Of course, Tito was a big hero because he was so independent and supported Dubcek. Ceausescu was also a hero because he was also rather independent vis-à-vis the Soviets. People really thought this was going to work. Both visited Prague in early August. It was a very exciting political climate that we came into.

Q: Well, when you arrived, the Embassy was relatively small. Even though you were a visa officer you were part of the Embassy staff. What was the feeling at that time, June '68 or so, of the lasting ability of this Dubcek regime and the Soviet menace at that time?

RUSSELL: As visa officer, a junior officer, I was not privy to small group discussions the Ambassador had with the military attaché or station chief or senior Political Officer as to what was going on. But in the larger staff meetings the impression I got was that it was considered that the chances the Soviets were going to intervene were increasing and were fairly high, certainly better than even. Certainly by July, that was the feeling. Then after a tense four day meeting of Dubcek and Brezhnev, accompanied by many members of the Soviet and Czechoslovak party leadership, at Cierna-nad-Tiso on the border of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the Soviet Union, at the end of July, Brezhnev appeared to have been mollified by Dubcek's reassurances. A Warsaw Pact summit meeting in Bratislava a few days later appeared to confirm that tensions had eased. Actually by then or soon thereafter Brezhnev, with urging from Ulbricht and Gomulka, had probably made the decision to intervene. But after that meeting, the estimate was things have cooled down a little bit, and there isn't quite as great a chance of an invasion. However, the military attaches continued saying “you don't have half a million soldiers and mechanized units massed on the borders of a state applying all this military pressure unless you are very likely to use it. You just don't keep it ready to pounce for very long before acting.”

Q: It is expensive.

RUSSELL: It is expensive, and you don't do it. So the military people I think, certainly felt the chances of an invasion were better than even. Then, as I say, people became a little more optimistic after Cierna-nad-Tiso. There was always the feeling an invasion remained a real possibility. But the timing I think was a real surprise.

Q: Were you feeling any, being a visa officer, were you getting any feeling about people trying to get out or returning or what have you during this pre invasion time?

RUSSELL: Yes, the people were much more able to get travel permission during the Prague Spring period, so we had a rise in people trying to go to the States to visit relatives for example. Frankly I bent over backwards to give people visas, so you did have more people going out. What was more interesting and sad was that after the invasion a number of people who had gotten out came back thinking they could leave again. Some of them couldn't. But yes, there was an increase in people leaving the country particularly to visit relatives. We did everything possible to facilitate that.

Q: What about relations with ordinary Czechs during this early period. Obviously you were there just a short time, but did you find that they were fairly easy?

RUSSELL: It was clear that the secret police were as active as ever and maybe more so. I think Dubcek did not do anything to suggest to the Soviets that he was going to change alliances or something like that. On the other hand, contacts improved with ordinary Czechs or Czechs at a higher level who before wouldn't accept invitations. At our Fourth of July celebration, for example, we had a huge turnout, so it was clearly easier to have contacts with Czechs during the Prague Spring than before. But the secret police were as active as ever in terms of surveillance and harassment.

Q: Did you get any feel, we will touch on it. As you went out in this first time, did you get any feel for the Czechs versus the Slovaks and that or were you pretty much in a Czech bastion.

RUSSELL: It was a Czech bastion but what we saw was that a lot of the reforms under a Slovak, Dubcek, had to do not only with liberalization, censorship rules, and of course the economic liberalization that set a lot of this off, but also with giving more autonomy to Slovakia. In fact that was the only thing that survived for awhile after the invasion. All the other reforms were rolled back. The greater degree of autonomy for Slovakia was an integral part of this whole thing and was what made the Slovaks enthusiastic about the Prague Spring. They were getting a bit more autonomy and that survived the initial crackdown after Dubcek was ousted.

Q: Let's talk about what was it, August, and just before. What was the atmosphere like?

RUSSELL: August. The atmosphere, as I say, was threatening from the time we arrived. There was a feeling that the Soviets might come in. Their pronouncements were watched very closely. What the Czechoslovak government was doing was watched very closely. My impression from just reading the local press and some of the cable traffic was that Dubcek, because he did not have

a majority in the central committee, was using the media to try and offset that to gain influence with the people. When you started seeing stories about the Katyn Forest massacre in the Czechoslovak media...

Q: You are talking about the massacre of Polish officers by the...

RUSSELL: By the Soviets, by the KGB. That made me think the Soviets are not going to like this at all. So, I think that the Soviets must have been getting very upset by the extent to which the Czechoslovak media was getting out of control. I think they thought it was becoming clear that Dubcek didn't have a firm grip. Maybe he didn't even want to have a firm hand in this area, because as I say, the conservatives outnumbered him in the central committee. So it was a feeling of menace. I remember we had close relations both with the Yugoslav and Romanian embassies. There was a certain amount of information sharing and that sort of thing. When Tito came to town in August he was treated like a hero by the Czechs and I'm sure this bugged the Soviets.

Q: Had a plan been evolved about well if the Russians and others invade, we will do this at the Embassy or something like this? Was that considered a problem, or were you just going to sit tight?

RUSSELL: Well it was considered a problem how we were going to deal with that in terms of getting Americans out of the country, dealing with the safety of American citizens. We did have very definite plans that had been made as to how we were going to react. We reacted very quickly after the invasion to get American citizens out. My own situation was a little bit difficult at that point because our older son Douglas had gotten a very severe stomach upset about the 14th of August. It was getting worse and worse. We took him a couple of times to children's hospital, and they said give him plenty of soup and liquids. He was getting worse and worse, so on the 20th of August we took him back to the children's hospital. They said, "He has acute appendicitis; we have to operate immediately or it is going to burst." So I called the Embassy, we were still pretty new in town. They said, "Don't even think of it. We'll get him a medevac to the Nuremberg U.S. military hospital." Well the Czechs wouldn't let the helicopter come in. I asked the Czech head surgeon, who was flabbergasted that we were not going to let a pediatric surgeon of the children's hospital do something that he considered urgent, "how many hours do we have?" He said, "You don't have more than three hours." So they sent a medevac helicopter to the border, and we drove like hell out there, and then Sally and Douglas were picked up, thrown on the helicopter, and I drove on after them. That evening we had dinner with the U.S. military surgeon. It is damn lucky we didn't let them do anything in Prague. He didn't have appendicitis; he had gastroenteritis. He was totally dehydrated. They didn't operate on him, but they pumped a lot of liquid into him. So we had dinner with the American surgeon. He said, "Well, how are things in Prague?" I said, "Things have cooled down a little bit." So the next morning we saw him at breakfast. He said, "Boy you guys are really on top of things. They invaded last night." So then I went back to Prague. We had a convoy going back because all of our supplies came from Nuremberg and there were always some U.S. and Czech employees out there on business. About five cars drove back to Czechoslovakia the next day. My wife and son were left in Nurnberg.

Q: Well I think this is a good place to stop. I put at the end where we are so when we pick it up. We are going to pick this up the next time, you were returning to Prague the day of the invasion from

Nuremberg. So we'll pick it up there.

Today is 13 March 2000. Ted, so let's pick up the tale of the invasion. You were in Nuremberg bringing your son. It was not appendicitis or whatever it was but it was...

RUSSELL: Yes. He had acute gastroenteritis, which I guess you can confuse with appendicitis, but you don't certainly treat it the same way. You have to rehydrate as soon as possible, so they put an IV into him. I learned about the invasion at breakfast from the surgeon. I had been with him the night before and said it wasn't really clear what was going to happen, but if anything the chances of a Soviet invasion had been reduced after the Dubcek-Brezhnev meeting. Anyway, that day I called the Embassy and they said, "There are several people from the Embassy out in Nuremberg. Why don't you all gather and come back in convoy tomorrow," the day after the invasion. So we formed a five car convoy. I was asked to give a ride to one of the Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), our chief administrative FSN. So we headed back from Nuremberg; it was about a five-hour drive. We headed out soon after noon and came to the border, got through the border okay. I don't remember seeing any Soviet troops yet at the border. They arrived or showed themselves a bit later. So we started to drive back to Prague. One of the things you noticed was a lot of the street signs were down. In fact the Czechs had taken down street and road signs across the country, particularly in Prague, as a sign of protest against the invasion and to confuse the Soviets, which I suppose it did very briefly. I remember vividly, we came to a village square about half an hour across the border. A column of Soviet, or Warsaw Pact tanks with a broad white stripe painted down the front, which was the only identifying mark they carried in the invasion, came into the square. So our little column waited for them to enter the square and go off on the road to Prague. We fell in behind them. I was the last of the five cars in our little group. What we didn't realize was there was another half of the tank column to come. I ended up with this enormous great thing rumbling behind my bumper, hoping they knew what my diplomatic CD plates meant but knowing that they probably didn't, and they probably didn't give a damn. Anyway, we came back to Prague, and we came back just before dusk. When we arrived the Embassy said we are glad you got here when you did because there is a curfew put on by the Soviets, so it is nice that you have arrived before dark.

So, at that point, I was the visa officer. I was head of the visa section. I was asked to help, as all of us were, in the evacuation of American citizens from Czechoslovakia. What that involved was getting people out in convoys, leading convoys of tourists who had cars out to the border, principally with West Germany, and then also getting people out by train. I don't think planes were flying west at that point. So I ended up down at the central railway station, and I had a little table. I was registering Americans. We had helped pay for a train that was going to Vienna. I was registering Americans as they came to the station and was telling them which train it was and getting their names. We were sending these names back by cable to Washington of all the Americans we knew the whereabouts of and in particular the fact that they had left, because we were getting flooded with calls from Americans worried about their relatives. I remember we registered a lot of Americans and got them on the train. The train was about to leave and there was a great commotion, and a group of guys all of whom looked like Che Guevara came dashing down the platform. They were Latin American students studying in Prague how to overthrow their respective governments, trying to get the hell out of there because they were concerned. I thought

that was pretty amusing. They got on the same train to Vienna.

Our younger son, Richard, who was then about two and a half, had been left behind with friends at the Embassy when we evacuated our older boy, who was about four, with suspected appendicitis. So the question was what we do with the families with young children. Ambassador Beam took the position and the Department agreed that families with young children could evacuate, could be gotten out, husbands in this case staying behind. The spouses with small kids evacuated at their own expense from Prague. Because I had one young son there and one in Nuremberg, I was designated to drive out another embassy family that had two little kids with whom Richard had been staying. That mother and her two little kids and our youngest son and I in an embassy station wagon with three big diplomatic pouches went out to Nuremberg several days after that. We got to the border, and there were two very tall Soviet border guards near the checkpoint. I presented my passport to the Czech authorities and they stamped it and said, "Okay, and you can't come back." I said, "What do you mean I can't come back? I am stationed here. I have a diplomatic passport." They said, "No, you can't come back." I thought, Oh, great, I am being PNGed. So I got across and stopped at Weidhaus, a German town right across the border and called back to the Embassy. I said, "They just the stamped my passport at the border and said I can't come back." So the Embassy said, "Well, we'll lodge a protest and try and straighten it out." So then I drove on to Nuremberg and the family was reunited, and my wife started making plans to go back to the United States. The embassy then called back and said, "Well, you haven't been PNGed, but they are saying you can't come back at that border crossing at least. So the Foreign Ministry doesn't know exactly what is going on. They clearly have told you not to come back, but they informally suggest and we suggest that you try a different border crossing." So I left off everyone in Nuremberg and headed back and came in with no problem at another border crossing to the south. I hadn't ever used that border crossing, and all the street signs were torn down. So, I didn't know exactly how I was going to find my way back to Prague, but then I noticed they hadn't torn down the right of way signs. I figured just as all roads lead to Rome, all roads in Czechoslovakia lead to Prague. I followed the right of way signs. So I got back to the Embassy. The next thing that happened involved a group of correspondents in the Embassy that we were sheltering.

Q: Foreign correspondents.

RUSSELL: U.S. correspondents. I think they were all U.S. citizens. They were sleeping on mattresses. Every evening for a number of days after the invasion, there was firing at night. Tracer bullets were going over our upper garden, which was on a line with the Hradcany Hill. We couldn't figure out what was going on. Military guys thought it was probably the Soviets shooting at each other. You know, they probably thought someone was taking pot shots at them at night and were just shooting back. It seemed very unlikely that any Czechs were shooting at them. Anyway, we at the same time were burning documents like crazy. We did not know what the Soviets were going to do. They had done some fairly belligerent things and postured in front of the Embassy main gate with a half track on one occasion. We really didn't know what the hell was going to happen, so we were burning documents to the extent that the flue heated up and caught the roof on fire. We had a fire in the attic and our roof. One of the correspondents found out our roof was on fire and filed something saying "Soviet shellfire sets fire to American embassy." It was really provocative. So that was squelched. Fortunately we had a fabulous staffer who had been a Seabee and a fireman in civilian life. He led the efforts to put out the fire. After that we had a big hole in the roof which we

covered by a big tarp. This attic space that had the hole in the roof was over the restricted area. The Marines a fairly short time thereafter detected an intruder in that area. There weren't that many Marines. I have forgotten how many we had altogether, but it was a small contingent, a half dozen or so. So the younger officers like me were drafted into night duty, were issued a flashlight and a .45 and sent up into the attic to patrol. It is a wonder we didn't kill each other. I had fired a pistol at tin cans in the back yard of our home in Maine, but I had never handled a .45 at that point. Anyway we were patrolling around up there. No one from the Czech side was ever put down there again, and eventually the Embassy fixed the hole in the roof. When I went back in 1988, you could still see traces of the fire up in the attic.

Q: Well one of the things, I mean initially, of getting the families out and all, what was the concern, because you know, we had embassies in Soviet controlled countries before?

RUSSELL: The concern was that there was considerable violence connected with the invasion. It was generally not a case of violent resistance by the Czechs because President Svoboda as commander-in-chief immediately urged that people should remain calm and that there should be no armed resistance. There was fierce resistance by students and others downtown who tried to seal off the radio station and protect it by overturning vehicles and lining up busses, so there was some fighting in the sense of the Soviets pushing and shooting their way through. A number of people, particularly students, were killed, but it wasn't hundreds being mowed down or anything like that. By the way, it is fascinating that after the Soviets captured the radio station in Prague, clandestine radio and even TV stations went into action and remained on the air for about two weeks. There was firing for several nights after the invasion. The people really didn't know what the Soviets were going to do. Their troops seemed very nervous. One pregnant lady was shot down at a bus stop apparently because some guy had his finger on the trigger in a half-track and it went over a bump and he let off a burst and killed this poor woman. He apparently hadn't deliberately shot her; it just was a stupid accident. It was a very nervous time, there had been a lot of violence downtown, a lot of fires and firing and that kind of thing and the bridges had been sealed off. The children's hospital was across the river from the Embassy. Had our son been put in the local hospital, he would have been cut off from us in the children's hospital across the river, not speaking a word of the local language, being operated on for something that he didn't have. So the feeling was it was a dangerous situation with little kids, who might need quick medical attention. The expense of evacuation was not covered. In fact, because our son Douglas was sick for quite awhile my wife finally flew back to the States to be with her parents and took the two kids with her.

Q: Were you aware around Prague of East German, Polish troops and that sort of thing?

RUSSELL: No, I was mainly aware of what appeared to be Russian or Soviet troops and equipment. What was interesting was that in the first wave, you had more of the Caucasian Russian troops. They were met with great hostility, and young Czechs screaming at them, "What are you doing, shooting your brother Slavs? It is our country." They were being harassed by the citizenry who were understandably very angry. There was one report we heard that they had been told that the Germans had invaded Czechoslovakia. They were told all kinds of cock and bull stories to explain why they were doing what they were doing. Apparently the first wave became demoralized and was withdrawn and replaced in many cases by Asian Soviet troops. You found different features in the troops that you saw around town. I don't remember seeing people that I thought

were Poles or Germans.

Q: I was just wondering...

RUSSELL: They came in for sure.

Q: I know, whether the Soviets were trying to make sure that the Poles and East Germans and all were dragged into the center of Prague so that they could, you know, sort of dissipate a bit of the blame or not?

RUSSELL: They certainly were involved in invading Czechoslovakia, but I don't remember seeing them in the center of Prague. I think the Soviets wanted to handle that themselves.

Q: What was the Embassy doing during this, both you, I mean I know we were working with Americans, but while you were doing that, were we able to get out and around?

RUSSELL: Yes, the Ambassador in the first days right after the invasion said only the military attaches and I think a couple of Political Officers will be allowed to wander around downtown. All the other personnel unless you are assigned to go down to the station and do something, you are not to rubberneck around to see what is going on. There was a certain amount of violence still going on. Then, that was lifted pretty quickly, and we could look around as we wished. Those officers that had the responsibility for reporting on political and military developments were the ones that were assigned to get out there and do it. The rest of us were still trying to keep track of Americans and report back what was going on. We initially had a situation where we were not able to communicate with Nuremberg or the States by calling out. I couldn't call my wife's mother for example to say that my wife and our two kids were planning to come home. However, people could call in from the States. Some woman in upstate New York, my wife's family was from Albany, called us to ask about a relative to see whether he had been evacuated or not. At the end of the conversation, I said, "Could you ask my wife's parents to call their daughter in Nurnberg and say that her husband is coming out bringing their younger son." She very kindly called my wife and gave her the news.

Q: How about as a visa officer and all, were you able to do anything about Czechs who felt in peril?

RUSSELL: During the Prague Spring we tried to be liberal in letting people go visit the U.S. because it was the first time they were allowed to. We would follow the rules, but certainly we tried to give very expeditious treatment to people in that situation. What happened after the invasion was a fair number of people came back, which turned out to be a mistake, because then some of them were trapped there. We didn't have a lot of cases of people that I remember applying for U.S. visas where we were granting them visas for political reasons. Anyone who needed to escape that urgently was probably getting over the border into Austria or Germany.

Q: This was not a parallel of 1956 in Hungary then, I mean as far as you know, in that time there was a tremendous flow of people out of Hungary.

RUSSELL: Right. In talking about who wanted to go to the U.S. as I say, anyone who wanted to get out that urgently would get out over the border and not worry about trying to get a U.S. visa in Prague. Yes, some people were flowing into Austria, and I guess to a lesser extent into Germany, but we didn't see that in the visa section. It wasn't a huge outflow like in Hungary in 1956.

Q: Yes, and you didn't have the equivalent of a Cardinal Mindszenty. Had you had people...?

RUSSELL: No we didn't. Occasionally we would have someone come who would say, I want to get asylum and we would have to say "If you come in to our embassy we can't guarantee how you are going to get to the U.S." The policy was, as you know, give asylum if someone is in imminent peril. If the secret police are chasing someone down the street and he dodges into your gate, then you shelter him. We did have approaches even from a few other nationals, in one case from an East European security service officer, who wanted help in getting out of Czechoslovakia. We had to advise such people to get themselves out of the country and talk with U.S. Embassy reps in Austria or West Germany. We were being heavily watched and were wary of provocations.

Q: As things were beginning to settle down after, you were there until when/ When did you leave there?

RUSSELL: My wife came back after about a month in the U.S. after the invasion. We left Prague on transfer in the summer of '71.

Q: So you were there a good hunk of time. Can you talk about your impressions about how the Czechs adjusted to this?

RUSSELL: There was a lot of euphoria, of course, during the Prague Spring, which after the invasion gave way to fear that they were going to lose all of the progress that they had made. However, the crackdown was not immediate, so there was some initial hope that some of these reforms would survive. Immediately after the invasion, for example, there was a secret session of reformist members of the Communist Party in a Prague factory where they continued to pass reformist resolutions. So the crackdown did not come immediately, and people were initially hopeful. However, little by little, toward the end of the year, they started to remove reformists from their positions. There were signs that a lot of reforms were going to be rolled back. The press was silenced pretty quickly. Everything pointed to things deteriorating. That's why early in the new year in '69 you had the student, Jan Palach, burn himself to death. He doused himself with gasoline or kerosene in Wenceslas Square and burned himself to death in protest to what was clearly becoming a crackdown and a rollback of the various reforms. Then people started to really understand how bad things were going to get. But the real crackdown didn't come until later. The end of March of '69 you had a Czechoslovak-Soviet hockey match which everyone in the country was watching. It was a highly political development. The Czechoslovak team won 4-3, and people just went nuts, driving all around town beeping their horns and yelling and dancing and generally celebrating. Probably, the secret police took advantage of this and perhaps even prepositioned loose cobblestones next to the Aeroflot offices in Wenceslas Square, and lo and behold, the rocks were thrown through the window of the Aeroflot office, and the office sacked by demonstrators. The Soviets reacted sharply. By mid April a Slovak hard liner, Gustav Husak, had replaced Dubcek as Party Secretary. Then the crackdown started in earnest. So Husak came in, and then

they rolled back virtually all of the political reforms with the exception of some of the changes that had given Slovakia a bit more autonomy. That was not initially rolled back but gradually made moot by the fact that it was emptied of content. Prague was continuing to dictate and the dictator was Gustav Husak, a Slovak but a willing ally of the Soviets in the crack down.

Q: Was there any reason why Slovaks were in that? Was that a deliberate move in the Communist Party to push Slovaks to be the head of the party? I mean Dubcek was Slovak.

RUSSELL: Dubcek was Slovak and part of the impetus driving the Dubcek-led reform movement was that Antonin Novotny, who was head of the Communist Party and was a Czech, was an anti-Slovak Czech. He was also an extremely unpleasant fellow. The Slovaks hated his guts, so part of what mobilized Slovaks to join this reform movement was the feeling that they had to get rid of Antonin Novotny. Part of what the Slovaks wanted out of this was more autonomy. The Czechs were interested more in the political and economic reforms, building on the ideas of economists like Ota Sik in the early '60s. Husak was brought in because he was the tough guy. The Russians trusted him. He had been locked up in the period of the purges and actually tortured, but he was a dyed in the wool Communist, a real hard line guy. He was brought in and simply conducted what was then a major purge of the Communist Party. While the general populace was very enthusiastic about the Prague Spring reforms, the ones by definition who are able to drive things were party members who held all the positions of power. So when the crackdown came, Husak and the Soviets said, "We have got to purge this party. This party is sick." So the purge was to get rid of reform Communists. In the Embassy in the last year I was Political Officer and we were trying very hard to keep track of the intensity and breadth of this purge. We were able to do it to a certain extent, and it was very broad. Anyone who did not recant, say they had made a mistake supporting the Prague Spring, say the invasion was justified, sign something to this effect, in other words anyone who had any kind of principles at all and was not willing to sell out totally, was purged, and sent to work as a window washer or furnace stoker and that kind of menial job away from contact with the public.

Q: Well one always thinks there was the name of a movie that was quite popular, the unbearable lightness of being.

RUSSELL: That was later.

Q: But it showed some of the effects of a doctor ended up a window washer. I mean that sort of thing stands. Was that sort of thing happening down in the professions?

RUSSELL: It was absolutely happening. You had distinguished professors of political science and similar professionals who were in some cases locked up for long periods of time, although many of them might be locked up more briefly and then put to work as window washers and stokers. They were given jobs, which were unpleasant, low paying, unhealthful, and didn't have any contact with the general public. So you had Jiri Dienstbier who after the revolution became Foreign Minister, he was a stoker after he was released from prison. Actually a lot of them said this had a bright side because it gave them time to think and to write.

Q: Well this was it. In a way you are training a whole class of I mean people who are obviously

going to be leaders, and you put them out there for a while and they simmer.

RUSSELL: They had time to think anyway. The only thing is with the might of the state, the totalitarian state where they obtain control of the police, the army, all the instruments of power, and then once they have gotten over that, they don't need to shoot their opponents to keep the lid on. They got over that in the early '50s after Stalin died. They weren't shooting many people. They were locking up some, but you don't really even need to lock them up that often. All you need to do is deprive them of work, deprive their wives and children of work, in the cases of leading dissidents who were primarily men. Rita Klimava was a notable exception. She was the wonderful first Czechoslovak Ambassador to Washington after the Velvet Revolution. But you deprive the family of the means of sustenance, you deprive the kids of a future in terms of any education, you give them menial work and you harass them. You call them in for questioning periodically. There aren't many people who are going to put up with that, who are going to risk that willingly. So the vast majority of the population shut up, hunkered down and did what they were told. A very small minority of dissidents really were the ones who were pushing the resistance.

Q: Did you, I am really saying the Embassy and all notice a change in the before the Prague Spring and after the end of the Prague Spring in the Czech government? What is spurring the question is Czechoslovakia had the reputation of having one of the nastiest regimes around particularly since it was an educated group of people, and yet they are doing. Also that it along with the East Germans were in the forefront of running secret services abroad, I mean giving terrorists sustenance and being great spies, that whole thing.

RUSSELL: But this is absolutely understandable and explicable. The Czechs, just talk about the Czechs, but the same is true of the Germans in slightly different ways. The Czech part of Czechoslovakia in the '30s was so advanced industrially and culturally across the board, I think it is a correct statistic that if taken separately, Bohemia and Moravia made up the seventh richest area in the world in the 1930s. Czechoslovakia as a whole was highly developed and the whole country was doing really very well under a free market democratic system, although Slovakia lagged economically. So from that two things follow. One, if you are going to turn it into a totalitarian society, you have got more people to stamp out or stamp on. You need a very tough regime to convince these people they are better off under communism, which they did not vote in, particularly in Slovakia where there was even less support for communism and the Communist Party after World War II than there was in the Czech part of the country. So you needed a very vigorous regime to enforce discipline on a highly civilized people who remembered better days and who now had a new, Communist boot on their neck after the Nazi occupation. The other thing was that those who were willing to do anything to get ahead, the ambitious opportunists, had great rewards if they went into the secret police. The Czechoslovak intelligence service was very effective in the '30s and '40s. They helped, the Czechoslovak government in exile set up the assassination of Heydrich, one of the most closely guarded people in the third Reich. They had a great intelligence tradition which was then built on by KGB mentors who controlled every aspect of the Czechoslovak security apparatus. I remember in graduate school I wrote a paper on the role of the East European countries in the Soviet effort to gain influence in the third world through trade, aid, and other activities. It was a huge role, and the Czechs played a very big part in this because they had the wherewithal and human capital to do it. Those two things went hand in hand and weren't strange at all. I guess a lot of that was true of East Germany. As far as helping with

some of the terrorist groups, certainly they gave them shelter. They would go there to regroup and that sort of thing. There was a famous case in early '68 where the American head of a Jewish relief organization, Jordan was his name, was apparently assassinated by Arab terrorists in Prague and his body thrown in the river. We were pretty certain that the Czechoslovak secret police knew what had happened. Whether they had done it or helped it or just watched it was unclear and I think remains a mystery to this day. That was a huge issue in relations between the two countries for at least a couple of years.

Q: Well as things developed there during this time up to '71 when you were there, were you able I mean could you go talk to people and all in the government or comment regular people?

RUSSELL: In dealing with the government say on consular cases, you could talk to people. But in dealing with Czech and Slovak bureaucrats there were two groups. This was particularly true the second time I was there. There were those who were nasty because ideologically they didn't like you or they felt there was opportunity to be nasty to westerners because the governments had bad relations. There was that category. Then there was the pragmatic category trying to get business done. "I don't like your country; your country doesn't like our country. Let's try and get a few practical things done." Doing consular work if there was an American locked up somewhere or about to be tried for some usually phony charge, I could go and even talk to senior officials. I remember going to central Czechoslovakia; I forget what town now. There had been a U.S. scholar, a young postgraduate type who had been grabbed for some alleged infraction. They didn't say espionage, but implied it. I remember talking to the so-called defense lawyer involved in the case. I said, "Look this young guy hasn't done anything wrong. He is not hurting anybody. You are making a very bad impression on everybody by these absurd charges against him. Why don't you just let him go?" The lawyer replied "Don't worry, he will be sentenced to a few months and then it will be waived and he will be expelled." So he knew exactly what was going to happen to him well before his trial and would even tell me what was going to happen so I wouldn't be too concerned about it. That is exactly what happened, and we got him on a train and got him out of the country.

Q: What about just prior, you got there when?

RUSSELL: I got there in June of '68 and left in June or July of '71.

Q: Not too long before your arrival, there had been a survey done about pensioners, whether to give checks. I know because I was in Yugoslavia at the same time and we were trying to get the social security administration people to come in and do a survey. The Yugoslavs were pretty unhappy. It was being done in Czechoslovakia, so this must have been around '66 or so, to see if the pensions were actually reaching the people which they were. In a way that had been cleared. But normally we were going out to make sure the people were still alive and that sort of thing. Were you doing much of that?

RUSSELL: No, but when I was head of the visa section there was another officer in the section who was doing social security and veterans benefits issues. If I remember correctly, social security beneficiaries could get hard currency coupons to exchange for dollars they received. They could use those coupons in the state stores. Actually they could sell them on the black market at a very

good rate. So we didn't see that the government was stealing the money from them. They were just absorbing all the dollars and giving them some other kind of currency, but it was still a great benefit to these people. That is the kind of thing you could deal with them on.

You were asking what the relationship with the bureaucracy was. On death cases for example, I would go through all this paper work with the local authorities. They did not try by and large to be bloody-minded. They had the Austro-Hungarian red tape, you know, and when you superimpose communism on Austro-Hungarian red tape you really get a lot of red tape, but they weren't being really obstructionist. You ran into fascinating cases. We had a number of death cases, mainly traffic accidents, that sort of thing. I remember the doctor who also did embalming who was involved with a death case that I dealt with had been one of the people who had been called upon and had seen Jan Masaryk after he had, I think, been pushed out of a fourth floor bathroom window in the Foreign Ministry in 1948 two weeks after the Communist coup. He wouldn't say anything about it obviously, but he let slip at one point that he had been involved. So you ran into fascinating cases like that. You also had an odd category of people, sometimes journalists, sometimes bureaucrats, who professed an interest in contacts with the Americans, professed to be rather nervous about these contacts, professed to have opinions and knowledge about what was going on politically or economically in the country, and were all working for the secret police. They were targeted on members of the Embassy. We always had to make the determination were they marginally worth cultivating knowing that one of the purposes of this contact was their string could always be jerked and you could be PNGed on the grounds that this person had been your contact and you had been a spy. So, you always had to judge whether it was worth talking to these people. There were a couple of people I used to see from time to time who occasionally had marginally interesting stuff to say, but you always knew what they were up to and presumably they knew that you knew. One used to take us fishing and was at least an engaging type. Once he "warned" me that the police were "bugging" our phones and urged that we look for a particular device in them. It turned out that the device was ours and he obviously was trying to find out what it was. The other oddball contact was rather dull and drank a lot of my scotch when he came over to our apartment at night for hours on end. Our wives could not communicate, so my wife had to pull out photo albums and was incredibly patient about it. Once, I was feeling bloody minded and simply refused to ask him anything political all evening. Driving him home, he urgently gave me about a ten minute, unsolicited "dump" of the information he had been allocated for the evening. This was all pretty phony, but it was that kind of a phony world. It was very hard to find people who were involved in any way, shape or form in political or economic activity that you could talk with openly. About the only people you could talk with openly were in the arts and some of them were absolutely delightful human beings.

Q: I was going to say this has always been sort of the one area in the Communist world.

RUSSELL: We knew the photographer of the national gallery well, and various painters and that sort of thing. So we did come to know a circle of people in the cultural world who were uniformly highly cultivated, thoughtful, fine people. That is another thing that I think is important that I am sure you saw in Yugoslavia. What you found in these totalitarian societies was what you find, I guess, in any totalitarian society particularly when the country has known better times and has a rich cultural background. These people revert to an inner life to get away from the grayness or worse of their outer life. You would have people cultivating hobbies, for example, doing miniature

trains or owning some particularly difficult to care for purebred dog. Everybody collected wild mushrooms in the beautiful forests outside Prague. That was a big thing, get out in the woods in the fresh air and collect mushrooms or hunt or fish or whatever. People would pursue with a vengeance all of the things that gave them a chance to escape from grayness.

Q: Also I know in the Soviet society and to some extent in the Yugoslav society there was room for great debates around the kitchen table and all that, not necessarily political but this was the ability to exercise your intellect more than we have in our society.

RUSSELL: There was much more interest in doing that, although, the first time I was there, people knew that there was a danger they were being bugged almost no matter where they were, so open conversations about politics and that sort of thing were pretty rare. Even discussions about art theory and indeed almost everything was considered political. One of the few places people would talk was at noisy, crowded cocktail parties. This is the only time I've enjoyed such events.

Q: Did Havel ever come across your or the Embassy's gun sight or not?

RUSSELL: Not the first time I was there. In fact he became engaged in political activities, I think, during the Prague Spring, but I never met him then. However, I certainly came to know him the second time.

Q: What were we looking at in Czechoslovakia? Were the curtains or shades drawn and we were just marking time, or did we see any opportunity maybe to turn Czechoslovakia around as far as we were concerned or partially to find some opening?

RUSSELL: I think we were always looking for ways to deal practically on things that made sense, even just a limited amount of cultural exchange. There wasn't much of a relationship. However, there was a desire to eliminate useless areas of controversy. There was the issue of the Czech gold that we held and how that was going to be negotiated, and the issue of confiscated American properties on the other side, and you know, all those kinds of issues that are a diplomat's job to try to resolve or at least not exacerbate. So we were picking around the edge of what would be a normal international relationship trying to resolve those fairly minor problems that we could. We liked and felt sorry for the Czech and Slovak people, but we detested the guys in power. We felt sorry for the people who had known better times. While we intensely disliked the people in power, who were a miserable bunch of mean spirited opportunists, we did try to work with them on minor practical things on the one hand, and on the other tried to hammer them on individual human rights issues when they would seriously abuse people who dissented in some way. The first time I was there that was something we had zero influence on, particularly after the Soviet invasion and the party purges. By the time I went back in '88, this was a major focus of our activities, trying to do things to help protect dissent and dissidents to the extent that we could. We had some levers to do that. But the first time I was there we had a pretty miserable relationship after the August 21 Soviet-led invasion.

Q: How about American reporters and all that? Were they able to get in there, and was there a problem? I can't remember if there were any cases during your time.

RUSSELL: Yes, we had one case I remember vividly. We had the case during my first time there in 1971 where Alan Levy, a journalist in Prague, was doing a manuscript on Czechoslovakia, and the police found out about it. I think they confiscated the manuscript. I remember going down to the station with our USIS chief who had been very friendly with Levy. He was put on the train, I think to Vienna. It was night and the train was unheated. The embassy protested it, but the Czechs in effect said go to Hell. He has violated our law; he had manuscripts. He has had ties with people he shouldn't have. They threw him and his family out of the country. That was the one case I remember of a journalist being chucked out of the country. Certainly there were some other journalists. I remember Lars Nelson who until his death recently worked for one of the New York papers. He was a very acute observer and we had quite frequent conversations. I think he was working for Reuters at the time in Prague. Other journalists would come through quite often and write quite perceptive reports about what was going on. They didn't have a lot of access, but they made a good thing of it. I think Lars for example spoke Russian, which most Czechs also spoke. Alan Levy I think spoke Czech, as he had been there several years.

Q: What about American citizens. There were quite a number of people there who came over. They were called Bohemians.

RUSSELL: You mean after the revolution.

Q: I am talking about before, in other words as a rather large Czech community, Czech- Slovak community in the United States, mainly working types who came to the mills and all at the turn of the century. Did they play any role in our relations I mean through Congress or newspapers or like that?

RUSSELL: I remember there was a citizenship issue. We had a treaty with Czechoslovakia designed to avoid too many cases of dual nationality and thus establish that you either had one nationality or the other. There was a certain period of years where this applied. It was very complicated and led to some problems. We were trying to work around that because many people after the end of Communism wanted to have both nationalities, and, in fact, you are allowed to do that now. But we did have cases of Czech Americans coming back to visit relatives. They were allowed to do so unless they had some record of speaking out against the regime or something negative in their file. There were some Czech Americans who came back to Prague and the surrounding areas. Some of them would get into trouble because they couldn't comprehend how bloody minded the Communist regime was or how poorly people lived. Some of them did turn into consular problems. You had offbeat types who seemed to arrive in Prague more often than one would expect. You would have people who would arrive and get in trouble because they had mental problems. There was one sad case of a kid whose parents were obviously paying him to stay in Europe and just wander around. He received checks through American Express. He wandered to Prague not realizing there wasn't an American Express in Czechoslovakia. He couldn't get his checks, so he became a consular case and we had to lend him funds to get to Vienna. He was obviously highly disturbed and had with him some scraps of paper with psychiatric records. A fair number of people came in with mental problems. One gigantic fellow, usually dressed in a dirty T shirt and leather jacket, claimed he was "King of the Goths" and demanded to see our Military Attaché to plan how to defeat the Communists. Another, a Hollywood minor league "producer," went nuts in Wenceslas Square Christmas morning and was

arrested for screaming curses at the Russians. I was Embassy Duty Officer. When he was allowed to call the Embassy from the police station, he told me I was his “contact in Network Orange” and started speaking French “so they won’t understand.” We got him released and out to Vienna ASAP, as even the Czech police recognized him as a mental case. We subsequently got a call from the Duty Officer in Vienna saying someone had called to say they had left “secret documents” in front of our Embassy. The Duty Officer said the papers looked like the contents of a waste basket from a Czech police station.

Q: If you didn't have, I mean go back to my Yugoslav experience. We had what was a virulent Croatian community in Chicago. It was not close to being a fascist community, but it had a lot of political. Did you have anything equivalent to that?

RUSSELL: We are still talking my first tour ending in '71. We didn't really notice that sort of thing. There was a Slovak emigration after WWII to the U.S. and Canada that was highly anti-Communist, including some who had sympathized with the Tiso Clero-Fascist regime during the war, but we did not hear from them much. Of course there was the large number of Czechs and Slovaks who simply fled west because they hated and feared the new totalitarian regime and wanted to live in a democracy as they had before the war. Their flight was our gain and Czechoslovakia’s loss. The ordinary Czech or Slovak who had not been targeted by the regime who was curious or had come back to see relatives would tell us they had no real problems. However, sometimes they would get in trouble by insulting a policeman or in other minor ways. For example, one guy from Chicago came to Prague and yelled at a Czech cop in one of their yellow and white Skodas “you milkman!” He said he had heard in Chicago that Czech police were commonly called that. So the cop beat him up and hauled him off to jail. We got him out of jail and out of the country.

Q: What was the feeling that you were getting from more of your military colleagues, your own embassy estimate about the Czech military effort in case of a war? We were always concerned about war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. What was the feeling there?

RUSSELL: I honestly don't remember much discussion of that. I mean as I say, I was in the consular section for two of the three years. The second year, 1969-1970, when I was head of the section, I attended the country team meetings and again, as Political Officer I would be in on those meetings. I don't remember discussion of what the Czech role in case of war would be. My understanding is that their role would be to be cannon fodder and go over the German border and get shot down and then the Soviets would come in behind. But I don't remember a lot of discussion of that. There was more focus on border incidents, a NATO helicopter getting too close to the border and getting shot down, or what the Czechs were doing on the border. I remember that kind of discussion, but it wasn't about their role in case of war.

Q: Well, did the border become much more dangerous after the clampdown?

RUSSELL: Yes, they certainly clamped down along the border more than they had earlier in the 1960s, although it had always been tight. I bought a series of border guard medals in 1989 that had a German Shepard, crossed rifles and “they shall not pass” as a motto. The badges were of first, second and third degree and you had to wonder whether they had to have shot some poor escapee

to get a first class medal.

Q: How about the Czech's neighbors, particularly the Hungarians and all? Was this and the Poles, were they restive or was this a problem or were they all happily in the Warsaw Pact?

RUSSELL: I think the East German regime, in particular, and the Poles supported the Warsaw Pact invasion. They feared something similar to the Prague Spring happening in their country. They were both very susceptible to that kind of thing, so I think their leadership was perfectly happy to move. The Romanians, of course, refused to go in. The Bulgarians did whatever they were told at that point. During the Prague Spring some of the Hungarian leadership would make statements saying that the Czechs were going too far. I don't remember the Poles speaking out on it that much. The East Germans were very hard over as usual. Frankly we were pretty cut off in Prague, tightly controlled, heavily watched, every contact monitored, it was not that easy to pick up that kind of information in Prague. Cables from other Embassies would have that reporting, but we did not get all of it. We had some very good people there, and the head of the combined political and economic section was a very bright guy.

Q: Who was that?

RUSSELL: Mark Garrison, who later went on to teach at Brown. He was head of the Russian Institute there. He was a very bright guy, and he had a good handle on what was going on, but it wasn't easy, and we didn't exactly have that broad visibility. The only good thing is in a totalitarian country like that, if you can see the tip of the iceberg, you can often adumbrate the rest of the iceberg. If you have any information that Husak, for example, feels strongly that something is getting out of hand or that he is planning to move in a certain direction, if that piece of information is true, then that is what is going to happen. Not like Italian politics, for example, where there is lots of information available but often you can't predict from one day to the next what is going to happen.

Q: What about working with other embassies including the Yugoslav embassy at that time? I would have imagined that there would be an awful lot of exchanging of information and all that.

RUSSELL: There was very good cooperation among the NATO embassies. There would be meetings with NATO embassy colleagues, and when I was Political Officer, there was a Political Officers club. We were a very tight bunch. In fact some of the folks have kept in touch for years. We would regularly meet in one of the secure rooms of one of our embassies, often ours, to discuss what was going on. That was useful because if someone picked up some tidbit, for example from a well informed source like a Yugoslav journalist, they would share it. The Yugoslavs were particularly good sources of information because, while they were not trusted by the Czechoslovak government, they weren't considered the enemy. You could tell on the numbering system of the diplomatic cars. The Soviets were "00" on their license plate, which I thought was perfect symbolism. We were #20 and began the NATO series and the Yugoslavs were #50, beginning the "neutrals" series.

Q: They were gaining on Yugoslavia. We were 60.

RUSSELL: The Russians were 00 on their license plate. We were the bad guys, and that started at 20. 50 was the cutoff. 20 and into the 30s, those were NATO. 50 was Yugoslavia, right in the middle. Above that were the developing countries. The Yugoslavs were seen in that light and often Yugoslav journalists would have good sources and ideas that were pretty perceptive about what was going on, so we would make an effort to cultivate them.

Q: They were also being used in China as one of the points of contact. I mean they got around a little bit.

RUSSELL: Really. They got around because they weren't as mistrusted. They weren't trusted, but they weren't seen as enemies, so we did try to have good relations. I mentioned that before and after the invasion we had good relations with the Romanians, who thought they might be next, and exchanged information with them. But within the NATO community, the Political Officers and Economic Officers got together as well, and that was very useful.

Q: What was the feeling, obviously it wasn't your beat, but at the same time you were in a small embassy, what was the feeling about the economy of Czechoslovakia because it like East Germany had been essentially advanced economies and turned out after it was all over, after '89 the East German economy was not as fancy as we thought it was. What about Czechoslovakia at that time? Did we feel it was producing some pretty good stuff?

RUSSELL: I think what happened there was that by the early '60s the economy was not doing well. The deal had always been that the Communist government would be in charge of everything and no one would challenge it, and in return people would get a certain social safety net. That would include food at a decent price, clothing and housing, although they never could deliver on housing. But the economy was doing so poorly by the early '60s that government economists like Ota Sik were forced to start thinking seriously about how to reform it. As I remember the economic situation by the late '60s and early '70s was really not good at all. However, the crackdown was such that the people weren't raising their heads to say anything. Our impression of the economy was that it was not doing well, that a fair amount of money was being siphoned off for aid in support of the Soviet diplomatic effort, and some of the arms sales and other transactions with developing countries that were going on were not helping. There was a tremendous housing shortage. People had to wait for years and years to get a house or decent apartment. You also had to wait for a long time to get a car and the cars were wretched and expensive. There were many jokes about that kind of thing. "How do you double the value of a Skoda? Fill the gas tank." Our impression was that the economy was not in very good shape at all. That said, I don't think that was what brought the system down in Czechoslovakia in 1989. It was a collapse of political will and lack of military support from the Soviets in the face of absolute public rejection of the regime and its incompetent, brutal and uncultured leaders.

ELLEN JOHNSON
Secretary
Prague (1969-1973)

Born and raised in New Jersey, Ellen Johnson entered the Foreign Service in 1955. Her career included service in Japan, Poland, UK, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Germany. She was interviewed on April 27, 1994 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: So, you then went overseas again and for a long spell from 1969-1973 in Prague.

JOHNSON: Yes, I found myself once again in a communist country. I did a double tour there primarily because I like working for Art Wortzel, who was my second DCM there. Prague was a beautiful baroque city which had not been destroyed by the Second World War and a delight to wander through. There was a lot more to do in Prague than there had been in Warsaw. There was opera, the famous mime theater, a castle, bridges, lots of churches, some very good restaurants, excellent beer, golf, to name a few things of interest.

Q: It was what, a year or two years after the Prague...?

JOHNSON: I arrived a day after the first anniversary of the Prague Spring.

Q: This was when the Soviets came in and crushed the new government.

JOHNSON: Yes, with tanks and troops. So, although there were a number of things one could do and see in Prague, the secret police was in control of things. There was a guard box across from the embassy entrance and one near the entrance to the DCM and staff houses in the Residence compound. At times you would be under surveillance, although it wasn't quite as noticeable within Prague as it had been in Warsaw. When you were driving in the country you would quickly know whether you were being followed or not. But it never bothered me, in fact, I felt rather safe. Once when I was driving in the country I got a flat tire, and the two men following me changed the tire for me.

As in Warsaw, there was very little contact with the Czechs. I had a maid, who would occasionally ask me to do things for her and I unhappily had to refuse. Again one had to operate on the premise that she was controlled by the secret police. During my third year, I had a man who came to my house to teach me German. He was a very interesting person. He was a former vice president of a large company who was at that time digging up cobble stones and laying them back down again. He was living alone in Prague while his family was forced to live in the country. He loved his city of Prague and would tell me wonderful stories about its history. Once when I had visitors he offered to act as a tour guide. He was fantastic, showing us all around the city and the castle. I didn't learn much German, but I enjoyed his commentary. One day he called and said he was sorry but he would not be able to come again. Very sad. I hope he is still alive and can enjoy the city's liberation. It was sad that the country wasted so much of its professional, business and intellectual manpower resources.

Q: What was the embassy like. How was it operating?

JOHNSON: The chancery, along with 12 apartments, was located in the Schönbrunn Palace which was bought by us in 1924. The office I shared with the Ambassador's secretary had three enormous chandeliers! I felt I should be dancing rather than typing in the room. It was not a large embassy

with about a dozen Foreign Service officers and representatives of CIA, USIA and Defense. When I arrived Mac Toon was the Ambassador. He was a Kremlinologist and later became Ambassador to the Soviet Union. The DCM, who I worked for, was John Baker. There was one econ officer, one political officer, three consular officers (the Czechs had a difficult time getting permission to go to the States so the consular section was not as active or large as the one in Warsaw when I was there), and three Americans in the admin section. In addition to those State Department people there were CIA, USIA and Defense representatives. There were Czech nationals working in USIA, consular and admin. We knew that the head driver was a Lt. Colonel in the secret police.

Q: What was your impression of how the embassy was run by the ambassadors?

JOHNSON: I was there with two ambassadors. Albert Sherer, who had been the DCM when I was in Warsaw, arrived as ambassador in 1972. As a staff member I was impressed by the fact that keeping morale high at post was important to both ambassadors. They held daily and weekly staff meetings to which all American personnel were invited. This was the first time I had ever attended staff meetings. Knowing what is going on and why something has happened or is about to happen certainly helps one understand why one has to work late or on weekends, etc Or why you can't do this or that. Everybody was also included in most official functions. I had to "work" four Fourth of July parties. But we also mingled, staff and officer, at non-representational parties as well. In fact, we all got to know each other socially very well, as often happens at small posts.

Both ambassadors operated informally with an open door policy, although Ambassador Toon was a little more reserved than Ambassador Sherer, who thoroughly enjoyed people.

Q: How about John Baker, how was he as a DCM?

JOHNSON: I felt John was a good reporting officer, but he was a little stiff when dealing with people in his capacity as manager of the embassy. I also felt he was not really at ease with Ambassador Toon who was rather conservative and shy, and could be a bit brusque at times. I don't think he knew how to handle it. When Art Wortzel arrived in 1970, there was no problem at all between him and Ambassador Toon or anyone else in the embassy. And things got even more relaxed when Albert Sherer arrived as Ambassador because he was genuinely outgoing and enjoyed people. People were people as far as he was concerned, not officer and staff. At functions he would be seen talking with staff members, not only American but other nationalities if present, almost as often as officers and dignitaries.

The embassy was a very pleasant place to work when Ambassador Sherer and Art Wortzel were both there. People felt included and part of the entire operation. You knew if you were called in by the front office to do something, it had to be done and wasn't just busy work. Morale was high.

SAMUEL G. WISE, JR.
Chief Political/Economic Officer
Prague (1970-1971)

Samuel G. Wise Jr. was born in Chicago in 1928 and educated at the University of Virginia and Columbia. He entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Palermo, New Caledonia, Moscow, Trieste, Prague and Rome. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.

Q: You left there in 1970 and whither?

WISE: To Prague, to Czechoslovakia.

Q: Doing what?

WISE: I was head of a small Political/Economic Section. We had about four Officers (one Economic Officer, two Political Officers and myself) and that constituted our effort in those days to follow things in Czechoslovakia from the Political and Economic standpoint. At that point, we were still in the aftermath of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. There had been a tremendous crackdown in terms of contacts with foreigners. Except for a little contact with people in the cultural field that felt safe enough to talk to an American and, during the summer, a once a week softball game that we played with some Czech teams, we had virtually no contact with them. My boss, Mark Garrison, introduced me to just one unofficial contact, who was a Czech journalist who was still willing to talk to us. I saw this man about once a month. I was there about a year and three months; one morning, I read the newspaper and there was a big headline on the front page that this one contact that we had had been arrested and sentence to ten years in jail south of Prague for contacts with foreign diplomats, for giving state secrets. Our DCM went in to protest, and was told that I had 48 hours to leave the country. This was in November of 1971, so, in fact, I was PNGed. I left Prague in November.

Q: It sounds like it was such an enclosed place that you couldn't have been too unhappy to leave.

WISE: That's true. The atmosphere was very tight and very closed. Prague itself is a beautiful city. You had the sense that, if you could talk to Czechs more, they would be good people to know. So, there was some bitter sweetness to leaving. You always feel a little funny, too. They drove me out to the airport in the Ambassador's limousine with the flag flying, trying to make a little statement ourselves. And when we got to the airport, there were four Czech soldiers who marched with me all the way to the plane. So, it was a little bit of a lonely feeling. Once you got on a plane bound for the West, you felt a little liberated.

Q: How did the Department treat you, as far as Personnel and so forth? Did you have any problems when you came back?

WISE: No, I thought the Department's attitude was very supportive. They knew that these were all false charges. Information that I would get from this man was all stuff that was contained in press releases from the Foreign Ministry. When we would meet, he would always want to meet in places where, I always felt, he was sure there was a microphone so that he could take down the conversation to make sure that he wasn't saying anything he shouldn't. One time, we had a small garden where we first lived in Prague and my wife was going to have a little lunch outside. He said, "Oh, no, let's eat inside." And that sort of tipped us off. I thought that he always wanted to be

listened to, that he was part of the Secret Police. He may have been. After I left Prague, I went to London, while they were trying to cook up another assignment. I was approached by Alfred Friendly, who is the former editor of The Washington Post. He was a great friend of this Czech who had been thrown in jail and wanted to know all about it - had I really gotten anything from him? I told him that, no, there was no information to really pass at all. It was all part of the Czech campaign to increase the distance between foreigners and the Czech citizens.

Q: For some time, the Czechs were almost the most virulent anti-American population, weren't they? They were not a benign member of the Soviet Bloc.

WISE: They did engage in some of those activities. I don't know what the best clue to the Czech character is, but one that I've always found very insightful, is the Good Soldier [Shvek]: the story of a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, how you outwit your bosses by over compliance with their desires. You sort of do them in that way. There's something in the Czech character that way. They could be very subservient. When Communism fell, the Czechs were close to the last in this. There weren't big demonstrations out in the street. So there is something in their character. I think part of it is being in Central Europe, surrounded by all these bigger powers and thinking you have to keep your head down.

Q: You mentioned how you got out. What happened to your wife and family?

WISE: They were able to leave in a little less haste. They left at the end of the week. The action of persona non grata applied to me alone, but, clearly, they were to leave. We met in London, and by that time the Department had worked up a trade whereby I went to replace a fellow named Peter Bridges down in Rome. And Peter, who had wanted to come to Prague eventually, took my place. So, we didn't even go back to the United States.

ROBERT B. MORLEY
Economic/Commercial Officer, Office of Czech Hungarian and Polish Affairs
Washington, DC (1971-1973)

Robert B. Morley was born in Massachusetts in 1935. He received his BA from Central College, Iowa. After joining the State Department in 1962, he served in Norway, Barbados, Warsaw, Caracas, and Quito. Mr. Morley was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: You were then assigned to the Polish Desk?

MORLEY: I was assigned to the Office of Czech, Hungarian, and Polish Affairs as the economic/commercial officer. Most of my work was done for the Polish Desk Officer. I was the backup Polish desk officer. I had a collateral responsibility for handling Baltic country affairs (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia) which were not independent at that time.

Q: You were there from '70 until when?

MORLEY: I was there from January of '71 to the middle of '73.

Q: Here you are, a newly minted economic officer with this course under your belt. You're dealing with the problems of Poland. Poland is in the embrace of Marxist Soviet Union. In a way, does economics make sense in dealing with a Marxist society?

MORLEY: If targets of opportunity arrived, we felt we should take advantage of it. The invasion of Czechoslovakia, we believed, had both frightened the Poles and made them, at the margin, more willing to deal with the United States.

Q: This was in August of '68.

MORLEY: Yes, August of '68, I think. After that event, the Eastern Europeans generally and the Poles specifically became cautious about reform because they had the example of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, the Soviets seemed to be willing to tolerate a modicum of reform to avoid new crises. After the initial freeze on relations described earlier, we embarked on a slow, gradual policy of reassuring the Soviets on the political and military front, while at the same time taking initiatives to foster reforms. Whether we thought it would work or not, I don't think there was a real consensus. There was a consensus that it was worth trying.

Our policy was an open one. There were times when the Polish-American community got involved and there were times when Congress was pushing us first one way and then another way. The extension of Export-Import Bank facilities to Poland required a broad consensus. It was a long process within the government and included consultations with the Congress of the United States. I don't recall whether it actually required special legislation, but I don't think so.

Q: Moving to Czechoslovakia, I would have thought Czechoslovakia would have been almost in our deep freeze at that time.

MORLEY: Czechoslovakia was in our deep freeze at that time. Of the three countries on which I worked, Czechoslovakia was the least receptive to overtures from the United States government in the economic reform credits/trade area. Probably Hungary was the most receptive. Poland was a bit less so, but it was the country of most interest to us.

Q: With Czechoslovakia, was the feeling that since the question of what was known as the Prague Spring, which was in '68, there wasn't much that could be done? It was a pretty repressive government and there wasn't much you could do with it?

MORLEY: That's correct. When we went to Czechoslovakia, we were very much treated at arm's length. In fact, while I made three or four visits to Poland and, I think, three to Hungary, I only made one to Czechoslovakia. It was totally unproductive. I was not welcomed by our Embassy

there. I was not even met at the airport on arrival. We were still participating in the trade fair, but it was a USIA event, it was not a Department of Commerce event. It was designed more to influence the Czech people than to sell goods and services from the United States. The Czechs permitted us to do this because they wanted us to continue to have an American presence at the trade fair.

PETER S. BRIDGES
Chief Political/Economic Officer
Prague (1971-1974)

Peter S. Bridges was born in New Orleans in 1932 and educated at Dartmouth and Columbia. He entered the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included posts in Panama City, Oberammergau, Moscow, Rome and Prague and he was named ambassador to Somalia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Well then, in '71 you were off to Prague?

BRIDGES: Well, in 1970 I had spent four years in Rome. Our ambassador to Czechoslovakia was Malcolm Toon, whom I had worked for in Moscow and who had helped me get to Rome. I had been asked by Personnel at some point in 1969 if I would like to go as DCM to a small embassy in West Africa. And I said, I hoped politely, that I certainly would go where sent, but my idea was that since I had already been in the tropics, in part of the third world, in Panama, I would next like to go to someplace between the Soviet Union and Western Europe, that is to say I would like to go to Eastern Europe where, if I headed an embassy political section, I might have as much supervisory responsibility as the DCM in a tiny embassy in Africa. And they said, "Okay."

In 1969 I had a friend who had gone to work on the National Security Council staff, named Helmut Sonnenfeldt. I had known him since I was a cub on the Soviet desk and he was in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Hal had now gone to work for Henry Kissinger in the White House, and he asked me if I would like to come work for him. I had just been promoted to number two in the political section in Rome, my wife was six or seven months pregnant with our fourth child, and I was having a great time. I said to Hal that I would go if ordered, but I would just as soon not. Then, having been asked if instead of going to Africa I'd like to go to the White House, I had a letter from Dick Davies who had replaced Malcolm Toon as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Dick, whom I had also known in Moscow, wanted to know if I'd like to go back to Moscow and the job was number two in the economic-commercial section. It looked to me like the officer I was going to replace was a CIA officer and I didn't know what the Soviets would think of that. More importantly, it didn't look like it would be a step up from what I was doing in Rome. So I wrote Dick Davies that I was aiming for a place in Eastern Europe, and I wrote to Malcolm Toon who was now ambassador in Prague, and said I knew that the head of the political-economic section in Prague was due out in 1970, and I would be delighted if I had a chance to replace him and work again for Toon. Mac Toon wrote back that he would be happy to have me but he didn't think an ambassador should choose any of his staff except for his deputy and his secretary. So he was going to leave it in the hands of Personnel. Personnel sent to Prague, to replace Mark Garrison, my friend and old Moscow comrade Sam Wise, who died several years

ago. So I stayed on in Rome; Graham Martin asked me to stay on even longer.

Then one morning in November 1971 I got to work and was starting to look through the papers, and there was a little item reporting that the first secretary of the American embassy in Czechoslovakia, Samuel Wise, had been declared persona non grata. I cut out the clipping and went in to see Bob Barbour, who was my boss and who curiously had not gotten to work that morning as early as I had. So I just put the clipping in the middle of his desk and went back to my office. About ten minutes later Bob Barbour walked into my office and put the clipping down on my desk and said, "So?" And I said, "So." And he said, "So?" And I said, "So what?" And he said, "So do you want to go to Prague?" And I said, "My God, I hadn't thought of that!" And he said, "You hadn't thought of that? You are stupid. Do you want to go?" And I said, "Let me call my wife." So I called Mary Jane. We had moved from an apartment in the middle of the old city after our fourth child was born, to a house in the country with a hectare of land and a swimming pool; it was lovely. But she didn't disagree. So I went back and told Bob Barbour, "Yes, I would like to go to Prague." Well, it was arranged. Sam Wise came to Rome and took my job and I went to Prague and took his. So just before Thanksgiving of 1971 I arrived in the embassy in Prague.

Q: Great. So we'll pick this up right after Thanksgiving '71 in Prague.

Today is November 4, 2003. Peter, what was the state of relations between the U.S. and Czechoslovakia in 1971?

BRIDGES: It was bad; in some ways we seemed to have more prospects for improving relations with the Soviet Union than we did with Czechoslovakia. We would tell each other that it seemed we were punishing the Czechs for having been invaded by the Soviets in 1968. The leadership that the Soviets had installed after the Soviet invasion in 1968 was conformist, to say the least. Some of them were not much more than tools of the Soviet Union. There was not much trade between the U.S. and Czechoslovakia, something like 20 million dollars of U.S. exports. Our biggest export items were soy beans and soy meal for their poultry industry. There was also, between us, the problem of gold and claims. When the Wehrmacht moved into Prague in 1939 they confiscated something like 18 tons of Czechoslovak state gold. At the end of World War II, we took that gold back from the Nazis. It was kept in London under tripartite custody; the British, French, and U.S. It had not been returned to the Czechs in 1948 when the Communists took over Czechoslovakia, and so the West still held onto this gold. After 1948 the Czechoslovaks in socializing industry and property, had confiscated a lot of U.S. properties, some of it belonging to individual families, some belonging to American corporations. The question was whether we could negotiate a deal whereby they would pay us what we wanted for our claims and we in turn would give them back the 18 tons of gold. We had negotiated similar agreements with other Communist countries including China by 1971, but not with the Czechs. Without a gold and claims settlement it was clear that we wouldn't normalize trade.

Q: Was there any particular reason why we couldn't get to that point with the Czechs?

BRIDGES: There was not much interest in Washington in doing much with the Czechs at the time.

They were about as faithful an ally of the Soviet Union as you could find in Communist central and eastern Europe. Toward the end of my tour in Prague we did begin negotiations which were conducted by our Deputy Chief of Mission, Arthur Wortzel. He reached an agreement with the Czechoslovak government; it must have been just about November of 1974 when that agreement was submitted to the U.S. Senate for its approval. But the price of gold had leaped up and the Senate was not willing to approve an agreement that would give back the 18 tons of now much more valuable gold in return for a payoff of only 40% of the value of our claim. So it was some years after that before agreement was reached, and that was due to the skill of Rozanne Ridgway in the early 1980s.

Q: This gold was held jointly. Were the French and British willing to let go?

BRIDGES: The French were willing and the British later agreed, so we were the stumbling block. We remained the stumbling block; there had to be an agreement between the three parties to return it.

Q: You arrived there in '71 and you were there how long?

BRIDGES: I was there from the end of November 1971 until late June 1974.

Q: What was your job?

BRIDGES: I was the first secretary and chief of the political-economic section. The embassy in Prague was relatively small and compact and instead of separate political and economic sections we had one combined section that handled political reporting and representation and economic reporting and representation and commercial work, agricultural work, whatever scientific attaché work there was to do. It was a section composed of four officers, and they worked well. I insisted that all the officers in the section be flexible, that for example when there was more commercial work to be done, the political officer should be a part-time commercial officer.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

BRIDGES: By the time I arrived there Malcolm Toon had left, so there was a chargé d'affaires who was Arthur Wortzel. In March 1972 our new ambassador arrived and that was Albert Sherer, known to all as Bud, whom I had met in my first assignment on the Soviet desk when he was in that same office of Eastern European affairs as the officer in charge of Polish/Balkan affairs. He had more recently been first ambassador to Togo, then ambassador to Guinea, and then arrived in Prague in March 1972.

Q: On the political side what did you do?

BRIDGES: We tried to figure out what was going on in the political level in Czechoslovakia. The answer was not very much, although there were a few curious things. There was the case, for example, of Dubcek, who had been kidnaped and taken to Moscow after the Soviet invasion, and who was brought back only when the president of the republic, General Svoboda, said he would not deal with the Soviets until Dubcek and his colleagues were returned to the country. Dubcek

had later been sent to Bratislava in Slovakia; he was a Slovak, and we knew he was now working at a low-level job, as the head of the motor pool in a Slovak ministry. We learned, however, that the Soviets were staying in touch with him, and all we could figure out is that the Soviets didn't really know what was going to happen in the future, and so they wanted to keep a line out to Dubcek, the head of the more or less possible reformers, just in case there was a need to deal with him at a higher level sometime.

Q: Had you talked to him?

BRIDGES: No, I don't think that he was willing to see anyone from a western embassy. But we knew people that knew him, I guess is the way to put it. The economic and commercial work was the more important work of what our section was doing. I had really no experience in that sort of work. The chief economic-commercial officer was Carl Schmidt. In the summer of 1972, after I had been in Prague for six months, Carl was transferred to Warsaw to be the head of the economic-commercial section there. He was replaced by Emmett Coxson, who had come into the Foreign Service with me in 1957. Emmett arrived in Prague with his wife and children and after he had been there for ten days, he said that he wanted to visit Brno, which was the site of the big Czechoslovak trade fair, which made good sense. He decided that he would take with him Kent Brown, who was our junior political officer. They drove there; I walked out of the embassy at six one morning to go running, and there they were getting into the car, to my surprise. I had thought they were going to fly. Emmett said that they had not been able to get air tickets so they were taking an embassy sedan to Brno and they would be back that evening. There was Emmett Coxson, Kent Brown, Emmett's 14 year old son, and our senior Foreign Service National employee, Jiri Frantal. They left for Brno but they never got back. It was raining on the way back and near Cesky Brod, not too far east of Prague, Kent Brown was at the wheel when the car slid off the road and hit a fruit tree. Emmett was in the back seat, not wearing a seat belt, and was thrown against the roof of the car and was killed. His son was slightly hurt. Frantal and Brown both had broken bones; despite his injuries Frantal crawled up to the road, it was dark and raining, and he flagged down a car. Otherwise I don't think anyone would have seen them until dawn. So until Coxson could be replaced as economic-commercial officer, I was that among other things. When the replacement for Coxson arrived in December of 1972, and that was Bill Farrand, I knew a lot more about economic and commercial work than I had done, and I kept my hand in for the remainder of my tour.

Q: What sort of economic and commercial work was it?

BRIDGES: The biggest item that we were selling to the Czechs was agricultural: soybeans, soymeal. In 1972 there was quite a hike in the interest in the part of American industry in doing some sort of business with the Czechs. I remember we had on the wall a cartoon from the New Yorker that showed an American tycoon sitting in his office looking out his window at a line of smokestack chimneys, and he's saying, "Goddamn it, Caruthers, there must be something we can sell to the Commies." The fact was that not too many deals went through, but there were a number of trade missions that came to town interested in the possibility of doing business. Some months after Sherer arrived as ambassador, he said to me one day that he wasn't really overly busy. So I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, what if I could arrange some visits to Czechoslovak industrial enterprises. Would you like to do that?" He said, "Sure, but I don't think you'll be able to do it." So

I said, "I'll try." I went to the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and they said sure. The result was that Mr. Sherer and I visited half a dozen of the biggest non-military plants in the country: the steel mill at Kosice in Eastern Slovakia, the biggest steel mill at Ostrava, the Skoda automobile works, the Skoda engineering works in Plzen, a motorcycle factory, and one or two more that I can't offhand think of. But the results in terms of trade were very meager.

Q: On the economic point of view, were there remittances and pension checks?

BRIDGES: I don't know, I don't know that we ever measured it. There had been a block on Social Security remittances to pensioners in Czechoslovakia. I believe that had been taken off, but I don't recall ever seeing an overall figure about remittances from the U.S. to Czechoslovakia. This contrasted with the situation in Italy where we had a pretty good figure for the great amount of Social Security money going to pensioners there.

Q: What about contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

BRIDGES: The contacts we had with the Ministry were not too bad. I read several years ago an article written by a professor at Boston University, Igor Lukes, Czech by origin, who had been into the Czechoslovak archives of that period. I learned from his article that there was a certain degree of interest in the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry even in the Communist years in improving the relationship with the United States. It didn't surprise me to learn that but on the other hand it was interesting to see it confirmed. The Ministry of Foreign Trade certainly wanted to see more bilateral trade, especially things that they needed like agricultural and industrial products. I remember doing a couple of reports for Washington on the economic relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. It was clear to me and the embassy that this was not a terribly satisfactory relationship. It had been more satisfactory perhaps in the 1950s when Communism was new in Czechoslovakia, at which point the Soviets were anxious to take any sort of industrial good that the East Europeans could produce because it was going to be better in quality than what they produced themselves. By the 1970s it wasn't that the quality of Soviet production was that much better, but they were finding it possible to trade with the West, especially with the Germans, French, British, Italians. So they no longer needed, say, Czechoslovak machine tools as much as they needed them in 1950, 20 years earlier. Conversely, the Soviet Union didn't have much to offer its trade partners except raw materials and they were sometimes short of those. At some time during my tour there we learned that the Soviet Union was telling countries like Czechoslovakia that if they wanted to increase their imports of Soviet iron ore they would have to invest in the Soviet mining industry, which the Czechs very much did not want to do. So there was a dissatisfaction inside COMECON and that left a theoretical possibility for the United States and other western countries, but it was not a possibility that really came to much at least in the early '70s.

Q: During this time was there any sign of what eventually became an important dissident movement in Czechoslovakia?

BRIDGES: That was the period, when I was there, when Vaclav Havel said many years later that history had stopped for the Czech nation. Charter '77, the dissident movement, took its name from the year 1977, and as I said I was there from 1971 to '74. I don't recall that we knew of any sort of

organized dissident movement. I knew a couple of people who had survived the purges after the Soviet invasion. The best of these was a man named Miroslav Holub, who was a well known poet and microbiologist, who had spent some months in the United States on an exchange in 1967, and who had been one of the signers of a pro-Dubcek manifesto called the 2000 Words. He was still managing to survive as a microbiologist, but he was not signing any new documents and was not going out and starting any sort of dissident movement in the early 1970s. The situation was extremely bad. Holub had a rather attractive wife and they came to dinner with us a couple of times. One time, he came and said his wife would be late. He took a call from her later. He said that she said that she had locked herself out of her car; and she never showed up. Some time later the press reported that Holub had written a letter to the newspapers recanting and apologizing for his signature to the 2000 Words manifesto. The next time I saw him, at a reception at the British Embassy not too long before I left, I said something to the effect that I could understand the pressures that he must have been under to sign this recantation. He said, "I didn't sign it." I said, "What?" "No, I didn't write that letter and I didn't sign it." "How did it come about?" "Well, the curious thing was that when I read it I saw that it had to have been written by someone who knew me pretty intimately, because there were details in it that nobody else would know. I finally realized that it was the work of my wife, who was collaborating with the police. I've left her." That just goes to show the situation.

Q: Was there a big Soviet military presence?

BRIDGES: The Soviets had I think two divisions plus other units in the country, but they kept them largely out of sight. There was a Soviet headquarters up near Prague Castle but you would never see more than one or two Soviet officers or enlisted men going in or out. One of the divisions, I think an armored division, was garrisoned north of Prague near Mlada Boleslav and on occasion the roads would be blocked off because they were out on maneuvers. But they were unpopular; they didn't want they didn't want to advertise their presence and they stayed out of sight. It was not a huge military presence but clearly, and the Czechs understood this, if they needed to they could get back in pretty quickly across the border. I think the only time I personally ran into Soviet soldiers was one summer Sunday when my family was in Italy, and I took a 30-kilometer hike through northern Bohemia. I stopped at the ruins of the castle of Bezdez, and walking around a wall I literally bumped into half a dozen Soviet soldiers, who presumably thought I was Czech. We said just a couple of words to each other.

Q: What about the relations between the Czechs and Hungary, East Germany, Poland and all?

BRIDGES: Well, again the economic side was not going too well in CEMA, COMECON. Take for example CEMA non-cooperation on the question of the official automobile. The second oldest automobile producer in Central Europe was Tatra in northern Moravia. The oldest was Daimler Benz; but the Czechs started producing automobiles in 1898. In the 1930s, with the help of a designer named Ferdinand Porsche, they designed a small streamlined car with a rear-mounted air-cooled engine which was called the Lidovy Vuz, which means People's Car. In other words it was the Czech version of the Volkswagen. Like the Volkswagen in Germany, they only produced a few and then the war came. After the war Tatra went back to the rear, air-cooled engine design and produced a much larger sedan and they continued producing these after the Communists came in, but only for official use. In the late 1960s they decided they would produce a bigger and better

Tatra sedan for official use and they would sell it to their partners in CEMA. So they got an Italian designer to design them a very handsome car; it had an eight-cylinder rear air-cooled engine, a big powerful engine. They began to bring these things out around 1970, at which point they discovered that none of their Communist partners wanted to buy them. The Soviet Union produced its own sedan for top officials, the ZIL, the East Germans were probably buying the Mercedes, the Romanians were buying Citroens, the Bulgarians were buying Mercedes, so nobody wanted to buy their fine new Tatra, at which point they should have stopped making them but they nevertheless kept on producing around 150 to 200 cars a year.

Q: Did we have a chance to look at what the Czechs were producing? We went through this thing thinking that the East Germans were producing something equivalent to something that would be produced in the West, but when the wall came down, this turned out to be untrue. How about with the Czechs?

BRIDGES: I remember talking to my counterpart in the British embassy, the first secretary. He was quite an expert on Czechoslovakia; he came out of the research office in the Foreign and Commonwealth office. And he said one day that Czechoslovakia reminded him a little bit of the United Kingdom not too many years since, that is to say an old, highly industrialized country that had seen better days but was still more or less living on its fat; that is sort of the way Czechoslovakia was in the early 1970s. It had been very highly industrialized even in the 1800s. When the Austro-Hungarian empire broke up in 1918, the usual figure is that two-thirds of the industry of the whole empire turned out to be in Bohemia. So the new Czechoslovakia from the start was an industrial country and I think in the 1930s was something like number eight in the world among industrialized countries. But the goods they were producing in the 1970s were not the equivalent of what was being produced in Western Europe or the United States or industrialized Asia.

Q: Did the secret police there harass you and other members of the embassy?

BRIDGES: They were more in evidence in Prague than they had been while I was in Moscow. The CIA station chief said at some point that they used the Western diplomatic corps in Prague as a training school for the young officers in the STB, which was State Security, the Czechoslovak KGB. And so sometimes we would be trailed by these young recruits who were learning how to do it. I was probably a suspicious character because once or twice a week I would get an embassy driver to drive me across the river into the old town and let me off at the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and then I would go on to two or three of the state owned foreign trading companies, everything was state owned, and that would last me until about lunch time. The driver would always ask me if he should pick me up at some point, and I would say, "No, I'll walk home to the embassy." After my last appointment I would take a route that would take me to two or three dealers in used books, which were sold cheaply and were sometimes very interesting. They had a store of old books in English and obviously after a while the STB thought I was leaving messages in books or picking up messages from somebody or the other. One time I saw in two consecutive bookstores, browsing next to me, a young woman with red hair. That was pretty obvious, but maybe they wanted to be obvious.

When we would travel through Slovakia the police were still more vigilant. I had a fun trip in the

summer of 1972 with the chief of chancery of the British embassy, Stephen Barrett, and our 15 year old son, David. The defense attaché in our embassy had received a letter from a branch of the Anti-Fascist Fighters League, a Communist front organization, in a small village in Slovakia called Polomka. They wanted to inform us that they were putting up a monument at the place where the Anglo-American mission had stayed for a time after the Slovak national uprising had been put down in 1943. Well, we knew nothing about this mission but we knew something about the Slovak national uprising. While the German army was very much committed on the Russian front, the Slovaks were enjoying a kind of autonomous existence within the Nazi area. Then non-Nazi Slovaks kicked out the pro-Nazi government and in the end the Wehrmacht had to divert a couple of divisions from the Russian front to put down the uprising. Meanwhile the OSS sent a mission in from Bari, Italy by B-17. Anyway we reported the letter to the Department of State, requesting that they tell us about this Anglo-American mission. About a month after that I got in the pouch one day a big envelope of formerly top secret documents that had just been de-classified, and it was all OSS stuff that told the story of this group that had been flown from Bari to Banska Bystrica in Slovakia. I think there were something like seven or eight men, and a lot of ammunition. Anyway the Wehrmacht moved in against the uprising, the U.S. team and the Slovaks fled to the mountains, and the U.S. team put up for the winter in a mountain hut above the village of Polomka. One of the members of the team was a Slovak-American who had been born in the village and they met up with a British team from the Special Operations Executive who had been doing something in Hungary. The day after Christmas in 1944 somebody ratted on them, and German troops surrounded the Americans and took them off to Mauthausen where they were shot. Two Americans escaped because they were spending the day with the British who were staying in a lodge a half mile away. They fled into the woods. Anyway we decided that we should go out and help the Slovaks celebrate the plaque they were putting up. So we went, and David our 15 year old came as the official photographer of our mission. We were very closely followed, especially after we got into Slovakia. We got to the village where we were met by the local State Forest chairman, and the guy that ran the local inn and several other notables. We walked up into the mountains and had a marvelous day.

The police stayed in town, they didn't want to walk up there, but there they were waiting for us when we came down and we had a lunch in the inn with the local people and then they followed us. My son and I and Stephen Barrett had decided that we were going to camp out on the way back so we had sleeping bags and a tent. I was driving an American embassy Ford, and there were two STB cars, Simcas, following us into western Slovakia toward the Czech Republic. I decided to give them a run for their money, and started doing 75 or 80 miles per hour down a two-lane curving road. The cars the STB were driving were holding on for dear life. And finally just before we got to the border one of the Simcas passed me, obviously just so he could show he could do it. We got over the border and there was no sign of them; we went several miles into Moravia on the Czech side and camped for the night in a field and we didn't see any sign of them.

Q: Had the town of Lidice been restored?

BRIDGES: No, there was a monument there but the village had never been rebuilt. In 1942 the Czechoslovak resistance movement had decided to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, who was the Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia. There was some disagreement about this in the Czechoslovak government in exile, which came out many years later. As I recall, Benes who was

president didn't want Heydrich assassinated, for fear of retaliation. I believe it was the Czechoslovak military leadership in exile who insisted on parachuting two or three men into the country. They managed to shoot Heydrich, who later died of an infection from his wounds. The Germans then totally obliterated Lidice. But they did more things too. We had friends in Prague, the husband worked in foreign trade, and the wife worked in the state-owned fashion industry. His father had been an executive at CKD, the big engineering works in Prague, and after the assassination of Heydrich and the obliteration of Lidice the SS walked into the CKD headquarters one day and pulled out four executives and took them away and shot them. My friend's father was one of the four who had been killed. So they retaliated in more ways than one.

Q: Where did the Czechs go to get away? Did they go to Yugoslavia?

BRIDGES: They went vacationing in Yugoslavia, it was relatively easy to do, or they would go to the seacoast in Romania or Bulgaria. Very few of them could come west; I don't think any of them could come to the U.S. although back in '67, '68 before the Soviet invasion some of them had been there.

Q: I think at this point we weren't seeing that there was any pick or wedge that we could drive between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union.

BRIDGES: No. We didn't think that the leadership in place was capable of undergoing a sea of change and becoming reformists. It would have required a revolution. The curious thing was that the Hungarians had been put down by the Soviets in '56. (End of tape)

Q: You were saying?

BRIDGES: I was saying that by the time I left Prague in 1974 it was almost six years after the Soviet invasion and if Hungary was an example, one would have thought that after six years the Czechs would be picking themselves up and pushing the envelope and starting to do some reform. But they were really not doing that, they kind of had their heads under their wings and were being very quiet and still. We had a friend named Jaroslav Zyka who was a professor and head of a department at Charles University, a scientist. We would see him and his wife sometimes, and I said, "How do you manage to keep your job at a time when so many professors and department heads have been purged?" He said, "Well, everybody has a file in this country. In 1967 and 1968 I was in Thailand on a fellowship. My wife and I were the only Czechs in Thailand, as far as I know; there was no Czechoslovak embassy in Bangkok. Everybody back in our country was for Dubcek until the Soviet invasion, and they talked about it fairly freely. We talked just between ourselves, and we talked to our Thai friends, but there was nobody to stick any of that into our police files. So I still survive." His wife told us that her brother worked in Washington and I found after we came back to the U.S. that he was in fact working for the U.S. Defense Department, which may or may not have been known to the STB, I never knew that. The Czechs were probably the most pro-American people that I had worked with. Their affection for the United States was very deep.

T.G. Masaryk, who is a man I much admire, had created Czechoslovakia in 1918 with the support of the U.S. and Woodrow Wilson. Masaryk convinced Wilson he should support Czechoslovak independence after Wilson's 14 Points had initially called only for autonomy for the peoples of the

Austria-Hungarian Empire. Speaking of Czechs and Americans, let me mention an episode that happened, I think, in 1973. We were told by the Department that a group of U.S. Senators was coming to Prague. They would be the first Congressional delegation to visit Czechoslovakia since the Soviet invasion. I think there were three Senators, but I can only remember two; the head of the delegation was Richard Schweiker, a Republican from Pennsylvania, and another was Tom Eagleton, senator from Missouri and later a vice presidential candidate. The Czechs of course were very pleased that this high-level group was coming, because the U.S. had not been having any kind of contact with the Czechoslovak government, at least on the executive side. So we were told that the President of the Republic would like to receive the team. The President was a man named Ludvik Svoboda who had been an army officer; he had been in Russia during the First World War and had become one of the leaders of the Czechoslovak Legion which was created in Russia mainly from among prisoners of war, Czechs and Slovaks who had fled to the Russian side or had been captured by the Russians and who were very anti-Austrian, anti-German. The Czechoslovak Legion had to fight its way east to Siberia after the Bolshevik Revolution and eventually they made their way eastward across two oceans to Czechoslovakia. Anyway, we knew that Svoboda had been in the Legion. When World War II came and the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia, he had gone into the Soviet Union with other officers and spent the war there. When the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968, he had stood up, as I mentioned earlier, to some extent, for Dubcek and other leaders whom the Soviets had kidnaped and taken to Moscow. That was in August 1968, and now, three or four years later, he had been under heavy Soviet pressure and was an old man who was not standing up to the Russians in any way.

Anyway, it was good news that the President would like to see our Senators. We briefed them before they went to see the President. I remember that Mr. Schweiker asked me if President Svoboda had ever been in the U.S. and I replied that I was pretty sure he never had. I tagged along with the group to go see the President. And I saw that sitting next to the President was Vasil Bilak, who was known to be the most pro-Soviet of all the pro-Soviet members in the Czechoslovak leadership. So I thought that was really bad news. The conversation started very politely and after some minutes, Schweiker said to the President, "Mr. President, I understand you have never been to the United States." The president says, "Let me tell you a story. I finally left Vladivostok on a freighter with other members of the Czechoslovak Legion, and we sailed through the Panama Canal and up to the port of Norfolk, in Virginia. When we got to Norfolk, the ship was sold out from under us, and we didn't know how we were going to get home. But I had a Czech friend who was farming, in your state, Senator, in Pennsylvania. So I went up to Pennsylvania and worked on his farm for several months and if my friend hadn't sold his farm in order to go back to Czechoslovakia, I'd probably still be living in Pennsylvania." At this point we could see that Bilak was stirring in his chair and I expected he was going to say something especially foul. And he said, "Senator, I want you to know that my parents were married in the chapel at Moravian College in Pennsylvania."

Q: How about foreign policy? The Czechs and East Germans seemed to have a lock on setting up rather obnoxious police regimes. Was this at all a concern of ours?

BRIDGES: It was a concern; I don't recall if we ever discussed whether saying something to the foreign ministry would have done any good. Certainly the Czechoslovak arms industry was busy producing weapons that got into the hands of people like the Libyans and other people who were

bad types in our point of view. At some point the Czechs began to be proficient in producing explosives, including plastic explosives. They were doing certainly some training of Third World soldiers and perhaps policemen. It seems to me that the East Germans were probably more active in that field. I remember, for example, that when I got to Somalia in 1984, I learned that the Somali political prison, way off in the boondocks, had been built by the East Germans, not the Czechs. The Czechs may have done things like that somewhere else in the world, I don't know.

Q: Did you have any people coming in trying so seek asylum?

BRIDGES: I don't remember that we did. I remember how in Moscow people tried to make their way into our embassy, occasionally succeeding. In Prague I don't remember that happening, although it may have. For some months after the 1968 Soviet invasion, the borders were pretty much open so that Czechs and Slovaks who wanted to get out of the country could do so for quite a few months. We tried to do a calculation of how many people had left the country after the invasion. In my recollection we calculated something along the line of 100,000 people, maybe a few more, which was less than 1% of the population. Most of them didn't want to leave, it was their country and they wanted to stay and of course there was the fact that it wasn't so easy to emigrate in the 1970s as it had been in the early 1900s. Czechs want you to think that they are very good at languages, but the fact is that not too many of them are fluent in Western languages, although many had some notions of German. So it was possible that if they left they would not be able to find a job. In Czechoslovakia there was a most unpleasant regime to live under, but if you did your thing, if you were for all intents and purposes a patriotic citizen, life might not be too terrible. Vaclav Havel, for example, came from a very well-to-do family whose property had been confiscated in 1948, and he spent several years in jail for being a dissident, but he nevertheless managed to acquire a rather nice country house in northern Bohemia in the very bad days. He still has the house. I have never been there, but I have seen photographs and it's quite a fine house.

So what people in Prague would do is work at their jobs until Friday afternoon, and around two o'clock on Friday afternoon you would see the roads clogged; as clogged as they could be, not every Czech had a car but there were lots of people heading out of town. So from Friday afternoon until late Sunday or even Monday morning, they worked at what they really wanted to do and that was to improve their little houses or villas in the country, or go hiking or skiing and so forth and so on. And to some extent that probably saved their sanity.

Q: Was there any pressure coming from Czech groups in the United States to do something?

BRIDGES: Not that I remember. I think basically the Czech and Slovak immigrant groups in the United States at that point pretty much shared the opinion of the State Department: the leadership in Prague and Bratislava was a bad leadership, and they were going to have to be replaced by others some day for change to come about in Czechoslovakia. But when such change was going to come about, or what was going to bring it about, none of us could foretell. One key fact was the Soviets had not brought about the complete revolution that they probably would have desired in countries like Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak revolution was much less complete than that of the Bolsheviks; that is to say that in Russia the intelligentsia was destroyed or emigrated and the business classes were destroyed or emigrated. The well-to-do farmers and peasants were killed; many of them starved to death during the process of collectivization. That simply did not happen in

Czechoslovakia. A number of people had come west after 1948 and again after 1968, but most of them stayed in place, and since it was only 25 years since the Communists had taken over, there were still many people who knew what it was like to be a member of a democratic, very prosperous and industrialized country, which was what Czechoslovakia had been before the Second World War. And so they had some hope for the future.

The week before my wife and I left Prague, the man whose father had been shot by the Wehrmacht in retaliation, and his wife the fashion industry person, had us over. I think he was a member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and I think his wife was too, but it was clear from things we had said to each other that they were basically Czech patriots. So that evening I said, "Let's talk about what is going to happen in this country, because the Soviets have not solved the problems, they have not purged everybody that they would like to purge; the Czechs are still the Czechs although living under a terrible system. What is going to happen?" And he replied that he couldn't make any predictions as to how long the current situation was going to continue, but he could say this: the younger generation was a healthy generation, they were not deceived, and that is what he put his hopes in and he hoped that I would do the same. I always remembered that. He certainly had no early hope for change and that was 1974. It was another fifteen years before the great change came.

Q: I heard that a country like Czechoslovakia is so small that it really becomes subservient to the Nazis.

BRIDGES: They couldn't stand up to them. There had been a chance in 1938 that they could have stood up against the Wehrmacht, but only if the French or the British or the Soviets had helped them.

Q: Were we careful within our mission to not stir up the Czechs because we're not going to do anything? There's sort of a lesson from 1956 where we were probably a little too eager to push the Hungarians.

BRIDGES: Certainly we had no intent to try to stir up the Czechs and they probably wouldn't have believed us if we had tried to. An interesting thing happened. The Secretary of State was William Rogers and the National Security Advisor was Henry Kissinger. Dr. Kissinger was clearly in command, running the relationship with the Soviet Union, the relationship with China, and he wasn't necessarily using the State Department and the Foreign Service and the Secretary of State. I recall very well that Kissinger had gone to Moscow without Ambassador Jacob Beam, our ambassador to the Soviet Union, even knowing that Kissinger was there dealing with Soviet leaders. Rogers, we heard, was trying to carve a small niche for himself. Kissinger had the Soviet relationship, but he left Mr. Rogers the relationship with the Eastern Europeans which was not too important for the U.S. The initial meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was held in Helsinki. While that meeting was going on, we were told that the Secretary of State was going to visit Prague on his way home. That was a little surprising to us because NATO had more or less agreed that after the Soviet invasion, foreign ministers of NATO would not visit Prague, and none had. And now here comes the American foreign minister. Well, we followed orders, we told the Czechs and they were really pleased because it looked like the NATO embargo on visits was ended. Mr. Rogers got to see the president and the prime minister and the secretary general of the party; they pulled out all the stops, it was great fun. The foreign minister, Bohuslav

Chnoupek, hosted a great party for Rogers in a Prague wine cellar. After the wine party my wife and I went back to the ambassador's residence, where Mr. Rogers was staying. It was spring and we sat out in the garden, just Ambassador and Mrs. Sherer and Secretary Rogers and my wife and me. Bud Sherer's wife, Carroll Sherer, was and is an extremely sharp, sophisticated, fine woman. Her husband was a fine ambassador; I think Carroll Sherer could have potentially been a better one. She's a marvelous woman. And she started asking William Rogers about this visit. And he finally said, "Well, the President didn't really want me to come but I just thought I should." And so he had, causing other NATO countries to wonder. He went back to Washington and it was several weeks later that his resignation was announced. Whether Kissinger used this as the last piece of evidence he needed to use with Mr. Nixon to get rid of him - and to replace him as Secretary of State - I don't know.

Q: You were there in Prague during the initial Helsinki meeting. Did you have any feeling that this might turn out to be something?

BRIDGES: It's hard to remember what I was thinking at the time. Clearly it would depend largely on how far the Soviets were going to go on exchanges on security and cooperation, and we didn't know at that point. A main question for Washington was what the Soviets would do about allowing Jewish emigration from the USSR. Richard Perle, who worked for Senator Jackson, was the author of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment and I thought it was one of the stupider pieces of legislation; instead of forcing the Soviet Union to increase Jewish emigration, it led them to decrease it. So the Soviets wanted to be hard-headed about contacts with the west, and their police were very hard-headed and cruel.

Q: Did your wife reconcile going to Prague over having that nice place in Rome?

BRIDGES: Oh, she did. She was not anxious to go, but she got to know Prague well. We had served in Moscow with Arthur Wortzel and his wife and we had not been close to them. I think that when I told Mary Jane that we were going to Prague, she said, "Well, the Wortzels are there." And I said, "Yes, but they are due out next summer." In the event, he didn't leave that next summer, he was there for my whole stay and was my immediate superior. The Wortzels and the Bridges co-existed.

Q: In '74 was Watergate going on? How did this play in Czechoslovakia?

BRIDGES: I don't remember if the Czechoslovak press was using it, but we returned to the U.S. that June, during the House hearings. Earlier in 1974, we were getting ready to leave and the Personnel bureau had told me that I had been designated to go to the National War College in the autumn of 1974. Ambassador Sherer said, "You want to do that?" And I said, "Sure." And he said, "Don't you think it would be better, for senior training, if you could spend a year, as I did, in the international affairs seminar at the Kennedy School at Harvard?" And I said, "Yeah, that would be great fun. But I have already been assigned to the War College." He said, "Well, if you'd like to go to Harvard, I'll see what I can do." I said certainly, and thank you very much. They changed my orders, and so I would go to Harvard - at which point I got a telegram from the Director General of the Foreign Service, who was my first boss in the State Department, Nathaniel Davis, asking if I would like to come join him in Personnel as the head of a two-officer unit working on Foreign

Service personnel policy. Well, I loved Nat Davis and I was concerned about the state of the Service, so I passed up senior training to go work for Nat Davis.

EDWARD HURWITZ
Czech-Bulgaria Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1972-1974)

Edward Hurwitz was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1952. After serving in the US Army from 1953-1955 he entered the Foreign Service in 1956. During his career he had positions in Moscow, Seoul, Washington D.C., Afghanistan, Leningrad, and an Ambassadorship to Kyrgyzstan. Ambassador Hurwitz was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996

Q: Today is August 29, 1996. Ed, we are now in 1972. You left the Soviet Union and what?

HURWITZ: I came back to be the Czech/Bulgarian desk officer.

Q: How long were you doing that?

HURWITZ: From 1972 to 1974.

Q: Where did the Czech/Bulgarian desk rest within the Department?

HURWITZ: That was in the Office of Eastern European Affairs, which I believe until shortly before my arrival had been split into a northern tier and southern tier. Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Romania being in the south and Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the north. That was joined together and the officer director was John Baker, who had been a second secretary in Moscow in 1958. I was on my way to Moscow, in the Paris embassy cafeteria, when I read in the "Herald Tribune" that he had been PNGed, but that is another story.

Q: In the first place Bulgaria/ Czechoslovakia is sort of a....

HURWITZ: They have to combine two countries and one desk officer because of staffing problems and those were two countries--Bulgaria wasn't a very active portfolio, but Czechoslovakia at that time was much more so because it was the time we were negotiating the endless gold/claims issue. So, it was simply a question of how you could double up and not overburden an officer.

Q: Geographically it didn't make much of a hell of a difference.

HURWITZ: No, it was a question of work load. But, I found being the desk officer for two countries, even two relatively inactive countries, was still pretty much of a burden because you always had double duty. You had to write national day things for two countries, two sets of dates to

keep in mind, two sets of programs that were going on. So, even though they weren't front burner stuff from a Seventh Floor standpoint, it was still a considerable amount of work.

Q: Turning to Czechoslovakia during the 1972-74 period, four years after the Soviet crack down in 1968, what was the situation as you viewed it from the desk and what were our issues?

HURWITZ: The Czech government was pretty much a mess. They threw out all of their professionals in 1968 so you had pretty much a group of hard liners. Our major issue at the time was this gold/claims. During the war the allies, had come into possession of a stash of Czech gold, which was hidden someplace or in a bank some where, and we took control of that. That was the Czech side. We had all these outstanding claims on the part of US citizens who had had their property nationalized in 1948. So, these were long standing negotiations on how to resolve this issue. It came to fruition after my tenure. But, the question was how much they would settle these claims for before we gave them the gold back.

Q: Who handled the negotiations? Did we have a claims person?

HURWITZ: There was a commission, but I forget the details.

Q: What was the day-to-day work of our embassy? Was it a difficult place?

HURWITZ: Czechoslovakia was a fairly difficult place. You know the Czechs historically it seems after World War II have been real nasty guys. They have done the Soviets' bidding and done it in a rather nasty way in terms of supplying arms to the IRA or developing syntex, an explosive, and sending it all around. There was one incident, for example, when I was on the desk of an American/Jewish leader who was visiting Czechoslovakia and disappeared. He was later found floating in the Vltava River. At any rate, he may have been done in by the Czechs, he may have been done in by some Palestinians roaming around Czechoslovakia then. Czechoslovakia was kind of a training ground for terrorists.

Q: They and the East Germans, at least at the official level, seemed to jump into the whole nasty business with both feet.

HURWITZ: Yes. The guy who despatched Trotsky in Mexico City in 1940 was a Czech. They just seemed to be prepared to do the Soviets' dirty work in many cases. So, our relationship was very cool. Their ambassador here, Spa_ek, was a very urbane fellow and he tried to sort of turn things around. He was a music lover and had a lot of people to their beautiful embassy residence for either concerts or just plain receptions. He may have been fighting this image but the image was there nevertheless and reasonably so. We were also in the process of trying to negotiate a consular agreement with them. I recall there were a number of contentious issues. One of them was the circumstances under which a person born in Czechoslovakia, but who was a nationalized American citizen, could go back to Czechoslovakia and be assured of not being arrested for something he did before.

Q: What was the general view at that time of the Czech contribution to the Warsaw Pact? I would have thought if you were a Soviet Warsaw Pact commander you would be a little dubious about the

Polish army and really want to keep it away from your supply lines, more than anything else. But the East German army would probably do his bidding and how about the Czech army?

HURWITZ: The Czech upper echelons was cleaned out after 1968. I think that they would be pretty much willing to rely on the Czechs. They were traditionally very industrially advanced and made good weapons. I think they relied on them.

Q: From the desk point of view was there any feeling that maybe Czechoslovakia would break up into parts?

HURWITZ: No, no. All that was very much sublimated, not only for Czechoslovakia but for the Soviet Union. Slightly off the subject, there was a certain amount of cohesion which I think resulted not simply from force, but, certainly in the Soviet case and I think in the Czech case as well, the pride that comes from being a member of a nice country club where they are somebody. The question of breakup never entered anybody's mind.

ROBERT WILLIAM FARRAND
Economic Officer
Prague (1972-1975)

Ambassador Farrand was born in Watertown, New York in 1934 and graduated from Mount Saint Mary's College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Moscow and Prague and was named ambassador to Papua, New Guinea in 1990. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Well, we'll pick it up at the end how you did that. So, you were in Prague. What was Prague like in '72, well, first what was the state of our relations with the Czechs in 1972?

FARRAND: Not good. Not good. It was almost four years with a few months added on when I arrived from the time of the Soviet invasion.

Q: The '68 one?

FARRAND: The '68 invasion, August of 1968, so this was December of '72, a little over four years. The Prague and Czechoslovakia was an occupied country for all intents and purposes. The Soviets had established military bases outside of the capital city, which was Prague. They had base in the central part of the country and they had military units. They kept them out of sight because the Czechs were not at all happy with the situation, but the Czechs could do little and we did none, nothing that was kind of a replay of the 1956 invasion of Hungary when the Soviets came in. We talked a lot, but we didn't do anything. Even with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia we didn't do quite so much talking I think.

Q: We learned our lesson there.

FARRAND: I hope, I think we had, but it let the Czechs down, of course. As far as relations with the United States and Czechoslovakia were not good at that time.

Q: What was your job when you went there?

FARRAND: Someone had a very good FSO-3 officer.

Q: About the equivalent of a colonel in the military?

FARRAND: Yes, equivalent. Today it's FSO-1. In those days I used, I have remembered this man's name; he was a very good officer. He had been in Prague from, I guess he was in Prague, he went to Prague in 1972 as economic and commercial officer. It was a combined, actually it was a political economic, it was a pol/ec as we call it and the political officer was a man who has become a very good friend of mine, Peter Bridges, and the officer that was to be his economic assistant and commercial officer was this FSO-1 officer whose name I will remember who we had each year we participated in the Czech's industrial fair in the city of Brno which is located in Meridia. This man was on his way down there with an assistant and another Foreign Service officer friend of mine and the car spun out of control, the man was killed. His son, a twelve-year-old was riding in the back seat. He held his father's hands as the man died. I think Cocksum was the name. His name was Emmett Cocksum. Well, the post was then unmanned on the economic side. The personnel system was caught off guard and I was working in the economic bureau and we got a call one day from a fellow named Bob Morley and Bob called me and said, "I understand well you're in the economic bureau. Would you be interested in Prague as economic officer? I understand you speak Russian?" I said, "Yes, I do, but I only speak Russian." He said, "Don't worry. It's easily convertible. They're in the same family of languages." I was naive enough to believe that, but I had been in the Department for almost pushing three years and I said, "Sure I'll go." So, I up and went. But, as I say, it was a dark, gray, demoralized time. December is in central Europe, but added to that was the sense of brooding, defeat and a feeling of feeling of kind of an accepted despair. I don't know if those words fit, but anyway.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time when you got there?

FARRAND: Albert W. Sherer, Jr.

Q: What was his background?

FARRAND: Africa and Central Europe. He had served, I think, in Guinea-Bissau as ambassador and then they tapped him to do this. He perhaps had had one previous tour in Poland. A fine man.

Q: The DCM, do you recall?

FARRAND: I do, indeed. The DCM was Arthur Wortzel. Arthur Wortzel was a very humane and excellent DCM in my memory.

Q: What were working conditions for you in Czechoslovakia at that time? How did you go about

your business?

FARRAND: Well, physical working conditions. The embassy was located in the Schonbrunn Palace, which was the northern branch of the Austrian-Hungarian Schonbrunn family in Vienna. In Vienna there is a big one.

Q: So, that's the Hapsburgs' seat of government, or at least was.

FARRAND: I think you're probably right, I didn't, I'm not a student of the Hapsburgs or all of this. I just was located in a communist country, north of Vienna; occasionally we got down there, but not often. The Schonbrunn Palace had been held through the war, the Second World War, there was a Czech man. We left, George Kennen had been the charge d'affaires there and was evacuated at one point. He writes extensively about Prague and his time there. At one point during the Second World War they were evacuated so that the building which we had gotten in the 1920s when a man had been ambassador who was a scion of the Crane Plumbing Company, you know? Toilet bowls? Well, we had that big palace so it was located in the cramped streets, one of the cramped streets in the old part of Prague and as you come up on it from the front, it's a facade. As you enter the gate, it's an old creaky, wooden gate, literally that was what it was when I arrived. It had a single little key that you put in and you would open this creaky, wooden gate to let your car in. It was a cobbled interior and you walked in, the scene unfolded in front of you of this wonderful 18th century interior courtyard and the building rose on either side. We both lived there and had the office there. So, working conditions were better than I had ever experienced in the Foreign Service because I parked my car on a Sunday afternoon and didn't have to move it until the next weekend. Now, about interaction with the Czechs, I sometimes wondered why we had an economic and commercial unit working there because, number one the official position of the Czech government was the same as that of the Soviet Union and the Czechs and the Bulgarians were at the bottom of the heap of the six countries of Eastern Europe. The Czechs and the Bulgarians. When it came to servitude, vasseldom, they were right in lock step with the Soviets. The Soviet embassy in town was a large embassy, the ambassador there was essentially, it was very important to the day to day runnings of the affairs of the Czech government. At the time the prime minister, they called him that I guess it was the president. No, there's a president and a Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was Gustav Husak and he was a Brezhnev clone, I mean he had a very deep, resonate baritone voice. That was his distinguishing feature, but everything else he was just a Brezhnev clone. Nothing moved, nothing much happened and the idea of inviting American firms to come in and help the Czech industrial base improve itself or modernize or bring on new methods of production, production lines, new machinery, that was not in the cards. That was not in the cards to the great detriment of the Czech economy because before the war, before the second world war, during the interwar years under Maslovik, Czechoslovakia which was formed largely at a conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania of all things, to bring the Czechs and the Slovaks together. Czechoslovakia, Woodrow Wilson, had a lot to do with that, but Czechoslovakia became one of the leading industrial and manufacturing companies per capital of all Europe. Their standard of living I have this on third account, but their standard of living equaled or surpassed that of Switzerland for a few years in the war years. But, of course, then things took another turn.

Q: How did you get outside, I mean obviously you read the paper diligently, or somebody read them for you?

FARRAND: Right.

Q: How about contacts? Did you have any contacts with commercial or manufacturing people or anything like that?

FARRAND: Well, the Soviet system divided the countries of Eastern Europe into various categories under this arrangement known as commicon or CMEA, Counsel of Mutual Economic Assistance. We called it commicon. Long before I ever got there and long before our embassy was robust enough to have any influence, not that it would have, so I should strike that comment. The Soviets decided that certain parts of their eastern, well it would be their Western Empire, the six countries of Eastern Europe, what we call it, would do various things for the Soviet industrial machine. They would produce certain things and the Soviets divvied it out that way. For example, there were three parts of Czechoslovakia. There's Bohemia, in the west of which Prague is the center, there's Moravia in the center of which the city Brno is the most important town and then there is Slovakia in which Bratislava is the important city. Now, historically, Bohemia is inhabited by Czech peoples and as a just as a rough thumb, populist rule of thumb; the Czech peoples drink beer and are industrialized. As you go further east and get into Slovakia you come onto people who are agricultural and drink wine. Now, those are simple little differences, but they were used as a kind of a shorthand way of defining. Into Slovakia the Soviets gave the obligation to produce to build a huge steel mill in the far, far eastern reaches of Slovakia right up chock a block up against the Ukraine and to build a lot of steel for heavy application. For example, tank, tank turrets, engines, not so much the engines, but the housings for the engines of trains and things of this nature. This was something that these people had no experience in, they had no iron ore and the Soviets would ship the iron ore to them and then they would struggle to make this huge, massive, inefficient, behemoth of a plant work. It was that sort of thing that happened. The Czechs were to produce over in Bohemia all of the streetcars, the trolley cars that were used throughout that part of Europe. They were to produce the engines for trains and Czech engines, there was an outfit called Czechkaday who produced these huge massive engines and they became the engines that drove a lot of trains through the commicon countries. Czech streetcars would be on the streets of Poland and streets of Warsaw and places like that. Kiev. But, all of this was without the law of comparative advantage being applied and without any competition. So, they just kept slagging backwards. They wouldn't come up with new innovative things. We could have helped there, but the Soviets of course; it was a political thing.

Q: Did you go visit factories and that sort of thing?

FARRAND: That was the thing where there was a great deal of interest and those who listen to this later, if anyone ever does, will particularly if they're from Czechoslovakia will know that as an economics officer, I had a natural entree to talk to the heads of factories. When you talk about contacts, most of my contacts were carefully controlled through three ministries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ministry of well, they call it FMTD, it was the ministry of technology development and then another ministry was the ministry of, I want to say commerce, the ministry of trade. So, the ministry of trade and I had three people that I dealt with at all times and I would have them to my house as a unit and we would talk and sit around. I was trying to do this so that I could occasionally go visit some of these large factories. And your question is spot on. I would

visit the large factories and I would talk to the heads of factories. They would give me tours of the works. I am not an engineer, so I sometimes didn't know what I was seeing, but I would keep my eyes out for all sorts of little things, like working conditions for the workers; safety equipment. Did the workers wear safety equipment? It was appalling to see workers walking around huge heavy cranes overhead moving large pieces of equipment and some of the foundries and things of this nature. They're walking around in sandals; I mean the open-toed sandals with a pair of heavy socks on, no helmets, none, no gloves. Where did I see that? The aisles of the factories. In one case I remember so well, the aisles of the factories were not delineated. I don't know if you've ever visited an American plant, a big American plant that produces for example, aircraft or helicopters. In this country today, everything is palletized and everything is even in this massive building. Everything is carefully segmented with a big yellow line and you don't put things outside that yellow line into the lane where forklift trucks are moving, where bicycles are going, where all kinds of things are. Everything is there. Not in Czechoslovakia in those days. It was, I don't know how to say it. They must have had industrial accidents of horrific proportions and I would report that. Of course, there was a great deal of interest in my reports because there were a lot of people in the embassy who couldn't get inside those places.

Q: How did we feel about the whole Czechoslovakian production? East Germany had been targeted as being the best of the economic states within the commicon, but what was your impression from what you were getting in Czechoslovakia?

FARRAND: I think, Stuart, the way that you've expressed that is accurate. We saw it roughly that way. I think I had found myself when I'd go to certain embassies trying to normally, trying to put the, maybe it's just an unconscious thing, maybe it's just something that I did, but I would try to find out the best I could to put facts in line to make the country I was working in to the positive side of things. I would try to find something that they really would excel in production of. I guess it really came down to the city of Plzen, it was about an hour by road to the west of Prague in Bohemia and the German adjective would be Pilsner and the beer they produced there for four hundred years was just superb. So, it still is today. Pilsner was a great beer. They know how to do that and they did it well. So, they did that well, but you notice I'm not talking about anything else. Now, I will say, I will say that even in this period, the Czechs had an industry of producing small trainer aircraft, LET was the name. That was by all accounts a very good small trainer aircraft for beginning pilots. I suppose their turbines and their large engines for trains, I suppose they were okay, but I was never aware of any quality control standards. I was never made aware by any American. That's the other thing, an American businessman would come and he would get an opportunity to go see a plant. This didn't happen very often, it was not a very robust operation I can tell you, but when they did, I would talk to them, I would learn over time because they were the best source because they were engineers and they knew what they were looking at. They knew what they were looking at. We didn't.

Q: Were we seeing essentially, was it an inefficient workforce that you were seeing even in Czechoslovakia?

FARRAND: Yes, yes, inefficient. The Czechs are a remarkable people though. They have bent over the years, they have swayed over the years, they haven't always been resistant. They're right in the heart of Europe; they're surrounded by low mountains. Hitler had viewed Bohemia. He was

thinking about making it as I understand the center, the heart of the Third Reich because it was behind these low mountains and it was kind of a bowl called the Shumama Mountains on the west of the country. It was the Czechs, the Czechs, you know, over the centuries, that's the reason why the Charles Bridge across the Vltava in downtown Prague has stood since 1348. The Prague River, the bridge has stood there. It's a stone bridge, it's a beautiful bridge and it's never been destroyed. Why hasn't it ever been destroyed? Well, because the Czechs always found a way of making an accommodation with their conquerors. Probably that's good for the city that's good for Prague. I'm not so sure it's good for the spirit of the Czech people.

Q: How about going about your business around Prague? Was the security a problem for you and your family?

FARRAND: No. Those of us who worked in that part of the world and this was my second tour inside of a communist country. I had been in the Soviet Union as we earlier talked for a couple of years as consular officer. I had known, I knew and had felt the eyes of surveillance on me and the sense that things that you were saying over the telephone were recorded and all of this sort of thing. There were, the fact that there were bugs and all of this business, that became kind of a little game with everybody and it added to the spice of life. When I went to Prague the same thing was in place, they did not have the KGB, they had an STB and their STB was better in many ways than the KGB. Why, because they were up on the front line right across from Germany and there were German businessmen who would come in and they would use as targets of opportunity. So, yes, we were watched. It was a thuggish group, but it didn't really hamper. It probably cooled, if I was waiting in the outside waiting room and you are an official of a trading house and you know the American commercial officer's out there, well, I'm sure there was a protocol that you probably had to let STB know or they found out or something later, but you were on your guard. You had to be or there was going to be trouble. So, I dealt with that. So, that really cut into our ability to do what the Department in those days wanted was a reasonable commercial job. We did involve ourselves in big trade shows. They one huge trade show a year and then other minor ones. We got involved. I was very active in that getting American businessmen in to display their wares?

Q: What was the purpose of the trade shows from our point of view?

FARRAND: From our point of view? Well, I mean, let's just be real pragmatic Yankees. We wanted to sell some things to them that were not on the prohibited list. From their point of view, what they wanted was for western firms all over Western Europe, United States, Canada, wherever to bring in state of the art equipment that they could look over and study and not necessarily buy. Or if they bought they would buy a prototype and try to reverse engineering. Well, of course, that rarely works.

Q: Well, I would think that as a practical measure it would be hard to work up much enthusiasm for these trade shows?

FARRAND: Not so, not so. There were a number of American firms, particularly in the agricultural business and things. John Deere, other firms that were associated. I'm having a mental blank, but there were others like John Deere who were quite anxious to come in and show their stuff. I remember one big crane coming in from an outfit up in Grove, Pennsylvania. In fact, it was

the Grove Crane Company. It still exists. It's up in Pennsylvania. They brought a crane over and showed it and it was a very flexible crane. It could do things that the cranes that they were using weren't. So, yes, there was a lot of interest. American businessmen would come and they would see what was needed on the ground and they would say, "Boy, we can really come in." I didn't want to say no to them. I'd point out the downsides, but they'd come. There's optimism in American businessmen that you can't extinguish.

Q: Well, it probably works in the long run because it keeps them from doing write-offs and maybe the time has come for something to happen.

FARRAND: Right, right.

Q: What about the skoda works?

FARRAND: The skoda works was a difficult place for me to visit. It was always difficult to work out a visit to a skoda works. What we finally did do though, we finally got a visit to the skoda works but by not me going, but asking for the ambassador to go and they said yes to him. They equivocated with me. He went, I went, my boss, Peter Bridges went, the three of us went to see the skoda works one day over in Pilzen, where the Pilsner beer was produced also. Massive works, massive and it produced the skoda truck, the lorry. The Czechs produced good trucks. I mean, I think that not only a skoda, but another one down in the heart of the Tatra Mountains called Copshinitza. They produced an articulated truck, you know, the cab and the back end. But, and so we went there. We went there and my memory of it was that as we sat down they began to immediately hit the ambassador after opening pleasantries with a fact that occurred in world war two that some American bombers near the end of the war came in and bombed the skoda works, bombed it. So, they had to spend time remonstrating with him about this thing. Well, it worked out that Bud Scherer had been an army air force flyer in the Second World War and he flew I think liberators. He flew on bombing missions and he said, "I can tell you that these bombing missions, mistakes were often made. It was very difficult to know exactly what every building was." He got around it that way.

Q: Of course, the other side of the coin was that they were producing stuff for the Germany army.

FARRAND: Yes, but the standard routine of communist propaganda, the standard way of going about dealing in those years with westerners like us would be to get you always on the back foot right away, to make a charge of some awful that had happened in the past about which the facts were mostly known, but somewhat not known and then put you on the back foot and you in a moral bind because Americans, for sure, Americans, I don't know about Western Europeans, for sure Americans, when we come into a conversation with people, almost any interlocutor with whom we're going to be speaking, almost there is a natural tendency for Americans to want to be friendly at the outset and any number of photographs, I tried to restrain myself. But, in any number of photographs you'll see from the period and maybe from other places, too, you'll see three or four people, two people from the host country in the communist world and one or two from the Americans and they'll be shaking hands and the Americans will inevitably be smiling and the others will not. They'll be shaking hands without smiling and we will always be smiling. So, I tried to stop my smiling. I'm getting off the subject here. That was, the whole skoda thing was to put the

ambassador on his back foot right away and he just came back at them. He just said, "Look, things like this happen in war." He was a combat veteran, so they couldn't really trump him.

Q: Was it impossible to sort of talk to Czechs in the street or as you drove around?

FARRAND: No, it wasn't. I will give you. No, obviously there was a reluctance to invite you to their homes, although if they ever did invite you to their homes, everything they had in the house was yours, unlike the Soviets in that regard. They're very hospitable people and, of course, unlike the Soviets and the Russians, the Czechs had lived for a considerable amount of time under the Austrian/Hungarian empire as the northern branch and then during the interwar years under a philosopher statesman, Thomas Maslovik, who by any account was a marvelous human being. So, they had known culture, Dvorak, Martinu, people like this. They had artists, I can't think of the name of the famous artist around the turn of the century. The Czechs are by nature a very refined people by nature. Their upper classes are opera goers, symphony goers and they have an ad before the war and have again at these studios outside of Prague called Boudov. They had a very good movie industry and they produced some fine films. I've seen a couple of Czech short films that are built during the past fifteen or twenty years that are just marvelous. But, as far talking to people on the street, when I first arrived because I naively assumed that maybe my Russian would be used there, I went to a restaurant with my wife on one of the very first nights I was there. The waiter came up and he was dressed as often happens in Czech restaurants even under communism, he was dressed in a tuxedo. He asked me in Czech, of which I had studied just a very little bit of before I went, he asked me in Czech if I wished to order. I spoke in Russian in response to him and there was an awkward moment when he wouldn't say anything. Then he said, looking at me knowing from my shoes mostly that I was not a Russian and certainly not a Czech, he said to me in English, "Sir, if you would speak to me in a civilized language then I would be happy to serve you." It was all done very quietly, nicely and I realized at that point that I had made a major blunder, not a small blunder, but a major blunder. Speaking Russian on a street in a town that had just been occupied four years earlier in which blood had flown and in which a young man had emulated himself in front of the, I mean, to do that as a westerner. It would have been better if I had just stumbled along in English. I mean, you know, made my best try, but to speak Russian was to acknowledge and to say to them we validate the Russian invasion in your country and we understand that this is the. At that moment, it was in one way good, I stopped. I said to myself here I am in a little country. I know a language, a Russian language which covers a large huge number of people, but I'm going to put my skills in the Russian language on the chopping block and I'm going to learn Czech. I started within a week of getting up early in the morning. In those days people were hungry for hard currency and I could hire a lady. The Czechs get up incredibly early in the morning as a people. They are up and out on the streets by 5:00 or 5:30. They're moving toward their workplace at 6:00. This is a marvelous feature. They also go to bed early, but when you're up that early, for me, I don't like getting up in the morning. I'm a late night person, but anyway I would get up early and she would come to my apartment in the embassy and she would come in and sit down and I would have some coffee made and she would teach me one on one Czech. We did that for a year, I did it actually for the better part of three years. When I came out of there I was speaking better Czech by far than I was speaking Russian. I at least started doing it and then I could have conversations with the Czech. I took into account this sensitivity and put it behind me right away. It was very naive on my part even to listen to the Department of State telling me you can do that.

Q: Well, that's a personnel officer trying to get you there in a hurry.

FARRAND: And he's trying to fill a slot. Yes. I understand. I understand his position. He's a great guy, I know him. Bob Morley. He's a great guy. I worked in personnel so I suppose I would have done some of the same things, but anyway.

Q: So many of the Czechs would sort of blossom during the Prague spring, were sat upon very heavily. Was there sort of a dissident group that made itself known or were they keeping quiet?

FARRAND: There was. There was, they were keeping quiet, but they were keeping quiet and it was not my job. I was economic and commercial. The political officer, there were two political officers, there was my boss who was a political economics chief. Then there was a junior officer, Ken Brown was one of them and then another was a fellow named Bob, I'll think of it. But in any case, these were responsible for these people were responsible for doing the workhorse political report. I will have to say in retrospect that I don't think either officer spent much time at all cultivating the Prague spring crowd. If they hear this they will probably say, no that's wrong, but I don't think they did. I want to tell you, I want to tell you that in comparison with the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovakian scene was much more ominous, the sense of control and the sense of surveillance was more pervasive in Czechoslovakia than it was in the Soviet Union. That's probably because the KGB was tucked way, way back across the steps in Moscow and they got a little, I don't know if they got sloppy, but they didn't really have to think that everything was on the line like when you're right out there next to NATO in the NATO corridor. So, it wasn't until I came back as deputy chief of mission in Prague some eight or nine years later that we can talk about getting involved with the dissidents.

Q: As economic officer, were the Czechs through the Pentagon system pushing products to the third world selling streetcars and that sort of thing? How were they?

FARRAND: Yes. The third world doesn't have streetcars. The Czechs produced a very good pistol. I think they produced I want to say another small arm, I'm going to say that I don't know why. I can't put my finger on it, my memory on it. One thing they produced which was of very high quality was this plastic explosive known as syntax. That couldn't be detected by x-ray machines and I don't know about dogs, I guess dogs could detect anything. But, that syntax is wreaked a lot of havoc on the word.

Q: Yes, by terrorist groups.

FARRAND: I mean this was when they turned in their efforts. I think Hovel now and the Czech government has done something about that, but I don't know if they've closed it all off.

Q: Were you following their export business?

FARRAND: As best I could. As best I could. Their statistics were published. You couldn't trust them. You couldn't get a handle on a lot of this stuff. Czechs were in communication with a lot of countries of northern Africa, what do they call that? The Maghreb. Along there. In southeast Asia.

Q: How did your wife find it?

FARRAND: My first marriage broke up in Moscow as I think I indicated and so by the time it was two and a half years later that I went back to Prague and by that time I had met and asked another lady to marry me. On the day that I was offered a job, when Morley called, Morley called and said, "Would you be interested?" and I said, "I would." He said words to this effect, "There is one thing." And I said, "What is that?" And he said, "You are married, aren't you?" And I said, "Well, I could be." He said, "Well, that's important because the ambassador wants a married officer." You see in those days you didn't want officers that flying free so they greet the swallows and the swans and all the others that came with them. So, I said okay. I put the phone down and I dialed the young lady that I was seeing across town and asked her to marry me. Actually I didn't ask her to marry me, I asked her to go to Prague with me. She said, "Well, what does that mean?" I said, "It means what it means. We should go to Prague and I think we ought to get married." We did. How did she like it? She was fresh faced, hadn't been in the Foreign Service and I could say that she found it absolutely fascinating, I think I can say. I was flat broke.

JACK R. PERRY
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1974-1976)

Jack R. Perry was born and raised in Georgia. His career in the Foreign Service included overseas posts in Moscow, Paris, Prague, and Stockholm. Perry served as ambassador to Bulgaria from 1979-1981. He was interviewed by Henry Mattox in 1998.

Q: About 1974 in your career, you went off as DCM in Prague. Who was the ambassador then?

PERRY: We had a sort of a strange situation. Shortly before I got there, Bud Sherer (Albert Sherer), a wonderful man, had been named to go over to Geneva for the CSCE talks. But he was not taken away from his ambassadorship, he was just sort of sent over to Geneva, and he would come back to Prague about once a month for a weekend. So, within a couple of weeks after I had arrived, I was chargé de affaires. And I stayed chargé, except for these occasional monthly weekend visits, for about a year or a little more. Then the CSCE talks were finished, Bud Sherer went off on another assignment, and they didn't send an ambassador to Prague for another year. So I was chargé then for just about a year, until the summer of 1976, when they did send an ambassador. And then I left. So I was chargé most of the two years in Prague.

Q: Why was the Department so slow in assigning an ambassador?

PERRY: That's a good question. I was never totally sure. Maybe there was a struggle going on as to whether it would be a career person or non-career or something, but I never got the inside story.

Q: Well, after you had been there virtually two years as chargé, it would be normal practice to shuffle you on off, with a new ambassador coming in, with a little overlap, perhaps. But a new

ambassador would have to have his own way prepared or opened for him, and someone who had been chargé for two years would almost have to leave. Did you get that impression? Did anyone say that explicitly to you, the fact that we're going to put you through?

PERRY: I don't remember anyone saying it explicitly, but I had very good friends in Personnel, like Arthur Wortzel, and it was just understood from the beginning that I would leave when the ambassador came. We were working on an assignment for me during the spring. I went up to Stockholm to interview with the new ambassador up there, David Smith, and he invited me to come as DCM. So it all sort of worked out. And my wife and I had the joy of two 4th of July celebrations that year. We went to the one in Prague, so we could say goodbye to everybody and introduce people to the new ambassador, on the 4th, and then after the reception, which was midday, we got on the plane and flew to Stockholm, and then they had theirs up there the next day. So by the end of that week we were pretty well basket cases.

The 4th of July in Prague was, in those bad old days of the Russian occupation, really a big event, because a lot of Czechs could come to the embassy that day, whereas they couldn't have any contact with us the rest of the year. So you had people like alumni of American colleges and universities, and you had veterans who had fought with us in World War II, and all kinds of people who used to be part of the American sort of milieu there in Czechoslovakia who could come. We would have, as I recall, a couple of thousand people. It was a mob, and a very pleasant occasion.

Q: During the two years that you were chargé, did you have any issues or problems arise that still linger in your mind?

PERRY: It was a time -- the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of 1968 -- when not much was going on. As a matter of fact, when we talk about why they didn't send an ambassador the second year, I think one good reason is that it was a very dull, dead period. The Soviet occupation had left us without much to say to the Czechs. And although when you're at an embassy, you always try to make things work and get things going and sign agreements and one thing and another, it was rather hard in that period to put too much push into it.

I suppose the main thing that we were trying to do was get some trade going, with trade shows and that sort of thing, but that went nowhere.

We had one issue that was a burning issue (which in retrospect is very small potatoes, except it had a moral side to it), and that is that we had come into possession of all the Czech gold that had been taken out of Czechoslovakia by Hitler when he took over there at the start of the Second World War. That gold had been in American possession, and I think the British had a little of it, but we had most of it for a long time. And the Czechs had been trying, quite legitimately, to get it back. I mean, they were Communists, but it was still Czechoslovak gold and they should have had it. But we drove a very tough bargain and wanted to get a lot in exchange for giving them *their* gold back, which I always felt was a sort of a questionable moral enterprise, but that's what we did. And so I spent a fair amount of time trying to talk about that sort of thing.

About the only other issue that I remember that was a lively one is that I had the idea that it would be nice to celebrate the American part in the liberation of the Czech part of Czechoslovakia from

the Germans. While the Russians came sweeping through Slovakia, we Americans, under Patton, went rolling into Bohemia and could have gone easily to Prague, but decided to hold back and let the Russians do that. Patton set up a headquarters near Pilsen, and there were lots of Americans killed liberating the Czech lands. And so we were able to get more attention paid to that, which I thought was a nice thing to do.

I probably carried it too far, because we got USIA to write a really nice brochure, with illustrations and so forth, all in Czech, which was sort of a celebration of the American role in liberating Czechoslovakia. Well, of course, that was anathema to the Russians; they didn't want to hear that at all. And it was therefore anathema to the Czech government. But we issued that brochure and started handing it out. And, of course, I was called in for a protest, and the Czechs got terribly upset about that. So, after a while, we had to quit distributing it, because it was causing too many problems. But it got around in good quantity. I was proud of it.

Q: What was their objection?

PERRY: Their objection was that it was propaganda, and that the real liberation of Czechoslovakia came from the Russians and not from us. They distorted history.

Q: You dealt with the Czech government officials; you didn't deal directly with Russian officials while there?

PERRY: No, except that the Soviet Embassy had some pretty intelligent people there, people that we could occasionally talk to, although not about what was going on in Czechoslovakia; they wouldn't talk about that. But it was a certain dialogue about what was going on in the world. Otherwise, no, we dealt with the Czechs as if they were a totally sovereign nation. Of course, they weren't totally sovereign what with all those Soviet troops there and the rest of it. But that was the way that we (and they) acted. And I had occasion, as chargé, to meet all of the top Czech officials. Husák was then the head of the Party and the head of the government, and I had a number of occasions to meet him and other people. But, of course, as you would imagine, we didn't have that much high-level stuff going on. We didn't have really high-level visitors, nor did they go to the U.S. So we dealt mostly with our colleagues in the Foreign Ministry at a working level.

Q: You would deal with the foreign minister, as chargé, or the deputy foreign minister, or where exactly?

PERRY: I had some contact with all of them. Prague is not that big a place, and there were times when I would see the foreign minister, or some of his deputies. Some of the deputy foreign ministers I talked to a good deal. But it was the head of the American section that we dealt with the most from day to day.

TIMOTHY E. DEAL
Czechoslovakia Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1975-1976)

Timothy Deal was born in Missouri in 1940 and educated at the University of

California, Berkeley. He entered the Foreign Service in 1965. His career included posts in Warsaw, London and Paris. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2004.

Q: And that was in 1974?

DEAL: In 1974, right.

Q: And anything special about that period? It was not too long after '68, in terms of relations?

DEAL: U.S.-Czechoslovak relations were difficult at the time, but when I joined the office the U.S. had just negotiated a claims settlement with the Czechoslovakia, which should have paved the way for a better relationship. However, at the same time, Congress was debating the Trade Act of 1974, which was to become the basic trade negotiating authority for the Tokyo Round. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Russell Long introduced an amendment to the legislation, which required that any claims settlement with Czechoslovakia should be at 100 cents on the dollar, not the 25-30 cents settlements negotiated with other countries. Furthermore, Czechoslovakia had to repay the claims in gold held by the Tripartite Gold Commission after World War II. So, whatever hopes there might have been for a better relationship were dashed in my first few months on the job.

Q: So there was no claims agreement?

DEAL: Not at that time. A settlement would not come until years later. I did go to Prague in the fall of 1974 and met with the Czechoslovak authorities to discuss the legislation. I was relatively optimistic that the amendment would not pass, but, of course, I was wrong. The bilateral relationship went back into the freezer, and I turned to the care and feeding of Embassy Prague. Still, in looking back, I considered it a good experience since it was my first exposure to political work.

Q: Who was the ambassador to Czechoslovakia at that time?

DEAL: Bud Scherer, but he was seldom in Prague. He was in charge of the CSCE negotiations.

Q: I suppose you also spent a lot of time working with the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington?

DEAL: Yes, we had regular dealings with Embassy officials. I attended their social events regularly, and we had a civil relationship despite the problems between the two countries.

Q: There were restrictions on air travel?

DEAL: Yes, and there were other problems as well. I had a minor part in an FBI sting operation to arrest a Czechoslovak Embassy Officer accused of spying. The bureau caught him red-handed, and he was expelled from the country. Of course, that didn't help the bilateral relationship much either.

Q: Was there retaliation?

DEAL: Undoubtedly, yes.

JOHN M. EVANS
Consular Officer
Prague (1975-1978)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: Well we'll come to that.

Okay, well then we're talking about '74; Nixon has departed the scene in a helicopter and you've arrived to almost replace him, is that-?

EVANS: Hardly. But I had my assignment at that point; I had been assigned to Czechoslovakia. And so after a couple of weeks of getting myself settled I started Czech language training.

Q: Okay. Well then let's talk about- How did you find Czech as a language? I take it you're fairly- if you are picking up on Farsi fairly well you're one of these people somewhat adept at languages, aren't you?

EVANS: I've been lucky, I think, to have very good instruction in languages all along and I may have had some disposition to learn them. I had high verbal scores and so on but I've always found it difficult to speak any language really well. My Persian got to be quite good. I'd previously studied Russian. Czech I found quite frustrating because I wanted to use Russian. It's close enough to Russian that one is tempted to decline nouns and conjugate verbs in a similar way and it's quite different; the Western Slavic languages -- like Polish and Czech -- are quite distant actually from Russian in their formation.

But I did learn Czech quite well and a year later took off for Prague, and of course this was a time of not quite Stalinism but virtual Stalinism of a new generation.

Q: The Czechs have been quite adept at being nasty.

EVANS: Well, I don't think they would agree with that, quite, but they are sort of a dyspeptic group; some ascribe it to beer drinking. But what I found was -- in the summer of, by this time it would have been '75 -- I flew to Paris, bought a Peugeot and drove alone through Germany into

Czechoslovakia and of course I saw the great divide that then existed between Western Europe and the moment you got to that border fortified with guard dogs and barbed wire you knew you were going into a different world.

Q: How would you describe the political and sort of economic and overall situation of Czechoslovakia in '75?

EVANS: 1975 was less than 10 years after the Prague Spring when the Czechs and the Slovaks, more the Czechs, but under Dubček, had tried to reform the system, tried to open things up, tried to liberalize and of course they were crushed by not only the Soviet Union but all their Warsaw Pact neighbors save Romania. And the result was a kind of conservative reaction, a kind of a Thermidor in which Gustáv Husák, a hard line Slovak communist, was in charge and you had very hard line people in the governing communist party. So it was a kind of neo-Stalinist atmosphere. The United States was constantly criticized if not reviled in the media; people were afraid to meet with Americans, and yet there were some avenues and there was a great reservoir of love for the United States that went back to Tomáš Masaryk and Woodrow Wilson, the foundation of Czechoslovakia after Versailles and the many connections between Czech emigrants, going back even to the 19th century when Antonin Dvořák came for a stay in the United States and actually appeared at Carnegie Hall. So these memories were there and the main train station had been called the Wilson Station; that of course had been changed.

Q: And I think for somebody who's reading this later, Wilson was very much involved in the formation of Czechoslovakia-

EVANS: Yes.

Q: -during the Versailles Conference.

EVANS: That's right, that's exactly right. And Tomáš Masaryk, who's considered the founder of the Czechoslovak state, his mother was American, so there were those connections. And at the end of World War II it's also true, and Czechs remembered this, that General Patton had liberated from the Germans the southwestern part of Bohemia and there were graves to the soldiers, American soldiers, who had fought down in those parts, in the west and south that we visited every year. And every year, quietly, people would come to those graves, some of them with mementos from the soldiers they had met, some of them with their Shirley Temple fan club cards or various other things.

Q: She had been ambassador there.

EVANS: She was ambassador there later and I was her DCM but that was in the '90s.

But there was that reservoir of friendship for the United States, which to some extent tempered the popular feelings but of course made friendship with American diplomats even more suspect to the authorities.

Q: What was your job?

EVANS: I started off as consul, this time doing visas. At one point I had the great honor of giving a tourist visa to Martina Navratilova, the famous tennis player, and of course it was a non-immigrant visa. Had I known that she was going to stay in the United States I would have had to deny her; we later got the notice from the Immigration Service that she had decided to stay. And what I most remember was she had enormous hands and when I shook hands with her I felt as if I had put my hand into a baseball mitt.

Q: Well let's talk a little about the visa business. You must have- In the first place, it must have been hard for people to get passports, wasn't it?

EVANS: Yes. All travel was pretty closely controlled and people, some professionals, got permission to go to international conferences and there were cases like that but basically the visa business was fairly slow. What wasn't so slow was the issue of Czechoslovak citizens, in particular Slovaks in the eastern part of the country, who were beneficiaries of various American social programs such as black-lung compensation. These were the survivors of immigrants in the '30s who had come to work in the coal mines during the Depression and had then gone back and married Slovak girls who had far outlived them, largely that's what it was. And I remember taking one fascinating 18-day-long trip through Moravia and Slovakia with a Czechoslovak foreign ministry official who was my "chaperone." We would drop in on these farmsteads in the middle of nowhere in the mountains and in various isolated valleys for the purpose of discovering whether the beneficiaries were one, still alive, and two, actually benefiting from the checks that were being issued. We needed to find out that they were indeed getting the money, that their children and relatives weren't siphoning it off, and in one case we did find a situation like that where the children were intercepting the checks and preventing the old grandma from seeing her money.

Q: Well it's interesting that that relationship, I know I was in Yugoslavia back in the mid '60s and we had Social Security investigation there and it was going on in Czechoslovakia where Social Security people and Yugoslav authorities, I believe, was duplicated in Czechoslovakia and went out and did a survey.

EVANS: Well that's right, and this was actually in their interest also, to make sure that these benefits were going to the proper destinations and that fraud was not being committed.

Q: Well then, did you get involved in any, before we move on to the political situation, were there Americans or Czech-Americans who were getting into trouble?

EVANS: There was far less of that than in Iran. First of all, there were far fewer tourists who came to Czechoslovakia in those days. I mean, Prague is an absolutely superbly beautiful city and yet it was almost empty of tourists except for East Germans, who came largely to drink beer. There was a class of wealthy American tourists who were able to come through on organized tours or special arrangements but you didn't get the middling sort of tourist.

There were some cases that became problematic but they mainly had to do with people involuntarily violating security restrictions on photography, that sort of thing, or problems with their papers, people whose passport had expired, that sort of stuff. But there was nothing

particularly lurid.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

EVANS: Well, when I first arrived the ambassador was Bud Sherer, Albert Sherer, who at that time was participating in the talks in Geneva that led to the Helsinki Final Act being signed, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and I remember Ambassador Sherer departing that summer of 1975, and I'm pretty sure he was at the Helsinki conference. And that of course ushered in a very new era in East-West relations which came to affect very much our work in Czechoslovakia.

Q: But that was, in a way, unforeseen by almost everyone.

EVANS: It was even opposed by some, and you may recall that President Ford was advised by none other than Henry Kissinger not to sign the Final Act of the conference at Helsinki and there were many conservative columnists who deplored the idea that the U.S. president would go and sign an agreement with all those communists.

Q: Well I think part of the thing was that the Soviets saw this thing as being- it firmed up the borderlines and all that, which for the conservatives on the Western side, you know, they saw this as being, you know, I mean why acknowledge borders which are already pretty well established anyway, whereas the Soviets and company didn't realize that they were allowing a virus to get into their system, i.e., the, what is it, the third basket.

EVANS: The third basket, yes.

Q: The third basket, which was also some human rights things.

EVANS: That's right. Really the original idea went back to a proposal the Soviets had made in the 1950s for a European security conference, which was seen in Washington as a way of dealing the United States out of being a European power. That of course went through several different variations and in the end two negotiations were set up; there were the Mutual and Balance Force Reductions, or MBFR, which were focused on conventional weapons and troop levels, force levels. And then there was also this Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was through Western efforts, NATO efforts, balanced to involve a first basket on security matters, a second basket on economic matters and a third basket on human rights and related issues like movement of people, exactly. And so by the time this conference really started it was a very different thing than what the Soviets had originally envisioned.

Q: Well I know, I've interviewed George Vest, who was very much involved in that in the negotiations and he talked about how Henry Kissinger was basically undercutting them. He was telling what's his name, the Soviet ambassador-

EVANS: Dobrynin.

Q: -Dobrynin, well don't pay any attention to that. You know, I mean, the word was getting to Vest

through the East Germans, who said you know your secretary _____ very impressed in this. I mean, it was a bizarre situation.

EVANS: It was a bizarre situation. I knew George Vest and had huge respect for him. He grew up in Williamsburg in a house on the Duke of Gloucester Street that you can still see. A fine man.

I think Kissinger's idea was more the 19th century Metternich-Bismarck vision of the concert of nations and balancing power with power, with countervailing power, and what the participants in the Helsinki conference were talking about was a broader, more modern, more far-reaching process, that was non-traditional, had never really been tried. It was not another version of the League of Nations. There were two military blocs and neutrals interspersed but it was a kind of a dialogue and I think many people were suspicious of it. And Washington has always, as a culture, far preferred NATO where it controls, largely, to the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) now the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) where, although everything is done by consensus and there's no real voting, there's no tallying of votes, but if somebody holds out a consensus fails and so when you have a consensus in the OSCE you have a lot, but when you are lacking one party then you have nothing.

Q: Well you were in Czechoslovakia from '75 to when?

EVANS: To '78.

Q: Were you- What were you doing; were you doing the consular work the whole time?

EVANS: No. I did one year of consular work, during which I traveled around a great deal, as I mentioned, to Slovakia and Moravia, as well as much of Bohemia. And I then moved into the political section in '76. We by that time had a new ambassador, Thomas Byrne, who had come out of the labor movement. He was a friend of George Meany's and had already been ambassador in Norway. And it was a wonderful time to be in charge of domestic political reporting. First of all, we had a new ambassador and I traveled around with him a lot and sat in on his meetings with various officials. For example, we went to Bratislava and met with the premier in Bratislava and we met with local officials and so on, so that was a good education for me, certainly in taking notes.

The other thing that was going on at that time was that some Czech and some Slovak intellectuals were taking the Helsinki Final Act signed in August of 1975 very seriously. In 1976 the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act were published in full; that was a requirement of the agreement. It was published in full in the Czechoslovak newspapers and many Czech dissidents cut it out and had it on their refrigerators or whatever. And during 1976 it was enacted into Czech law and a very interesting group started to compose what became later Charter 77, which was one of the milestone human rights documents of Eastern Europe in the 1970s and led directly to Gorbachev and the loosening up of the system, the whole communist system. But in those days it was just a twinkle in the eyes of these intellectuals.

But I was fortunate enough to fall in with some young people who were very closely connected to this group, in particular I chanced to meet Marta Kubišová, who was a pop singer and had sung, I

must say at the top of her lungs, with Dubček at her side, during the Prague Spring in 1968 and was very much connected with people close to Dubček and those who, after the Prague Spring, had fallen into disfavor with the hard line regime. So through Marta and her circle of friends I ran into a lot of these people and they were really composing this Charter 77, which was scheduled to be published on January 1, 1977. I would go to the Café Slavia, which is an old café on the banks of the Vltava River and they would be passing drafts around, drinking strong coffee and deciding how to word something or other. In the end we obtained the draft of Charter 77 on about December 10, 1976, and I'm pretty sure that I was the first person to render it into English, on my old Smith-Corona.

Charter 77 had three spokesmen; a former Czechoslovak...Dubček's foreign minister, Jiri Hajek, by this time a retired professor, and Jan Patočka, who was a prominent intellectual, and Václav Havel. They were the three spokesmen, so to speak, of Charter 77. But then they opened it to signature and little by little more and more people signed on. The activists had gone through Czech and Moravian and Slovak towns and had gotten people to sign and so the list of signatories by the end was very impressive and it made the regime, of course, extremely nervous. What the signers and spokesmen were demanding really was that the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, which were now part of Czechoslovak law, actually be taken seriously and put into practice. And this was absolutely subversive in a one-party state and I do believe that, contrary to the claims of some that it was Ronald Reagan who brought down the Soviet system, I think that the activities associated with Charter 77, not only in Czechoslovakia but in Poland and Hungary and various other countries of what was then the Eastern Bloc, the activities of those people, based on the principles of the Final Act, had more to do in breaking down the old structures, in opening up new possibilities, in providing for contacts with the West than almost any of the other things that were done.

Q: I agree with you. I mean, this is obviously- Talk about almost unintended consequences. Maybe there were people within who were doing the negotiations who saw, who could at least hope for real consequences but it was considered sort of a throwaway at the time, you know. Okay, we have to do this but the main thing was to stabilize the borders and to set up things so that you wouldn't have military maneuvers menacing each other, that sort of thing.

EVANS: Yes, there were several parts to it, of course, and each of them played its own role.

Q: Okay. You're the political officer; how were you playing this? Were you watching this and- What were you seeing at that time and passing on to your colleagues?

EVANS: Well, I was with my girlfriend, who was another employee of the embassy; we had to be accompanied by another American in those days traveling in communist countries and so you couldn't go out very much by yourself; we got around a lot. We visited Marta Kubišová in her farmhouse in eastern Bohemia and people showed up there without our having to be involved in inviting them. People who were involved in the dissident movement showed up there and we, I had these fascinating conversations with all sorts of people, some considerably older than I was at the time. We ran into other people; there was another foreign ministry official whom we got to know who had a little chata on the Sazava River and so mostly on the weekends, I have to say, we were off and about and sometimes trailed by the secret police, which were known as the STB. It was a

kind of a KGB sort of organization and I remember taking evasive action at times to avoid their attention. I never had any serious altercation with them although I do believe that one of my maneuvers on the highway caused two of their cars to crash into each other.

But also, that was the time when the United States was toying with the idea, you may remember, of a so-called neutron bomb. This was a low-blast, high-radiation anti-tank weapon, basically. It was meant to fry the people in the tank and stop it if they came through the Fulda Gap but the Eastern bloc labeled it the “neutron bomb” and said “this is a perfect capitalist weapon that kills people but leaves property.” That was their twist on this. Well, we started getting a huge number of letters from groups of “concerned Czechoslovak citizens,” no doubt organized by the local communist party’s functionaries and we decided to answer these letters. And so we pointed out -- and it was all done in Czech -- we pointed out that this was in fact a battlefield weapon which was meant to neutralize the preponderance of Warsaw Pact tanks in this potential northern European battlefield. Whatever it was we said, I had to get these things mailed; we couldn’t simply put them in the outbox and let them be handled by the Czech employees, the local employees, who undoubtedly were in the pay of the secret police, but instead, after work, I would go rambling around Prague and find mailboxes that looked like good places to dump a bunch of these things. And I think a lot of these letters got out, in fact, to the population and the number of letters that we were receiving went way down. But there was a cat-and-mouse game definitely at work here between us and the secret police.

Q: Well now what were they- I mean, you have a- say a post Stalinist regime, how come that Havel and the other two and the singer weren’t all tossed in jail and the thing was squelched?

EVANS: You know, the Czechs have a very interesting political culture. The law is important. And there’s a lot of lip service to the law and what these people largely did was through their stubbornness and cleverness they were able to play legal games with the authorities. They would have the legal text at their side and they would point at the law and the people enforcing the law were not as ruthless as they are in some places further east, but they would try to fight this battle within the confines of the law. And so it became a very intricate game with the dissidents insisting on the letter of Czechoslovak law which was actually pretty good. There was a hypocrisy involved and they worked against this hypocrisy and were relatively successful, although Havel did spend time in jail. I remember running into him on a street corner just a few days before he was taken off for one of his stints in prison.

Q: Well were we doing anything of people going- I mean in promoting this or were- did we make a calculation they were doing the job and they could do it a hell of a lot better than we could?

EVANS: You know, it was always a question, there’s always a dilemma of does the attention of the American embassy on a particular case make things better or worse for that individual. And we faced those dilemmas again and again. Sometimes the decision was made to very quietly ask for clemency for someone or suggest that something be done differently. And if that didn’t work we sometimes would get instructions to make more of a fuss about it. I mean, this was a constant issue in all, I think not only in Prague, but in all the embassies in that part of the world.

Now, what changed radically in 1976, I think, was when President Carter, against the advice of

some in the State Department, wrote a letter to Academician Sakharov, who was at that time in exile in the city of Gorky in Russia. And that was the first time that an American president had ever brought an individual human rights issue to the very top. That was a milestone in establishing human rights as a legitimate area for action by other states. It was based, of course, on the Helsinki Final Act.

Q: Did you see a major split between Slovakia and the, later the Czech side of things?

EVANS: This question belongs more properly in my second tour in Czechoslovakia when I was DCM.

Q: Well I'd like to catch it at that time; were we seeing-?

EVANS: Yes. We were aware, one cannot fail to be aware of the differences between the Czech lands, which are Bohemia and Moravia, and the Slovak Republic, which was, after 1968, made a full republic in addition to the Czechoslovak Republic. Bohemia and Moravia were not a separate republic but Slovakia was and it had its own Communist Party whereas the rest of the party was the Czechoslovak Communist Party. And you do see the differences, cultural and language differences, of course, when you go to Slovakia. Originally the Czech lands were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled from Vienna whereas Slovakia was ruled from Budapest and that has a lot to do with the differences and there also is a sizeable Hungarian minority in the south of Slovakia. So yes, in my travels around I did run into this but I have to say that the level of expression of nationalistic feelings was quite low. Czechs love the Slovaks; Slovaks bridled to some extent under what they saw as something of a patronizing attitude by the Czechs but there were a lot of Slovaks who had ended up in Prague as "federal" Slovaks. And in fact, there was a saying, and I can't quote it now, it works better in the local language, but it basically was a saying that "Czech lands are now ruled by Slovaks" because there were so many, starting with Gustav Husák and his other Slovak colleagues.

Q: He'd be a Slovak.

EVANS: Yes. They were considered the loyalists of course, by the Soviets, because the Prague Spring was more of a Czech event than a Slovak one.

Q: Was the Sudeten Deutsche issue an issue anymore or was that gone?

EVANS: Yes, it was an issue under the surface. The Sudeten Germans after the war had been expelled under the Beneš decrees, which are still controversial today because in the context of the European Union Treaty there are still descendents of the Sudeten German groups who meet every year usually in the Munich area in August and September and sing their old songs and talk about going home to the Sudetenland and of course their property was seized by the Czech state and there are other people living in it for the most part now. This was an issue; it was not a major issue but it did come up from time to time in commentaries. I'm sure it was discussed in some of the meetings in the Helsinki process.

Q: What about- How are the Soviets seen there? I mean, from the optic of an American official

looking at the political situation.

EVANS: First of all, the way they were seen by the normal Czech citizens was interesting. I remember one weekend there was a light rain falling; the day must have been a Soviet and Czechoslovak holiday, something like May 9, and at the beginning of the day before the rain started almost every window on that street in Prague had had a Soviet and a Czechoslovak flag out, displayed for the holiday. As the rain intensified the Czechoslovak flag was pulled in, in every case, and the Soviet flag was left to get wet and lose its color. These were the kinds of subtle signs that the Czechs would send.

Another case of that, and there's a name for this; it's named after a character in Jaroslav Hasek's novel "The Good Soldier Švejk."

Q: A wonderful book.

EVANS: It's a wonderful book, very difficult in Czech; I have to say, because it's very much in the vulgate or the vernacular. Another case of this was a bookstore with the required display of the collected works of Lenin: I remember seeing one such bookstore with all the works of Lenin displayed there but somebody had walked through this shelf and left footprints in the dust. So, you know, it was just that kind of a subtle signal: you couldn't really say anyone was guilty of anything in particular but the signal it sent was clear.

Q: Did you find much adherence to true communism or was this, you know, I've talked to people who were in Poland who about this time, maybe a little later, but saying they were convinced there must have been three, maybe four dedicated communists in the country, you know. I mean, did you find, I mean, was it sticking or was this how you ruled?

EVANS: Outside the official circles where people said what they were expected to say, I ran into exactly one convinced communist, by accident. I was in a restaurant and I ran into a woman who was railing on about capitalism and saying that we don't need such "magnates" in our country and so on. But it was very thin. The population was tired; they were just trying to get on with their lives. They aspired to the kind of prosperity that their parents had enjoyed in the first republic, the first Czechoslovak Republic, which actually had had one of the highest standards of living in Europe, higher than Germany's, and people, there were enough people around who really remembered quality goods and how markets worked and the strength of the Czechoslovak crown at that time. So I think there was very little loyalty to the regime or to the Soviet Union.

Q: Did you get any feel for the academic life, the students, the faculties?

EVANS: I did get to know quite a few students. I met some of them through Fulbright professors; there was a Fulbright exchange and there were some other young people, young Americans, working there. And I think, if anything, the disgust for the current political and economic conditions was greater among the younger people even than some of their parents who had come to terms with it.

Q: How about Czech officials? How did you find dealing with them?

EVANS: Some of them were downright rotten in a sense that they were just flunkies and they would just do what they were instructed to do and they had no imagination or, I would say, even sense of decency. But there were others. I remember working with a consular official who actually had at least a little bit of sense of responsibility for doing the right thing. And there were a couple of diplomats who actually in the end lived through the transition and went on to serve as officials after communism fell.

Q: What was the role of Western embassies there, because I go back to my Yugoslav times and you know, you get pretty good relations. This is during the mid '60s but still the Western community was very much a very cohesive group, and I was wondering in a more difficult place like Czechoslovakia how would you find it.

EVANS: We were very much thrown on each other's company; the NATO group I have in mind, primarily, with the occasional neutral thrown in, particularly the Austrians. And at two different levels there were regular meetings, actually three different levels. The ambassadors met as the NATO caucus, you might say on a regular basis to exchange notes and impressions and discuss issues. The deputy chiefs of mission met as the Club de Prague and enjoyed nice lunches on a rotating basis at each other's houses. And then the political officers also had a smaller version of that; we met, we exchanged visits on a monthly basis. The strong embassies in terms of reporting among the Western camp were the Germans, who had some entrée through old connections, the British and ourselves. The British are always good in my experience and we were good because we had the best language capabilities of any of the Western embassies. What was particularly interesting at that time, though, was the Romanian role. The Romanians had not invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 along with the Warsaw Pact...

Q: This is Ceausescu?

EVANS: That's right.

Q: Cutting out a separate, nasty but separate, line.

EVANS: Exactly, that's exactly what it was. He was the maverick of the Eastern Bloc and we therefore got some very good information and useful guidance from one particular Romanian colleague. Now, I can't say as much for the Finns, and in fact a very sad thing happened during those years in which our ambassador was entrapped by the Finnish consul, a local Czech woman, and I'm not at liberty to go into the details of this but it was a very nasty situation and it resulted in his early departure from Prague under less than ideal circumstances.

Q: I mean, was this a feeling this was a Czech operation using the Finn?

EVANS: Yes, absolutely. The citizen was an honorary consul. She was clearly in the pay of the STB (Czechoslovak secret police).

Q: At this point were you- you were unmarried?

EVANS: That's right -- but not single.

Q: How did this work within the sort of Foreign Service situation in a difficult country?

EVANS: I arrived as a bachelor and within three or four months a young woman arrived to work for USIS (United States Information Service), a very attractive lady, and we hit it off and were, for all intents and purposes, like a married couple there in Prague. We traveled together, we had friends among the Czechs together, we went out on commissary runs to Germany together and that lasted through the entire tour.

Q: What was social life like, particularly vis-à-vis the Czechs?

EVANS: The Czechs came to official events, certainly the ones who were in the foreign ministry and official life. They came to visit, they came to meet visitors from Washington, and they always came to the Fourth of July in large numbers; that was something that was permitted. What was more difficult for them was to come to private dinners or semi-private dinners although some of them did, in particular journalists who were either stringers for a Western organization like Reuters or some of the other Western news organizations. They would come to our events but one of the problems was that people were poor. They couldn't reciprocate. They simply didn't want to be interviewed by the secret police after going to one of these events so they largely stayed away. Where we did find we could have conversations was in the pubs and the wine cellars. And if one went out and could speak Czech one could join a table, might never see the people ever again, but you could have a very good conversation for one evening.

Q: Did you feel that the people you'd meet, say particularly at a bierstube were they pretty well informed what was happening in the United States? I mean, were they getting- was news getting to them?

EVANS: It's hard to judge, but I think a lot more news was getting to the Czechs than I had observed getting to Russians 10 years earlier. They just seemed much closer, probably because they could receive radio broadcasts; in some parts of Czechoslovakia they could receive West German or Austrian television. So they just seemed more European in that sense. Not that they fully understood American life but they had a much better general idea of the West.

Q: Well was there a certain amount of almost contempt for the Soviets, for the Russians?

EVANS: Oh, yes. There were jokes, there were some fairly off-color jokes, in fact, about the Soviets and some Czechs would refuse to speak to Russians. Occasionally Soviet troops -- not necessarily were they Russian in nationality, they might have been from Central Asia -- would show up in Prague in the last week of their service in Czechoslovakia. They would be herded through the National Museum and across the Charles Bridge and inevitably the Czechs were very disdainful of the Russians and I think a lot of Russians and Soviets, I should say Soviets, not Russians, felt quite uncomfortable there.

Q: I take it Prague was not an R&R (rest and recreation) spot for the troops, Soviet troops in the area.

EVANS: The Soviets kept their troops largely away from the big cities. They had a couple of bases which were off limits to Western diplomats that are still closed areas. This is an old technique that even the Imperial Russian army discovered in its occupations, 19th century occupations of Poland, to keep the troops in the forest and away from the cities.

Q: Did you ever get the feeling from military attachés what do we think about, you know, the Czech army was right on the border ready to go across; was it on the Fulda Gap?

EVANS: The Fulda Gap is a bit north.

Q: What was the feeling about the, you know, if the whistle blew what would the Czech army do?

EVANS: The Czech army, going back again to the culture that “The Good Soldier Švejk” represents was not considered to be one of the greatest military machines in history. There was a sense that the Slovaks might have been the backbone of the Czechoslovak army more than the Czechs.

Q: This is traditional peasant, I mean more country or- same way we use the south, at least used to, as being the backbone of our military.

EVANS: Something like that, and there may have been some additional reasons as well. In fact, a lot of the Soviet military might was kept in Slovakia, sort of once removed from the frontline. You’re reminding me though of some wonderful stories about our attachés. Whenever the Warsaw Pact would have a maneuver our attachés would be out there shadowing them, usually with their wives doing the navigating or driving or something. And there were some hilarious moments when one of our attachés who spoke fluent Czech was asked directions by a Soviet commander who came through and they pulled out the maps and the Soviet commander had the entire exercise mapped out on his map and he was asking our attaché how to find the next little town. So there was a lot of cat-and-mouse sort of stuff that happened in those days but rarely with serious consequences.

Q: Did you ever find the heavy hand of the Soviet, I mean of the Czech secret police trying to do something to you, set you up or impede you or anything like that?

EVANS: Only in the sense that they followed us on the weekends and sometimes we had sort of chases on the highways, that sort of thing. But they never...and I’m sure they interviewed the lady I had cleaning my house. One of the reasons I never kept a journal there was that I feared by keeping a journal I might make myself liable to having things found out and Czechs would get into trouble.

Q: Were there any incidents that you knew of of Americans being compromised or threatened with compromise?

EVANS: The only one was the one I mentioned at a very high level which ended very badly for the ambassador.

Q: Okay. Well I'm looking at the time; it's probably a good place to stop. And you left in '77?

EVANS: I left in '78.

LEONARDO M. WILLIAMS
Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Prague (1976-1979)

Mr. Williams was born in Alabama. He was raised in Alabama, Washington, D.C and Minnesota and was educated at St. John's College (MN), University of Wisconsin and Georgetown University. After joining the Foreign Service in 1968, he served as USIA Public Affairs and Information Officer in India, Pakistan, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Yugoslavia. His Washington assignments dealt primarily with operations of USIA. Mr. Williams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Today is January 16, 2003. Was Czech something that you had picked?

WILLIAMS: This assignment came about by chance. During the time I was in Athens, I had expressed an interest in serving in Eastern Europe. In those days, at least in USIA, it was considered an important career development move to spend at least some time in the Eastern Bloc. Also, I was interested in the region and curious about it. The personnel system came up with this assignment.

Q: How long did you take Czech?

WILLIAMS: I took it for the full 44 weeks.

Q: How did you find Czech?

WILLIAMS: Extremely difficult. It was a different language structure from any language I had ever studied before.

Q: Sometimes from your teachers, you can pick up quite a bit about the culture. Were you getting that from them?

WILLIAMS: Yes, definitely. That was part of the goal of the training, to give us some sense of the cultural environment that we'd be working in. Yes, that was very much a part of our everyday interaction.

Q: So you went out in the summer of '76?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: Where did you go? We only had Prague then, didn't we?

WILLIAMS: Actually, in Czechoslovakia, we had Prague and Bratislava. I was in Prague. At that time, Bratislava was a consulate and it had been closed down. There was some diplomatic conflict.

Q: You were there from the summer of '76 until when?

WILLIAMS: Until the summer of '79.

Q: Were you there for the bicentennial?

WILLIAMS: That would have been '76. I got there in August, so there weren't any special activities.

Q: What was your job?

WILLIAMS: I was the assistant public affairs officer in the Press and Cultural Affairs Section. USIA at that time had two officers there, the PAO and the assistant PAO, and then a small staff of Foreign Service nationals, about eight or nine.

Q: In '76, what was the status of Czech-American relations?

WILLIAMS: It was pretty frosty. In the years leading up to that period, we had been trying to negotiate an exchange agreement. That was the nature of the relationship in the education and cultural sphere with the soviet Bloc countries. In order to have anything like a normal program, you had to have some kind of an agreement where it was spelled out legally what the obligations of the parties were. We were negotiating this document when I arrived there. I got this briefing saying someone suggested it might be signed in the next few weeks. When I left in '79, it still hadn't been signed. So, they were rather frosty.

Q: How would you describe the Czech government and the situation in Czechoslovakia?

WILLIAMS: At that time, it was one if not the most orthodox of the communist governments. It was very conservative, followed the Soviet lead very closely so that when things tended to get tough between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. They got tough on the Czech Republic, too, and probably to a stricter degree than some of the other countries. At that time, Bulgaria had the reputation for being the most orthodox and the most Slavish of the Bloc countries, besides the SU. But we used to say that with the Bulgarians, they do everything the Soviets do, but the Czechs try to anticipate what the Soviets are going to do. That was the sense of it.

Q: Who was our ambassador there?

WILLIAMS: When I got there, it was Thomas Byrne. When he left, Frank (Francis) Meehan came. Byrne was a political appointee who had come out of the labor union, had strong ties within the Democratic Party. Frank Meehan was a career Foreign Service officer.

Q: With Byrne, what was your sense of how he operated? I would think somebody coming out of the labor movement in a tight orthodox communist state would feel very uncomfortable with nowhere to go.

WILLIAMS: By the time I got there, he had been there a while and had reached some kind of equilibrium in how to deal with the situation. It was always difficult dealing with the Czech government and everything was always very formal. There didn't seem to be a lot of room for the kind of latitude one gets when you have good personal relations with the officialdom.

Q: Who was your public affairs officer [PAO]?

WILLIAMS: That was Fred Quinn.

Q: What did you do?

WILLIAMS: Tried hard. That was a lot of what we did. Our program consisted of doing some distribution of materials like the wireless file to a limited number of people, mostly in the government. We had a small library that would accept walk-in clientele, we still had a good flow of people coming in given the circumstances, but often they would be stopped on the street and IDs checked going in or their bags looked into coming out to see what they had. We had a tiny Fulbright program which brought two American lecturers to Czechoslovakia every year. One was at Charles University in American literature. We had someone in Bratislava who was a teacher of English as a second language. We tried to get the International Visitor Program, the IV Program, but I can't recall that we were successful in getting anyone. Maybe toward the end of my stay we got a couple people to go to the United States under that program. We brought in performers. The biggest thing we did there was, the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra came in the fall of '76. Johnny Cash was there. We brought another group called the Jubilee Singers. Then we had some smaller solo artists come in. Igor Kipnis, who was at that time considered one of the world's great harpsichordists, was there but performed only in the living room of the PAO to a small invited audience there.

Milos Forman came back for the first time. He was a famous Czech movie director who left Czechoslovakia after '68 because of the Soviet invasion and the aftermath. After that invasion, there was a relatively calm period but then there was a major purging of the Party subsequently and, in addition to that, more pressure on the intellectuals and withdrawal or clamping down on intellectual freedom. So, a lot of prominent Czech artists, intellectuals, left the country. Forman was among them. His films were banned. But it was a movie production of "Hair" around that time that came up. There was a loosening up of some of the restrictions at least to the point where Forman was able to come back and introduce the film and do the premier in the Czech Republic. We had an event for him at the public affairs officer's residence. So there were these kinds of activities going on.

A lot of what we did was just personal contact trying to stay in touch with the community on a personal basis and maintain some kind of relationship with officialdom at the Ministry of Education as well.

Q: With officials, was there much interplay or by this time were they all pretty much apparatchiks?

WILLIAMS: They were pretty much apparatchiks; formally in terms of interacting with the government. At one point, they even wanted us to have all contacts outside the foreign ministry cleared by the foreign ministry. Before you went and made an office call, for instance, to discuss a grant or something like that. We just didn't do it. We kind of ignored the directive and things worked out. But in terms of... Every now and then after you had been working with someone over time, they would move off the official line or at least would not be as uptight about dealing with you and would show a little individualism. But mostly it was very formal.

Q: Was there any travel to the United States? Were you able to get leader grants or anything like this?

WILLIAMS: No, other than toward the end when we had our first IV grants. And that involved a couple of choreographers. It was in the cultural and arts field that we were able to have any kind of ongoing interaction.

Q: One always thinks of Czechoslovakia as having some of the oldest universities in Europe. Was there much intellectual life that we could tap into?

WILLIAMS: I'm sure there was a lot of intellectual life going on. The thing was that we were circumscribed in what we could actually do in terms of working with universities. It took forever to set up a program, in part because university administrations were so cautious. I'm sure they had their guidelines for dealing with foreigners and Americans were a particular breed of foreigner that required a certain amount of bureaucratic courage to start with because you opened yourself up to criticism for working with Americans. It was a little bit easier at those universities where we had Fulbrighters because they had already been accepted and were permitted to have some contact with foreigners within certain prescribed limits. So, it tended to be through those classes that were taught by Americans or colleagues of the Americans who felt comfortable doing that. There was not widespread access.

Q: What about publications and things like this?

WILLIAMS: Our primary publication was the magazine "Forum," a magazine that was put together in Washington and contained selected articles from a broad array of American publications. It was directed at the intellectual student, professor, independent intellectual, the better educated. I don't remember the number that we distributed, but we were never sure that they got to the people to whom we sent them.

Q: When you were looking at groups, did you have to have programs designed for the Czechs and programs designed for the Slovaks?

WILLIAMS: No, we were glad to get any program we could. There were obvious differences between the republics, but that didn't extend so much to our program. Our program tended to be more designed for Czechoslovakia for a more general audience, although we did see how the

audiences could differ from locale to locale and how they responded to some of the programs. The emphasis that we had on the arts, particularly the performing arts, that tended to be a universal language.

Q: Was there any influence from the Czechoslovaks who had left long before and also after '68 and gone to the United States? Were they exerting pressure or influence?

WILLIAMS: No, I think that was felt more in Washington and in the discussions within the Department between the Administration and Congress. In terms of what we were doing on a daily basis, I don't recall any particular issues, not for us in public affairs. I went to a lot of the country team meetings and the other internal meetings, but I don't recall any instances where that was a major issue, although I'm sure that in the discussions with the Department, some of that filtered back to the embassy.

Q: The Carter Administration came in shortly after you arrived. You arrived in August of '76 and by January of '77, the Carter Administration came in. They were making a real effort to open a new face to the East. If we're more open and more friendly or something like that. Did you feel this change?

WILLIAMS: No. What happened was, it was in the winter of '77 that the Charter of '77 was issued by the Czech intellectual community. So they really clamped down. They were going in one direction, whatever hand may have been extended. They were turning inward to deal with what they felt was a threat to the regime.

Q: Could you explain what this charter was and the group that was sponsoring it and how we dealt with it or felt about it?

WILLIAMS: Yes. It was a group of Czech intellectuals who decided to challenge the Czech government to implement the constitution. They publicly signed it. They had the names. The government's reaction was to begin to harass them. Some of them were jailed. One of the tactics they used was to allow someone an exit visa to go out of the country for some professional reason. Vaclav Havel, for instance, a playwright, was allowed to go to Vienna to either direct or attend a premier of one of his works and his passport was revoked. At times, people were afraid even to accept the chance to go abroad to do some professional activity. One of the tactics then was to use it as an occasion to lift their passport. Havel was put in jail and others were jailed around that time as well.

We were strongly in favor of the liberalization and the establishment and growth of democracy in Czechoslovakia. But on the other hand, we were not active sponsors of the movement. It was an indigenous Czech movement. I know there were contacts between people in the embassy and the people who were involved in the Charter of '77. But it was more informational than anything else. They wanted us to know what they were doing. Morally, we were in favor of more freedom in Czechoslovakia but it was up to the Czechs to do that themselves.

Q: The Carter Administration put the first major emphasis on human rights. Did that translate into anything we were doing in Czechoslovakia?

WILLIAMS: I'm sure it was part of the dialogue, but I'm sure it was part of the dialogue before the Carter Administration's emphasis on it. I don't remember any particular programming that would have addressed that specifically. It was always part of our discussions, part of material we were disseminating there. It was always an element of the broader message that we were trying to deliver there.

Q: Was civil rights still a theme that we were playing in Czechoslovakia?

WILLIAMS: Civil rights in the U.S.?

Q: Yes.

WILLIAMS: It was again part of our general presentation of the benefits of an open and democratic society. Some of the people that we brought there were minorities, but I don't remember if they ever specifically talked about civil rights in the United States. We had Judith Jamison, for instance, as an example of what an open society can achieve in terms of diversity.

Q: Were there minority problems in Czechoslovakia?

WILLIAMS: Yes, but they weren't as evident as they became later, at least not to us. Their big problem was the Romani population, the gypsies. The Czechs never talked about it much, if at all. I remember being down in southern Bohemia in České Krumlov, and there were all these dark skinned people. I asked one of the people in the foreign ministry and he got a little bit defensive about it. You saw a few in Prague. After I started asking, I began to hear about what some of the issues were.

Q: In Yugoslavia, it was a significant drifting population. It remains a problem.

WILLIAMS: Yes. There were problems with the foreign minority community. There were a number of Africans there either as foreign students or they were already second generation living in Czechoslovakia. But most were foreign students. Some had married Czech women. There were a couple of incidents, at least one murder, and there were instances of harassment and that type of thing that was severe enough that they came to public attention.

Q: Did you feel the Soviet influence there?

WILLIAMS: Yes, you saw it - soldiers on the streets on leave. By that time, they were no longer garrisoning the city the way they had immediately after the Revolution. There was a big base there. You'd see them in town walking around in groups.

Q: In your work, did you find yourself in competition with the Soviets or did the Soviets pretty well run the show?

WILLIAMS: They had a dominant position in terms of what they could do. There was a Russia house, for instance, that was a big cultural center right down in the center of Prague. We had a

good collegial relationship. We were foreign diplomats and they would invite us over to the Russia house for lunch and we'd talk and debate. But they had a larger presence. They had more money. They tended to be a longer term presence. Their officers generally had more time in the country than ours, etc.

Q: Was there much East German influence there?

WILLIAMS: That wasn't so obvious. The dominant presence were the Soviets. I don't recall anything specifically about them. One of the things that we noted was that we had a lot of Germans that came into the American Center and our little library there, which was down the street from the West German embassy. It seemed to be tourist types, they were in town and now they could go to the American library, where otherwise they might not have been able to in their hometowns.

Q: What about the press?

WILLIAMS: It was unrelentingly anti-American by every measure. There were three newspapers, "Pravda" being the major one. That was the Communist Party organ. It was hard to find any real news. International news was all slanted toward communism and against the western democracies. We would read them, but you really had to be sifting with a very fine sieve to find anything interesting.

Q: The decline of Soviet prose is not something to be mourned.

WILLIAMS: Yes. And it was totally state controlled. We would go and call on the editors at different places and there would be debating of issues but we would never see the results.

Q: Czechoslovakia being sort of stuck into Austria, was there much knowledge of what was going on, things from the BBC, the Voice of America? Was there an undercurrent of people being pretty well up to date on what was happening?

WILLIAMS: People listened to outside broadcasts, so they knew what the major issues were. They didn't always see the finer points of it or have a finer understanding of society. There is a tendency to idealize the western countries and life. VOA was sometimes tough to receive.

Q: It was jammed?

WILLIAMS: Yes, they jammed it at times. Some of the frequencies that they didn't bother to jam were just difficult to hear. Nothing was easy for them. The Czechs have this talent... The information collection internal security services have that knack for creating a sense of omnipresence.

Q: Yes. The Czechs were often the most efficient exporter of nasty police work in the undeveloped world. If you brought in your Czech security people, they could turn out a pretty nasty piece of work in Central Africa or something like that.

WILLIAMS: Yes. That wasn't part of my experience there. I never saw that. But I did see how

they could create a sense of insecurity on the part of everyone so that people never really were sure that the police weren't watching. And they couldn't possibly have been everywhere all the time. But they managed to create that illusion.

Q: Did anyone at the embassy have any problems such as provocations, attempts to suborn you or seduce you?

WILLIAMS: Not that I'm aware of. We used to joke about the fact that we were always getting these security briefings about sexual entrapment but nobody ever tried it. I had one funny experience that was pretty clumsy. A fellow came to my office and said he was a student and was interested in going to the U.S. to study. So, I explained the process for applying to American universities but also pointed out to him that his government hadn't looked with favor on students going to the U.S. to study. In fact, I didn't know of any who had managed to accomplish that. This chat went on for about half an hour. Then he pulled out a picture of a young lady in a rather provocative pose and put it on my desk. I said, "Does she want to go to the States, too?" He said, "No, no. This is my girlfriend. I can arrange for you to meet her." I said, "Well, thank you, but I'm happily married. I'm not really interested" and so forth. And then he looked a little bit embarrassed and said, "Okay, sorry. It's my job." He walked out. That was as close to anything like that that I saw.

Q: Did you always travel in pairs?

WILLIAMS: No, that wasn't a requirement. I made a number of trips by myself down to Bratislava primarily just to stay in contact and discussing cultural exchanges and orientation, that type of thing. At least in the time I was there, that wasn't a requirement.

Q: You left there when in '79?

WILLIAMS: July of '79.

JOSEPH R. MCGHEE
Consular Officer
Prague (1979-1981)

Joseph R. McGhee was born in Pennsylvania in 1952 and educated at Yale and Columbia. He entered the Foreign Service in 1975. His career included posts in Prague, Rome, Panama City and Bonn. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: Today is the 18th of September 1997. You are off to Prague. How did you get the assignment and what about language and all of that?

McGHEE: I got the assignment through the usual bidding process. I hadn't actually bid on Prague. I had bid on, as I recall, a job in Moscow, another one in Yugoslavia in Zagreb. Essentially what

happened was that the positions that I was bidding on were not available but the Prague job was in the same area and the timing was right. I went to Czech language training for a year from the fall of '78 to the summer of '79 then went out to Prague in the summer of '79.

Q: You were in Prague from '79 until when?

McGHEE: Until the summer of '81.

Q: About the language training, how did you find Czech as far as learning it? Was it difficult?

McGHEE: It's a fairly difficult language. I had had some experience with Slavic languages and so I didn't find it tremendously difficult although some of the people that were sitting with me who were doing Slavic language for the first time had trouble with the word endings, conjugating nouns and adjectives which is a little different for people who have only studied Romance languages. It was rather a large class for the number of teachers available. There were something like eight or nine people studying Czech at that time and there were only two teachers. It was a strange setup. There were more than the usual number of turnovers so as a result the class was on the large side. Nevertheless I found it went reasonably well and I got a three-three.

Q: That's three speaking and three reading, and a five-five being bilingual, a native speaker.

McGHEE: I would say call it an educated native speaker. In any event the language training went okay. There was no particular problem. I rather enjoyed it on the whole.

Q: Sometimes when you are taking the language you absorb quite a bit of the culture but there is the area studies lectures and also there is interaction with the teachers. I know I had this when I took a year of Serbian some years earlier and I had two diehard Serbs teaching us. I certainly learned about the Serbian attitude from them. Did you get any of this while you were taking the course?

McGHEE: Up to a point although I think if you were talking strictly about attitudes I would say on the whole Serbs have a lot more attitude than Czechs tend to. There wasn't any kind of effort to forcibly use the class to imprint their views but you did get a sense for how the Czechs viewed their neighbors and this sort of tense relationship that existed between the Czechs and Slovaks. If you look today, the country split in half when it became independent and it is now two countries.

I would say that if there was one thing that was missing in all of the training we got, it was a sense for how the language is spoken on a day-to-day basis among Czechs and at that time Slovaks in the country. We were taught how to speak proper Czech which is a language which was codified. The first grammar was actually written by Jan Hus, who was also a theologian in the 16th century.

Husites were really, their warrior class made its appearance after Jan Hus was burned. Jan Hus was an academic, philosopher, theologian and a university teacher but the great military commanders that lead the Czechs in the Hussite wars, Jan Cheska, Tropsnova, Procopoli really came after him and after the kind of resentments that grew up among the Czechs after Jan Hus was burned at the state at the Council of Constance in 1415.

Q: You were basically learning a pretty formal language?

McGHEE: The problem is that the Czech that Hus codified which is considered now to be proper Czech, is not quite the same in pronunciation and I would say usage as the Czech that is spoken in Prague. Hus was from Husinetz and there is a marked difference in accent and in the slang and how the language is actually spoken between Husinetz and Prague and between anyone in the cities and anyone out in the countryside.

Then of course there is this marked difference between Czech and Slovak. They are both dialects of the same language, but Czech, because of its history and geographic position has been heavily affected by German and absorbed a lot of German words whereas Slovak has been more affected by Hungarian. In the long period from the middle ages to modern times, Slovakia was an area that had Germans predominate in the towns and Hungarian landowners in the countryside with Slovaks working the land on Hungarian estates. That of course is a generalization. Plus Slovakia had a huge Hungarian strip along the Danube in the south. It had Ruthenians, who actually speak a kind of Ukrainian out in the east and lots of Poles scattered around in the Tatra Mountains in the north. There were a lot of odd influences on Slovak that really caused them to differentiate from Czech. There was no real effort to put Slovak on the agenda while I was here. It took a little bit of work and concentration to understand people from out east.

As I was in the consular section, we dealt quite a bit with Slovaks because Slovakia was where most of our annuitants lived. We had to travel out there to check on people to see that the people that were receiving these checks were still alive and were getting the benefit money from these checks. A lot of them were very elderly people. When we would send people out to do these consular trips in Slovakia we would generally send a translator with them because it was necessary with the strange combination of language and dialects that we ran into out there.

Q: When you arrived in Czechoslovakia in 1979 what was the political situation there as an American diplomat would see it?

McGHEE: The political situation was, I would say, that relations were quite cold at that time and they remained not very good throughout the period that I was there. In fact for the entire second year that I was there which was 1980-1981 we didn't have an ambassador and there was frankly no hurry on anyone's point to appoint an ambassador. The ambassador when I arrived was Frank Meehan. He was pulled away I believe in the summer of 1980 to become ambassador to Poland. Byron Morton became the chargé and remained chargé for over a year and was still chargé when I left. I guess that just toward the end of that time Jack Matlock was picked to be ambassador but he at the time was chargé in Moscow and we didn't have an ambassador in Moscow at that time. In December 1979, you will recall, the Russians invaded Afghanistan so we withdrew our ambassador from Moscow at the time and he was not replaced for quite a long period there.

We were talking about the state of relations. I should add that there was one area where we had success in spite of the host of political problems that we had with the Czechs. The problems were considerable because this was just two years after the so-called Charter of 1977. There had been a heavy crackdown on dissidents in Czechoslovakia. Vaclav Havel for example was in prison at that

time. He was in prison for almost the entire two years I was there. Relations weren't very good but there was this one area where we continued to make progress nonetheless and that was in the area in reuniting divided families.

I would guess that when I arrived in Prague we had maybe 40 odd families on our divided families list, maybe closer to 50, but it was a total of around 100 people. These were people whose relatives had managed to get to the United States and were petitioning to have family members come and join them. We whittled that list down to virtually zero over the two years that I was there. We had people coming on and people going off but the net result was that it was close to zero. I think the main reason that the Czechs were so eager to do this had to do with the Czechoslovak gold.

Early in World War II the Germans had seized Czechoslovakia's gold reserves and put them in the German National Bank; it's in Frankfurt or some place. In any event, at the end of the war these gold reserves fell into the hands of the United States and the Western allies. A commission was set up to administer these funds. I think some of them were kept in the Bank of England, some perhaps in Fort Knox. It was jointly administered by France, Great Britain and the United States through this commission.

We had always expressed a willingness to return it to the Czechs but on the basis that the Czechs first had to pay off a series of claims by individual American citizens and American companies for U.S. property that had been nationalized or seized by the Czech government: either by the German run government during the war or by the communists after they took over in 1948. Our position was that the Czechoslovaks had to agree to pay this money back with interest to the claimants in order to get their gold back. For years and years the Czechoslovaks simply weren't interested. They could do the math and see that it was a bad bargain.

In the 1970s that changed because the value of that gold that we were holding went through the roof and suddenly it became a very profitable exercise for the Czechs to go ahead and negotiate with us. These negotiations were going forward, going forward very slowly. I think the final agreement was not signed until 1982 or so. The larger point was that the Czechs were eager to make the process work and one of the areas where they saw that they could improve the atmosphere a little bit was through resolution of these divided family cases. They set some very tough requirements for these families to get out but they were reasonably fair in their dealings with us in the sense that once the requirements were met, they generally were very good about letting people go to the States. We resolved quite a number of these cases during the time I was there.

Q: You were in the consular section the whole time was it?

McGHEE: Yes. I was the head of the visa section for about the first eight months, ten months perhaps. For the remainder of the time that I was there I was the head of the consular section.

Q: On the visa side, was there much in the way of visa issuance?

McGHEE: We issued approximately 5,000 non-immigrant visas a year and one year I think we issued 90 immigrant visas and the other year it was in the 60s.

Q: It really was very small wasn't it?

McGHEE: Yes it was but the visa work was complicated because every single visa applicant had to have a security advisory opinion. That meant a name check that went back to the FBI and other security agencies here. It had to be verified by the Immigration Service office in Vienna. Every single applicant required a cable to be written, a response cable to be received. Certain types of applicants if you received no response within a given period of time the application lapsed. In any event it was a complicated paper shuffling process. No Czechoslovak received a visa the same day just by walking in the door or at least very, very few.

Q: With 5,000 non-immigrant visas, who were these people?

McGHEE: There were any number. There were of course officials that went back and forth to the Czechoslovak embassy here and their embassy at the UN. There were transit visas for government officials, trade officials and various other travelers going back and forth to South America, Latin America. Virtually all of them transited either New York or Miami. There were also a certain number of tourist visas.

Q: What sort of tourist visas? The Czechs didn't sound like they were very forthcoming.

McGHEE: They were not forthcoming relative to the demand that there might have been for such visas if there had been a normal relationship. It was possible for even a private citizen to petition the government for permission to receive a tourist passport and receive a small quantity of hard currency to travel abroad as a tourist. The vast majority of Czechs when they had a chance to do so preferred to go to West Germany because they could drive over there in their little cars, sleep in the car and carry their own food in the trunk to the extent possible. They would use what little money they were able to bring along with them, that small amount of hard currency, to shop which is what they liked to do.

We did nevertheless get a small but constant number of people that came to the U.S. Mainly people with relatives in the United States and always one family member at a time or possibly in the case of a larger family one or two. The larger point was that with anyone going to the States it was almost always a given that one spouse for example could go at a time. You couldn't both go.

Q: This was the Czechs?

McGHEE: This was the Czechs because it was necessary to have a tourist passport and a type of exit visa that stated specifically what countries it was valid for to travel to. This was a long application process and you were required to have this document in hand before you could come to the consulate and ask for a visa.

We had a fair number in that 5,000 of academics going to conferences or exchange programs in the States. These things went on at a reduced level notwithstanding the problems in relations. These were generally people who were in good order with the regime. You could pretty much count on the fact that if some university professor, for example, received permission to attend a conference it was someone that was considered loyal by the regime. Often these were people who were friends

with their academic colleagues in the States. On occasion we had to refuse a visa or delay issuance for national security reasons. We would get outraged letters from these people about our bureaucratic ways. The fact was that all of them, or virtually all of them, were loyal supporters or at least did what they had to do in order to assure that they would be able to travel again. This was a big perk to be able to travel to the west.

Q: *What was your contact with Czechs other than the very official contacts? Did you have much?*

McGHEE: Yes up to a point. We had regular and quite frequent contact first of all with the so-called dissident community. These were people who were the signers of the Charter of '77.

Q: *Could you explain what the Charter of '77 was?*

McGHEE: The Charter of '77 was a document that was signed by about 1,000 Czech academics, intellectuals, some clerics, religious people, mainly Protestants. The Catholic church had its own bureaucracy that was rather complicated. There were also some people in the arts, musicians, etc., who had signed this document. This charter was protesting the way the communist government ran the country and the lack of individual freedom and was calling for democratization. A return to Dubcek type reforms.

The key signers, for example Havel is a figure that comes to mind, the famous ones, the ones that were well-known, were heavily persecuted by the regime but all of them came in for a certain amount of pressure, quiet pressure and not so quiet pressure. They took a certain amount of risk by associating with us but for them it was kind of a psychological lifeline to know that someone out there knew that they were still alive even though they might have lost their job at the university and been forced to take some work as a maintenance man somewhere. There were also a few Protestant pastors that were part of it.

It was a difficult thing and I think that there was a fairly high level of passive support for them among the population as a whole but not much overt support. They were pretty much on their own and although the Czech government was rather careful to see to it that these people were not physically harmed, there was a lot of psychological pressure on them: surveillance, petty harassment and above all an end to any prospect of professional advance.

Q: *This was during the Carter administration which had a great priority on human rights. Were special efforts made by the embassy to keep up contacts with this group?*

McGHEE: Absolutely. The embassy kept up contacts quite regularly. We did not get many visitors in this period. My recollection is that the highest ranking visitor that came to Prague during my two years there was our office director from State Department so that gives you an idea of the state of things. We had people from groups like the Helsinki Watch and Freedom House, etc. who did come out and make periodic contact. Each year we wrote a long and rather dreary account of all this for the human rights report which at that point these were among the first human rights reports that were written. All of the embassy sections contributed in one way or another.

The consular section had a fair amount of contact with these people. Some of them were on our

divided families list. For others I would go into the visa office at the Foreign Ministry regularly, three or four times a month. In fact my practice was simply to have an open request for an appointment. As soon as they saw me I would call the next day and ask for another appointment because generally it took a week or ten days at the minimum for them to agree to see us again. We pretty much kept an open request on file. Another thing that we did was we had a fair number of American citizens in various types of distress that we looked after. Some people in prison.

Q: Were there many American who came to Czechoslovakia? Were there problems with them, I am talking about tourists or official visitors?

McGHEE: Official visitors in my time not so much. With tourists we had some rather exotic problems with people getting arrested. I had a bunch of college students who were arrested smuggling bibles into the country. I don't know how they got hooked up with this group or managed to be talked into doing it. There was absolutely no need to smuggle bibles into Czechoslovakia because they were readily available and frankly not very frequently read. Czechs aren't the most religious people in the world. Somehow someone managed to convince these kids that there was a shortage of scripture in the Czechlands so they were nailed at the frontier carrying a bunch of bibles and other religious material for some Protestant group here in the States. The Czechs kept them for about a week, sweated them, then let them go.

We had a man who in the 1950s was a draftee boarder guard along the Austrian border. He was out on patrol one snowy night and made a break for freedom. There was a gunfight that ensued and he killed his commanding officer. He made it over to Austria anyway and was eventually processed and came to the United States, moved to New York, got married and had kids.

In the early 70s we had come to an informal agreement with Czechoslovak government that if they gave a visa to an American citizen to come into Czechoslovakia, then you could assume that the Czechs would not arrest this person for leaving the country illegally. That was the big fear that people would come out and be arrested on the spot for illegal immigration which was a crime. The deal was that they wouldn't give a visa to anyone that they thought had to be arrested on this charge.

This fellow had read something about this in one of these émigré newspapers. Thinking that that applied to him too he had applied for a visa to come back and visit his father in I believe it was Brno. The visa was granted. He came back thinking he was in the clear and of course he was arrested on the spot as soon as he came into the country for having killed his commanding officer which hadn't been overlooked by the Czechoslovak army.

We screamed and yelled about it and yelled about the agreement in particular that they should never have issued him a visa. The Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry in fact was rather straight-forward with us compared to their usual and said that they agreed that it was a mistake but now that he was here they couldn't very well let him go because after all it was a military question. In the end I believe he was sentenced to 15 years and got out in seven which we considered to be something of a victory for having pounded on him. His congressman who was Geraldine Ferraro, or at least her staffer who was handling this, didn't see it that way at all and actually was pretty nasty.

Q: Was Prague much of a center for American students during their wander-year or was that a later manifestation?

McGHEE: That was a later manifestation. At that time the Czechoslovak government simply was not prepared to put up with wandering. There was a requirement that any westerner who entered the country have a minimum amount of hard currency on their person and change it into Czechoslovak crowns at the border. I think the actual requirement was that the tourist had to spend a minimum of x amount per day but in fact changing the money guaranteed this because the money couldn't be spent anywhere but in Czechoslovakia. It was a soft currency that couldn't be reconverted when you left. If you changed it and you didn't spend it, you were just stuck with all this paper.

Anyone who thought they were just going to hop on the bus was wrong. Number one they had to have a visa and number two in many of the consulates in the bordering countries they forced you to change the money right there at the consulate and you received a little stamp. You had to stay in an approved hotel. There was no sleeping on a ground or no sleeping in a tent. It was just not conducive to this kind of lifestyle where you hitchhike or hop on a bus or the train. It had to be planned in advance. You had to have a place to stay, etc., etc. As a result there was quite a bit of tourism but it was organized tourism.

We had people that got into all sorts of trouble. We had the usual number of people that died while they were touring in the country or fell down the stairs or suffered some sort of injury. That was a problem because Czechoslovak hospitals didn't run quite the same way as American hospitals. People usually brought food and fed their family members because the hospital food was so bad. If there were any valuables or things like a radio or a watch family members generally took them home at night and brought them back to the patient the next day because they had a tendency to disappear. We had lots of people who were robbed in their hospital by the attendants of various little things like blue jeans, radios, cigarettes.

Q: What about travel around the country? I know you said you did social security travel. Did you get around much?

McGHEE: I got around quite a bit in fact because of the social security thing. We had a requirement to go out and check periodically on people that were over a certain age or on people that had some arrangement where someone else was authorized to sign their check and go in and cash it. The two things that we were checking for was number one were they still alive and kicking and number two if someone else was signing the check, was the annuitant receiving the benefits of the check? In other words that they weren't locked in the cellar.

Q: How did the social security system and the other government systems appear to be working as regards to beneficiaries in Czechoslovakia.

McGHEE: In our case I think it worked fairly well. I suppose there was some fraud although I never saw any while I was there. Our program was about six million dollars a year. Not many of our annuitants were in Prague. They tended to be either in southern Bohemia or in Slovakia

because they fell mostly into three categories: railroad retirement, black lung from miners, and social security.

For the most part these were people who the head of the family went off to the States to, say, work in the mines for x period of time. As soon as they got to pension they had every intention of moving back to Czechoslovakia as soon as they could. Generally many of them left their families behind and came to the States for as long as 15 or 20 years to work and earn a pension. Most of our annuitants were widows of these people. They died in the States in some mining accident or drinking accident. The check came to the family that was left behind. Especially out in Slovakia you could pick out the house. In many of these places it was the only two story house in the village so it was easy to pick them out and go right to them. The main thing was to make sure that they were alive and were living reasonably well and that they weren't being taken advantage of by their relatives. We never had any big problems.

Q: On these trips, and also while you were in Prague, you and also others in the embassy, what was the security apparatus there? What were they called?

McGHEE: The activity was generally called the STB. The people called them steboks.

Q: Were they a problem with either provocation or following?

McGHEE: At times. For my work personally going out in Slovakia it wasn't a problem. As I said this was a six million dollar program and there was a requirement under Czech law that anybody who got one of these checks had two weeks to turn it into Czechoslovak currency. Either into soft crowns or what were know as tuzeks crowns which were valid to be spent in the hard currency stores that were scattered around the country. If we needed to go out and do something in order to administer the program, in order to keep it going, there was no problem. As long as we called ahead and provided an itinerary to the Foreign Ministry we got cooperation.

What would happen would be that out in these areas in Slovakia where they seldom saw a foreigner the trainees from the local police would practice following us around. They weren't very good at it and often when we missed a turn they would speed up and honk at us. It was never a problem. I would say the two biggest incidents we had with the internal security were number one our chief of station was entrapped at one of his mailboxes down in the south.

Q: Could you explain what a mailbox is in these terms?

McGHEE: A mailbox is a place where someone local who is working for the Agency drops off whatever it is that they picked up: written communication, recording, photographs, whatever it may be, documents. Our people drop off instructions and I assume in some cases a paycheck although I would think that most of these people have their pay deposited somewhere else understanding that it would be gotten out somewhere down the line.

I don't know the exact circumstances, but it was something like a hollow tree or fence post somewhere out in the countryside. They had picked up the agent and so they were laying in wait for this guy. He was picked up and held for a couple of days and sweated. We had to drive to see

him, have a tantrum, pick him up and of course it was all filmed and put on the local television.

Q: I assume he was kicked out.

McGHEE: He was kicked out. We brought him back to Prague and he was given three days to pick up his stuff and go home which he did.

The other thing was that in the spring of 1981, in fact it was on memorial day, a Soviet soldier climbed over the back wall of the embassy and announced that he wanted asylum. As I said it was Memorial Day. I remembered because I had to go to a trial. I was sure that the Czechs had done this on purpose; holding this trial in Bratislava on a U.S. holiday so I would have to pile in the car and drive down there. I got back late in the day. The arrangement that they had then was the building that housed the embassy was way too big for our needs. There were only about 20 Americans.

Q: A huge castle wasn't it?

McGHEE: It was a palace. There was a long history to it. It used to be owned by Thomas Crane of Crane Plumbing. He was a Czecho-phile at one point and he made a deal with the Wilson administration at the end of World War I that in effect he would give them this place to be the embassy if they made him ambassador. He was ambassador for two or three years and then at the end of that time he sold the place to the U.S. government for a buck and we are still in it. In my day, the embassy was so small, there was nothing going on, that the central wing was the chancery and the rest of it was apartments. I lived in there as did about half of the other American staff.

We were up in the back garden cooking hamburgers and hot dogs. This rainstorm swept through and everyone went piling down the hill and into my apartment. We were milling around in there, drying our food and stuff when someone came and got me and said come here, look what's sitting on your bed. When the rain started this guy had ran down behind everyone else and ran into the apartment and there he was sitting on my bed. He was about 19 years old. He was a Ukrainian draftee and a corporal. He had buried his uniform and had swiped clothes from someone's clothesline so he was kind of dressed like Emmett Kelley.

Q: Emmett Kelley being a renowned clown dressed in old bums' clothes.

McGHEE: He had had trouble with his commanding officer and wasn't very popular. He had been beaten up and he just wanted to get out but of course we had no way to get him out and there he was. I myself and some of the other officers went up in the garden with one of the Agency guys and they said that they wanted to have absolutely nothing to do with him and never wanted to see him again. At this time there was absolutely no chance that we would be able to get him out of the country. In fact this was at a time when our embassy in Moscow had a couple of families living in it who had done exactly the same thing and they weren't even Soviet soldiers. This was a deserter.

One of the people there spoke some Russian and this guy could understand Czech when he wanted to. We managed to convince him that there was no hope for him and that he could be stuck in the embassy for years. What he ought to do is go back to where he buried his uniform, put it back on

and get good and drunk and then return to his unit. It was a well known fact that there were dozens of drunk Russian soldiers wandering the countryside and they had to be swept up and brought back. He would have some minor disciplining and could go back and finish his service and go back home.

He agreed to all of this and we even gave him a bottle of vodka to take with him. We cautioned him to go find his uniform first and put it back on before he start drinking this. So fine, we waited until it was raining really hard on the theory that we would be less likely to be seen and we took him back up to the back garden and let him go over the wall. I watched him go over the wall in the rain.

The next morning, Tuesday morning, I was in my office and there was a view up through the garden out of one of the windows in my office and there he was sitting up there finishing off the bottle and talking to the gardeners telling them who he was, etc. etc. I went up and brought him back down and there we were stuck with him. In an hour we were surrounded by border police and dogs. I was control officer for him. The problem was of course that we had 40 or 50 Czechs working in the embassy so he couldn't just wander around loose. We had this garden up in the back that was not particularly secure. He had climbed over the wall and at this point Czech police started climbing over the wall making threatening gestures.

The long and short of it was that he stayed in the embassy for about two weeks then the Czechs insisted that before anything else could happen they wanted him to have an interview with the Soviet embassy to ascertain that he had not been kidnapped by us and that he was there of his own free will. This of course was absurd but we couldn't very well say no. We set up this elaborate interview with the Soviets on one side and us on the other side. We brought the kid in. The first thing that the Soviet consul said was your mother has heard of this and it gave her a heart attack. There were ground rules with no mention of family, etc. etc. They were just supposed to lay out his options and ask him whether he was there of his own free will. Of course everything went to pandemonium. We dragged him out of the room. We had to start over again. We made them tell him that it was a lie, that his mother hadn't had a hear attack. In the end, after about 15 to 20 minutes, he agreed to go with them. He picked up his stuff and left. I don't know whatever became of him. I'm sure it wasn't fine whatever it was.

Q: In December of 1979 you had just arrived and relations were pretty lousy with the Czechs anyway when the Soviets went into Afghanistan. This caused the Carter administration, as well as other European allied countries, to really rethink how they wanted to treat the Soviets because this was the first extension beyond its borders into what had been a friendly socialist country. Did that have an immediate effect?

McGHEE: No. Things were already bad. Czechoslovakia was strangely involved. When the Russians went into Afghanistan, Afghanistan was ruled by a graduate of Columbia University Teachers College named Hafizullah Amin who was slightly out of his mind. Although he bent over backwards to please the Russians, they thought he was a disaster and he was alienating the country. They managed to convince themselves that this was an opening to bring the Afghan Communist Party back.

The Afghan Communist Party existed to the extent that it existed almost entirely abroad. It had

split into two factions, Parcham and Khalq. They didn't get along with each other and so some of them were parked in Warsaw or Budapest and the other bunch which included Babrak Karmal who was the head I believe of the Parcham faction had been living in Prague working on the *World Marxist Review* which was this kind of Comintern newspaper that was published in Prague. Actually it wasn't called the Comintern anymore. We got involved because suddenly Karmal was spirited away, disappeared from his office and home, and had been flown off by the Soviets. This was the first hint that anyone had that the Russians were planning something in Afghanistan. Of course when they went in after they had secured the airport and the Balahisar and the government buildings in downtown Afghanistan, they flew Karmal in and made him President. I think he hung on through most of the civil war right up until the very end.

As far as that went, things were already bad with the Czechs and it didn't make it appreciably worse. Of course they got in on the propaganda side supporting the Soviet Union very heavily and that didn't help anything. There were no Czech advisors in Afghanistan. They weren't actively part of the policy and so I wouldn't say that it made things appreciably worse.

From our point of view it was much more the tough line for dissidents and above all the undifferentiated support for Moscow that the Czechoslovak Communist Party always provided. At that time you had Romania which occasionally would criticize them. You had Yugoslavia which was independent of Moscow. You had Poland where there were at least some economic experiments going on and there was kind of a soft line towards dissidents, at least as long as they were within the church.

Q: The church was a powerful factor there.

McGHEE: In Poland, not in Czechoslovakia. The church was itself divided in Czechoslovakia. The cardinal Tomasik was ancient, he must have been in his 80s then, and was this kind of patriarch and represented the old school. He was very close to the Vatican and very close to the Pope. But the Czechoslovak government had created this organization for the Catholic clergy called Pacem in Terris through which they attempted to control to some extent the training and functioning of the clergy. There was a strong faction, in fact I would say a majority, within the Czech clergy in those days that felt that cooperation with the state was the way to go because they were freer to do their jobs, they had better access, and constant conflict with the government gained them nothing in terms of their ability to propagate faith, etc. etc. So it was a very conflicted church.

At the time that I was there, I forget what the precise number was, but there were, I suppose, eight or nine bishoprics in Czechoslovakia and five of them were empty because the Pope, rather than get into this dispute or open up a new area of conflict with the government simply didn't name new bishops when the old ones died. They left the seats empty.

Q: As you and your fellow officers were talking about this, were the Czechs considered, when I say Czechs I mean the Czechoslovaks, a different breed of cat than some of the other Balkan or middle, central European countries? What made them tick?

McGHEE: That's hard to say. Compared to say the Poles or the Serbs, they were I would say not

nearly as volatile, not nearly as prone to, they were not nationalists in the sense of being wed to this idea of the country, the fatherland or motherland if you will. The idea of being a people with a destiny, you didn't get much of that from the Czechs. The Czechs obviously yearned for democracy as demonstrated by the outpouring in '68 when Dubcek liberalized things, but I would say that at least in the period that I was there, very few of them would have been willing to take any risks.

Obviously that changed to an extent by '89 when the old communist regime fell apart but I think the key there was that there was a clear prospect, based on what was happening elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, that it could succeed. The Czechs by and large were not about to get caught up in any helpless causes. Their attitude was that if you didn't like what was going on then you keep your head down and go about your private business and don't get in trouble with the government. That is basically what they did while I was there. It took a push of outside events to stir them again to take some risks at the end of the 1980s.

Q: Was there any concern that was voiced to you about the Germans reasserting their claims to property in the Sudeten land or was this a dead issue?

McGHEE: In my day it was just a dead issue. The iron curtain ran right along the Czechoslovak border. We had the first armored division and the tenth armored division along with the Germans down in Bavaria. They had Russian armor and their own armor on their own side of the border. No one ever in any active way believed that was likely to change. I include myself among those.

Q: From our military colleagues what was the estimate of the Czech military service? In case of war what were they going to do?

McGHEE: In case of war, Czechoslovakia was automatically in the front lines. Since much of NATO's strategy was based on the assumption that in the event of a conventional war in Europe, it would take the form of the Warsaw Pact invading Germany in particular. It would probably go across Bavaria into the Fulda gap so Czechoslovakia was seen as the jumping-off point. In terms of military prowess, I think that the Czechs were considered to be in the average range. They had a couple of armored divisions on the border. They had a competent air force, but I don't think that anyone including the Russians fooled themselves that there was any great enthusiasm on the part of the Czechoslovaks for conquering any new land to support communism.

Q: Was there anything else we should talk about there?

McGHEE: I suppose not. When I left it was a quiet backwater and it gave every indication that it would remain that way. Gustáv Husák was in power and in a real sense he was unchallenged and that was the way it was when I left.

PATRICIA D. HUGHES
Rotation Officer
Prague (1976-1979)

Mrs. Hughes was born in New York State and educated at Wellesley College and Rutgers University. Commissioned as Foreign Service Officer in 1962 she was required to resign her commission upon marrying. As the wife of a Foreign Service Officer, she accompanied her husband to postings in London, Cape Town and Helsinki. Following changes in regulations she was re-commissioned and served in Prague and Cape Town as Political and Economic Officer, as well as in the Department of State dealing with Personnel matters. Mrs. Hughes was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2002.

Q: So, in Prague you were a political officer and a consular officer, rotated, a year of each? This was the period while we were still in the cold war?

HUGHES: Yes we were, but I was in the Office of Soviet Exchanges and this was broken down into ten parts and basically dealt with programs and projects for the Soviets that we could really work with them on. Their health, environment.

Q: This was before you went to Prague, when you were still in Washington?

HUGHES: Yes. I think we did some good things actually.

Q: Things were beginning to develop in terms of relations?

HUGHES: Yes.

Q: Now, were you in Prague at the time of the, what did they call it the Czech Spring?

HUGHES: No, the Velvet Spring or something like that, but no. That was '68.

When I was there things were pretty tight and my son still teases me about the fact that a lot of dissidents were being tried. So, I'd go to the courthouse everyday and wait for a verdict and there never was a verdict. Paul said it was a good thing because if there had been a verdict I never would have understood it.

Q: Because he didn't think your Czech was good enough?

HUGHES: My Czech was not great. It was only a 2/2, but not all that good. If I had done more consular work, it would have improved.

Q: Yes, to have the opportunity to actually use it. It's not that good in terms of being able to function and use the language. It's not bad in terms of what you can get out of training from I don't know how long, whether you had the full course.

HUGHES: I did. God helped me.

Q: Well, it's not an easy language. Prague was a beautiful place at that time.

HUGHES: Very beautiful, extremely somber. It was the sort of place that if one really wanted to get away for a weekend we'd go to Germany. I remember standing in front of one of the Catholic churches with my son who was wearing plaid trousers and an old woman came up to him. My Czech was good enough. She was screaming at him because he was not wearing appropriate clothes for church. Even though not that many people went to church, the ones that went had extremely high standards.

Q: And expected others to abide by them.

HUGHES: I still remember this because it just shows how things have changed. One of our consular employees was extremely dedicated and had a son who was roughly Paul's age. She had already begun to worry about college forms. He was probably 12. She said, "I am going to have to pay some one a lot to get my son into a university because he isn't very well traveled." She said, "I just hope between now and then I can figure out who."

Q: Make sure she got the right person.

HUGHES: Well, she did.

Q: Did you travel around Czechoslovakia much?

HUGHES: Yes, because we had social security visits. They were fascinating. I mean everything was so barren and dismal, but every once in a while you'd go into a town where things were just jumping and it was because of the social security money. They were buying appliances, television sets.

Q: These were Czechs who had either worked in the United States themselves or were close relatives of somebody who had?

HUGHES: Yes. On the other hand, one saw extremely pathetic situations where people would get up at 4:00 in the morning and listen to Radio Free Europe. They really, really cared and so many of them, this would not be the case now, but we're dealing with 20 years ago; I mean, people still had more time and they were very strong and they cared a lot about others.

Q: Did you get that impression, that feeling from getting to know people through particularly the social security visits?

HUGHES: It was mostly the social security visits because these people were for the most part, they were older. I think they felt they had a lot less to lose. They, as opposed to people who've had a lot of trouble getting out even for a family, these were people who could come and go. If they went, the government wouldn't care because it would be just one less pension that they'd have to pay.

Q: One less person to feed and support.

HUGHES: On the other hand, to be fair to them, their family reunification record is better than

anybody else's.

Q: Was there a lot of fear would you say, were you as an embassy officer, was it difficult for you to get around, was there surveillance?

HUGHES: There was surveillance. My husband was particularly surveilled because he had been not only in the army before the war, but also had been in army intelligence. They were absolutely sure that there was something there that they ought to be able to find. There was nothing, so they never found it. There were some USIS people who were given a little trouble. We were never given any trouble.

Q: Was your husband working in the embassy?

HUGHES: No.

Q: He was there as your family member?

HUGHES: He was an embassy wife. He had a wonderful time with all of the other wives.

Q: He was part of the wives' club.

P. HUGHES: that's right. He took little children to the museum. I mean, he had a wonderful time.

Q: Was he the CLO, the Community Liaison Officer?

HUGHES: No, he wasn't, but he could have been.

Q: Because that program was just starting at that time.

HUGHES: Yes and they liked him. All the women liked him. He was a very sweet guy.

Q: Did you have any sense of differences between Czechs and Slovaks in that period?

HUGHES: Oh yes, and part of it was mandated by the government. Slovaks could worship if they felt like it, but Czechs better not. They'd get in a lot of trouble if they did.

Q: Did you go to Bratislava some?

HUGHES: Yes.

Q: We didn't have a consulate there then?

HUGHES: We had a consulate, but it was empty and our job was to make sure that people stayed there every once in a while so that when it did reopen we'd be able to do it easily.

Q: Empty in the sense that it wasn't staffed?

HUGHES: That's right.

Q: But, if we had a building and we had the intent of opening it again and we did. Anything else about your time in Prague that you remember and want to reflect on?

HUGHES: I was not the world's greatest officer then. I'm not sure whether it was my training or whether it was just something somebody ought to have told me that I didn't know. I mean, I mention this only because the consular work really went well, but I had no idea how to be a political officer.

Q: Probably there was not a political tradecraft course or very much political training at the Foreign Service Institute in that period.

HUGHES: I'll tell you who my ambassador was later.

Q: Well, tell us now.

HUGHES: Jack Matlock.

Q: Jack Matlock; he was very good.

HUGHES: He was very good, but I wish I could remember.

Q: He probably could have done just about everybody's job and tried to and did. I don't know.

HUGHES: Prague in those days was, I mean a lot was going to happen, but nothing had really happened yet.

Q: Was there anticipation on the part of you and others in the embassy that that was the case?

HUGHES: No, but I mean you know everything changes. Ambassador Matlock had served previously in East Germany where there was a lot happening every minute. It was kind of hard to find stuff to write about in Prague.

Q: Do you think it was partly because of what happened in '68 and the clamp down?

HUGHES: What happened in '68 caused the Czechs to pull their necks in like turtles.

Q: Exactly, whereas there had been trouble in East Germany that had been earlier and maybe they were beginning to feel more confidence and do more and to some extent in Hungary as well, I don't know.

HUGHES: Oh yes, by the time we went to Hungary on this tourist thing just a few weeks before we left. I mean, things were happening. People were going to bakeries and buying things.

Q: I remember talking with Arthur Burns when he was chairman of the Federal Reserve. He came to Switzerland from Hungary, from Budapest. This would have been about '74 or '75 and he was really quite impressed by the economic changes that were occurring in Hungary, so this was five years earlier.

HUGHES: I should have mentioned that to show that we all weren't sitting around on our duffs. There was a lot going on in Poland and the Russians were very distressed about what was going on because it had to do with the Catholic Church. It was after really quite a long period deciding that it was just going to do and say what it felt like doing. Cardinal Comocheck, for example, was probably almost 90 and had been very cautious all those years. But what happened was, what one saw in Ruda Pravo in the Czech paper like on Monday, you'd see it in the Russian papers on Tuesday and it was kind of a feeler to see how you'd react and in most instances we just sort of didn't do much because what was going on in Poland was so much more vivid. There's always been this kind of difference between the Czechs and the Poles. The Czechs feel aggrieved and they've felt aggrieved ever since 1938. They thought that somehow the Poles were getting the better of every deal that was offered.

Q: This was also the beginning of solidarity and Lech Walesa and the shipyards at Gdansk in Poland? Were the Czechs sort of impressed by what the Poles were doing and were able to get away with?

HUGHES: Their feeling was, oh yes, the Americans helped the Poles, they always help the Poles, whereas they never help the Czechs and so we have stopped expecting anything from the Americans. I think to some degree that was right, an accident of history, but they weren't surprised when things happened in Poland that we countenanced. All of the Radio Free Europe and other stuff that was going on.

Q: They assumed that if it had happened in Czechoslovakia it would not have had the same support from the United States or expression of interest?

HUGHES: They wouldn't have had the same support or expressions of interest and they would somehow have gotten clobbered.

Q: Now you were there about five years or so after Helsinki and the CSCE, the European Security Cooperation. Was that something you heard about, thought about, worked on?

HUGHES: Yes, my husband worked on it. I was not working at the time.

Q: But at the time you were in Prague, was it something that seemed important there?

HUGHES: As long as there was the CSCE, it was better than when there was no CSCE. As far as, yes, it made an impression, but there was so much going on in Poland that it didn't make a huge impression. What was happening, was happening anyway in Poland.

HELEN WEINLAND
Political Officer
Prague (1982-1984)

Ms. Weinland was born and raised in New York and educated at Mount Holyoke College and Ohio State University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1974, she served in Zurich, Berlin and Prague and at a number of African posts, including Lagos, Nigeria; Kigali, Rwanda as Deputy Chief of Mission and Kaduna, Nigeria, where she served as Consul General. She also served in Washington as Desk Officer for the Philippines, Nigeria and Zimbabwe as well as Officer for United Nations Affairs. Ms. Weinland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: So you were in Prague from?

WEINLAND: '82 to '84.

Q: So this was still high communist time, wasn't it?

WEINLAND: Yes, very much.

Q: How did you feel about going to Czechoslovakia?

WEINLAND: Well, you know, I bid on a whole range of things and that's the one that came up. I can't even remember what else I bid on but I did want to have another political officer job. I must have bid on a few jobs in Africa. I am trying to remember because there were two different times. I think that was the time I had a CDO who was not particularly sympathetic to me. I think I bid on jobs in maybe Mogadishu and Lusaka as well as Prague and a couple of others. Prague was the one I got.

Q: You were in Czechoslovakia, again this was '81?

WEINLAND: '82 to '84.

Q: What was the situation in Czechoslovakia when you arrived?

WEINLAND: Well, they had, of course, a very Soviet-tied communist government with one of the then aging and ultimately aged heads of state, Gustav Husak. The government was secondary to the party structure. There was, by the time I arrived, a very recognizable dissident movement, an opposition movement called "Charter 77." That had formed in the wake of the adoption of the Helsinki final document. I frankly think that the Soviets made one of their major, major mistakes in signing on to the Helsinki agreements. They thought the basket of human rights issues and free movements of peoples was a throw away to get the security arrangements they wanted.

Q: They wanted those firm boundaries.

WEINLAND: Yes, they wanted the firm boundaries; they wanted more military cooperation and

transparency. But for us, of course, the human rights issues were equally important.

Q: Well, Kissinger at the time did not feel that.

WEINLAND: He thought it was a throw away.

Q: He thought it was a throwaway too.

WEINLAND: It wasn't until Carter came in that the human rights issues assumed an equivalent importance, but anyway, the Soviets had signed on to it. So the Charter 77 group, what they did was to write a document that was published in January of 1977, mostly drafted by Vaclav Havel. It emphasized that the Czech government, along with all the others, had signed this document that said that the following arrangements should exist. They were saying, "OK, we want our government to guarantee to us these rights that are outlined in these final documents."

They published the Charter and, of course, the regime went absolutely crazy trying to collect all the copies of it they could. But of course, it was out in the open and then the government tried to force -- this is all back in '77, '78 -- they were trying to force people in their workplaces to sign all these counter petitions that these "Chartists" were rabble rousers and trouble makers. Then in fact, a year or two later they began to arrest some of the leading proponents of Charter 77, including Havel himself and others too.

By the time I arrived -- I am trying to think -- I guess Havel was arrested in '79 and by the time I arrived he had been in prison about three years. Some of the others had been released but the government was continuing to harass them.

Charter 77 had an interesting structure. There were three different types of people who signed the charter. By the time I was there the total number of signatories I think was about 2,000. It never got to be much more than that.

So there was a group who were old communists who were upset at how the Prague Spring had been suppressed in 1969. There were the "bourgeois" types who had never been communists and who had always been discriminated against in their education and in their work. Havel was in that group. And then there were the religious people who wanted the right to practice their religion freely. Every year the Chartists chose spokespersons, three leaders of the Charter group, one from each of those different groups, with the idea that with a co-leadership of that kind, they could cover if somebody got picked up, there was always somebody else who was able to step in and continue organizing the constant stream of documents they were issuing and to support all the others.

So when I got there, all that was functioning pretty well; Havel was still in prison and the government was pretty tightly controlling everything.

Q: At the embassy, who was the ambassador?

WEINLAND: When I arrived, it was Jack Matlock; he was there for my first year, and then he was replaced by William Luers. The DCM when I arrived was Marty Wenick, and he was replaced by

Bill Farrand, so those were the two teams I worked under.

Q: What were you doing, what was your part of the action?

WEINLAND: We had a combined political/economic section. There was a political/economic counselor, Jim Connell; I was the political officer under him and Nick Lang was the economic officer.

One of my big jobs was the human rights report and the CSCE (Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe) reports.

Q: CSCE being?

WEINLAND: Every six months all the western NATO members individually produced a report on the compliance of Czechoslovakia with all the Helsinki final agreements; we had to submit ours to Congress. The others presumably sent theirs to their governments. We would have a big meeting of all the people at my level who were preparing the reports in their respective embassies and share all the information we had about Czech compliance with the various baskets of the Helsinki final agreement. So we would go around the table and say things like some of our citizens applied to have their relatives come out and they weren't permitted, and this guy we know is in jail, and that person couldn't get a visa to come in to do business, and we've announced these military exercises. So we went over the whole range of baskets, whether our businessmen were getting access and all our individual issues with the Czech government.

And then I also did the human rights report.

I was also the person in that section in the embassy who lived off campus so to speak. We have a gorgeous embassy in Prague, an old palace, and we had a lot of apartments in that building. So both my boss and Nick Lang lived in the embassy itself and I lived out in town in an embassy-rented apartment. I was the one designated to entertain the dissidents. Even though they were all followed and the government knew what was going on in my house, the dissidents felt easier coming to a place that wasn't quite so heavily surveilled as the embassy. That started somewhat later after I got there.

Marty Wenick, the DCM, was approached by a man named Jiri Dienstbier, a Charter signatory and a leader in the Charter group, one of the old communist guys, who had been a journalist. Dienstbier asked Marty if there was some way they could get together with people in the American Embassy. My own impression is that at that time the Czech government and party had come to some conclusion that Charter was not going to grow out of bounds, that there were never going to be more than about 2,000 signatories because there was a fairly steady but low grade rate of emigration when people just said, "I can't take this anymore." They would get permission to emigrate. They would leave and a few more people would sign but it was always a fairly steady membership. I think that the authorities must have decided that some amount of contact with foreign diplomats was not going to be a serious disruption.

I never talked about this with any of my colleagues in other embassies in any direct way, but I am

pretty sure the Canadians, the Germans, the French were all in contact with dissidents in one way or another. Certainly, everybody in all these embassies, not everybody but for example, if you were in a writer or an artist in Czechoslovakia and you wanted to get your work out to the West, a lot of that went out through embassy contact.

We were approached by Jiri Dienstbier. He said the Chartists would be interested in getting to know some American diplomats. so I was asked if I would host these people in my apartment. The VHS videotape system had just come in, so we set up a system by which we could get fairly recent movies. Somebody was always going out to Germany and we found a video store there that was willing to let us rent tapes for a week or two without penalty. Now I am going to say we were doing something illegal, but the tapes would arrive at the embassy and we would then spend all night, some of us, copying these tapes and then we would return them to West Germany. So we began to build up a fairly good library.

Q: These were tapes of . . . ?

WEINLAND: American movies, yes. So then we began then to invite these people and we would just say to Dienstbier and a couple of other people, we are going to show this movie on this night. Anyone who wants to come can come -- because they were all self invited. There was a huge amount of paranoia, obviously, among all these people. They would eye someone and say, 'Who is that person, I have never met him before,' and that kind of thing. But they were self invited and they would come and watch the video. By this time Havel was out of prison, so he was very often there with his brother, Ivan, and they would be huddled off in the corner. I have this image of him sitting in the corner of my sofa in the living room, talking with other Charter leaders, and they would be drafting and correcting all these various Charter documents that they issued. That's how we always got copies of the Charter documents. I would then take them back to the embassy, I translated them. We had a translator, but we didn't give him things like that so I would translate them. That went on until I left and my successor took over.

Q: What were the Czech authorities doing? Were they puncturing your tires, were they giving you a rough time or what?

WEINLAND: One time I had a bunch of embassy people from various Western embassies over to see a film. We were a very tight diplomatic corps because no official Czechs would ever come to any of our dinner parties, so we all just entertained each other. We were pretty close. So one night they were leaving, and a couple of them came back to my apartment door and said, "Somebody has poured red paint all over your car." Sure enough, I had red paint over every single panel of my car, which was parked out front, and a handmade PLO flag had been stuck under my windshield wiper. It turned out that they had vandalized two other cars at some distance from where my car was, one in front of Marty Wenick's house where he was also showing a movie and also the defense attaché's car. So they vandalized these three cars.

I was not given what we called the Tatra treatment; Tatras were the big cars, but following me, I only ever had the Soviet version of the Fiat, a Lada, and the Czech car, the Skoda, those were the two that followed me. If they really wanted to get you, they would put the Tatras on your tail, but I never got that treatment.

Q: You got the lower grade surveillance.

WEINLAND: But there were always six people behind me, wherever I was driving, in three different cars and that was a fact of life.

Q: Could you travel around much?

WEINLAND: Yes, we were not restricted in internal travel. For official visits, of course, we had to submit a note saying where we wanted to go and whom we wanted to meet, but going in and out of the country or just taking a holiday and going to some hotel in the mountains or something -- we were free to do that.

Q: Did you get much of a chance to sort of mix and mingle with regular Czechs?

WEINLAND: We always had to let the initiative come from them. That was our rule of thumb. Obviously, the dissidents came to see us, and then there were a few other people who didn't come to those film parties but who were happy to have me drop in and were in some way or other in the dissident community but not maybe overtly.

One incredible episode I will never forget was on one of the holidays, I think it may have been May Day, the first year I was there. I had gone to the May Day parade and came home and was in my apartment. The doorbell rang and there was a totally strange woman standing there with a huge bunch of daffodils. She asked after somebody who had lived in that apartment before I did, the chief consular officer, who had left post and had gone to Vienna, I think. She said, "Is Mr. So and So here?" And I said, "No, he's left. He's gone to Vienna," and she said, "Well, these are for you" and she handed me the daffodils. I said, "What for, what are they for?" and she said, "for friendship" and before I could even say, "Won't you come in and have a cup of coffee?" she darted off down the stairs. She obviously wanted to make a statement, didn't want to be photographed or bugged or anything.

Q: I always think of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union involving sitting around the kitchen table talking about things. Did you get involved in sessions of that nature?

WEINLAND: With Czechs?

Q: Yes.

WEINLAND: Maybe with a couple of the couples whom I used to drop in on who had made it clear they were happy to have me drop by. Interestingly, I have subsequently learned that the husband of one of them was reporting the entire time to the secret police. His wife was a survivor of Auschwitz, she was the only one of her family who had survived Auschwitz, and so I would talk to her from time to time about some of the issues confronting the Jewish community.

That was another one of my reporting responsibilities -- to liaise with some of the churches. I did a huge airgram on all the different religious denominations. I mean, there were only like 5 or 6,000

Jews left in Prague at that point, but it was interesting to know what they were doing.

Q: Was the regime anti-Semitic or not?

WEINLAND: I don't think particularly. I mean, the Jewish community along with all the other denominations were officially recognized. Their rabbi was presumably paid as were all the other religious leaders. I am trying to think if any of the people in the main Central Committee or government was Jewish. There had been a terrible round of purge trials in the early '50s, the Slansky trials. Those had been overtly and horribly anti-Semitic but I don't think that was a factor by the time I was there.

Q: What about the Catholic Church at this time; the Catholic Church in neighboring Poland was a visible center of resistance to the regime. You had a Polish Pope and the communists never really were able to deal successfully with the Catholic Church in Poland. What about Czechoslovakia?

WEINLAND: The Czech communists hated that Pope. The press always called him "That man, Wojtyla."

Q: This was the party?

WEINLAND: The party, yes. The Catholic Church was in a difficult position, because it was the only denomination with a truly international hierarchy, so the Czechs were very nervous about them, compared to the Protestant denominations over which they could exercise more control. From the point of view of the population, all the churches were an attractive way to exercise some form of opposition to the regime, if you were willing to make the sacrifices that it involved, like not being able to go on with higher education, and being restricted in employment and that kind of thing. Before I got there, I think it was, Pope John Paul II had issued a statement aimed mostly at the liberation theologians of Central and South America. It was essentially pointed at saying you could not be a priest of the church and also engage in overtly political activity, particularly activity that embraced a view of Jesus as a revolutionary or social reformer.

It was interesting because at about the same time the Czech authorities organized a regime-sponsored peace movement they called Pacem in Terris, and all the bishops and all the clergy were asked to sign on as members of this organization. The organization had all this anodyne language about anti-nuclear policies and anti-war sentiments. So the Catholic clergy and the bishops turned to Cardinal Tomasek, the Czech Archbishop, who was already rather old, in his 80s, and said, "Are we allowed to sign this document?"

So Tomasek referred it to the Pope and he said, "Is this considered to be political activity on the part of the priests?" There was a waiting period for a while, when everyone was uncertain but then in the end the Pope said it was political activity and bishops and priests, particularly the bishops they were concerned about, the bishops may not sign it and remain in good standing.

And so Tomasek instructed all the people under his authority and it became a real struggle between the regime and the Catholic Church. The regime wanted to enroll the Catholic Church into their anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-West movement, because this was the time when we in the West were

placing short range missiles in Europe.

Q: This is the SS-20, the Pershing.

WEINLAND: What are the slow ones? The Cruise missiles were being deployed in Germany and then the Soviets were deploying their SS-20s in a couple of places in Czechoslovakia.

The regime desperately wanted to have the Catholic Church as one of the two biggest denominations behind them. They couldn't get the Pope to go along and Tomasek would not fold. There was just this standoff, they never did resolve it. What happened was gradually the bishops began to die off, and the Pope would nominate somebody to take the position and the regime would refuse to let him have it. By the time the regime changed, five years later, there were something like 15 empty bishoprics. It was a very significant number of bishoprics that had never been refilled.

Tomasek himself actually survived until the end of the communist regime and never gave in. He was an incredible man.

The Protestant churches were less harassed because I think in those cases the denominational head could kind of make an agreement with the regime and they didn't have the same kind of authority over the general clergy. The problem would come when a clergyman actually signed the Charter. He would then lose his license to perform clerical duties. That happened to Catholics as well as to Protestants. If a clergyman agreed to be under the political authority of the director of religious affairs, an office in the government, he then had to report once a month to the office of religious affairs and show copies of all his sermons. Of course, you couldn't get married legally in the church; you had to go to town hall; they couldn't do funerals and other pastoral services, but they could preside over Sunday services. If they could do that, they could continue in this very uneasy relationship, while the Catholics really were under more pressure to knuckle under and individually join the official peace movement.

I was close friends with a Baptist minister and went often to his services, and so I would ask him about his minders. He just preached the gospel. He stayed well away from anything controversial in his sermons. People like him and all the other clergymen I talked to essentially had the attitude of, I am called to serve the spiritual needs of people and if we all oppose the regime, there won't be anybody who can meet these needs. Therefore, I won't go along with anything overtly pro-communist. Each person had to carve out his own area of comfort.

Q: Was there any give at all within the regime towards the Western position or was it a very hard line?

WEINLAND: It was quite hard line. I would not have gone as note taker for any substantive meetings either with the DCM or the ambassador. That would have been my boss who would have gone. The press was uniformly very anti-West. I was taking language lessons through the embassy while I was there. I would go down and meet with my language teacher. One day she said, "Look at what Rude Pravo has in the paper today" and it was a whole explanation of the American health system and how much it cost for cancer treatment, heart surgery and other big ticket health issues.

“Isn’t this outrageous what they are printing about the United States in Rude Pravo? This can’t be true.” And I said, “Of course, it’s true. That is what it costs for cancer treatment or some other kinds of heroic measures when people are very ill. Of course, it also does not say,” (of course in those days) “that most people are covered by some form of insurance or other so the insurance pays most of those costs. We have to pay for our own insurance.” But she instinctively didn’t believe anything that the press published about the West because the people were just so suspicious of anything.

Q: Did you get the feeling, I think it was about this time I talked to people who served in Poland and they said that in Poland it was sort of the word of mouth was that there were probably at least three dedicated communists in the whole country. Did you get the feeling that OK, they’re going along with it but there was just no substance, I mean there was nothing behind this, outside of fear or just getting along.

WEINLAND: Yes, I think that’s true. If people wanted to be engineers or doctors or things like that, they had to go along in order to do something that was interesting to them. The only people who were getting any serious benefit from it were the party hierarchy and the various ministers and so on.

The Czechs, I think are unlike the Poles. This was at the time of Solidarity in Poland. It was a little after the height of Solidarity. The Czechs were cynical about the Poles, sort of “Oh, there the Poles go again, making all this trouble. They are always doing these heroic, fruitless things, getting their heads bashed for nothing. We Czechs, we just sort of live with it. We know you aren’t going to be able to change it.”

That’s why I think the Charter Movement never really grew to being as big and well-supported as Solidarity was.

Q: You left there when?

WEINLAND: ’84.

Q: Did you think you had five years to go before the whole system would collapse?

WEINLAND: Absolutely not. It looked as though it would just grind on. We were there during the time Brezhnev died and then there were the two rapid changes, Andropov and Chernenko. I forget which came first and died.

Q: I think it was Andropov first and then Chernenko and then Gorbachev.

WEINLAND: I don’t think Gorbachev was in office when I left. I think that was just a little bit later.

Even when I went to Berlin five years later, I never thought what happened would happen. And the Czechs were pretty much as hardnosed as the -- the East Germans were the worst -- but I think the Czechs were not too far behind.

Q: One does get the feeling that the Czechs weren't going to raise their heads too much. The Prague Spring was enough.

WEINLAND: Was enough, yes. That was lesson enough and too many people got their heads chopped off.

Q: Were you aware of people who had done well, or been professional people and after the Prague Spring had sort of lost everything?

WEINLAND: Well, Dubcek was still around and he obviously had lost out. There was a man who had been a foreign minister, I think under Dubcek, Hajek, and I think he was still in the country, but a lot of them who were prominent political types had decamped and gone West, as had many of the intelligentsia like Kundera and Milos Forman and some of the writers and so on, many of whom were actually running émigré presses. They were very much involved in publishing the writing that was coming from people who were still in the country.

Q: Was the hand of the Soviets pretty visible?

WEINLAND: They kept out of sight. Occasionally you would see young, Soviet soldiers sight-seeing in Prague, but their military presence was out of the cities. It was in bases outside town. The embassy of course, was a big embassy but I don't think we had any contacts with each other, I can't think anybody in our embassy was palming around with any of them, and, of course, we had non-fraternization rules that were pretty damned strict. You would have been a little bit crazy unless ordered to do so, to meet with them.

Q: With the community, for example, were the Yugoslavs considered a good source because they sort of had a foot in both camps or not?

WEINLAND: I would assume if that was going on, it was our cousins who were doing some of that.

Q: They just weren't, you didn't have any . . .

WEINLAND: I didn't know any Yugoslav.

Q: How about other embassies? Did you all get together and share impressions?

WEINLAND: Yes, we had a very interesting group of people, of whom I was one, called the Secretaries Club. We were first and second secretaries in our embassies. We had 12 or 15 members at any one time; many NATO embassies, so we had a Norwegian, a Canadian, the Brit, the French, Italian and then we had some who were from other countries like Japan, Egypt, Brazil. We had monthly lunches that we rotated hosting, always with huge amounts of wine. It was really funny because we would all be sitting at the table telling stories back and forth. We had an Austrian. They were still neutral and not in the EU or anything. Some of them, like the Egyptian, had much more contact with Czechs than we did. The Japanese guy who arrived halfway through the time I was

there, had actually had an earlier posting when he did nothing while he was in Prague but study Czech. He spoke a perfect Czech and a perfect English and listened to the radio all the time, which most of us didn't do and watched TV, but he just really had his ear to the ground and was always able to share a lot of scuttlebutt about what was going on.

I loved being at the lunches and watching the Egyptian colleague writing in Arabic, the Japanese in his language. We all had little notepads; we'd be making notes throughout the lunch.

Q: Were the Chinese there?

WEINLAND: They were there but I don't think we had any contact, at least I didn't.

WILLIAM P. KIEHL
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Prague (1982-1986)

William P. Kiehl was born in Pennsylvania in 1945. He received a BS from the University of Scranton in 1967 and an MA from the University of Virginia in 1970. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1970, he was posted in Belgrade, Zagreb, Colombo, Moscow, Prague, Helsinki, London and Bangkok. Mr. Kiehl was interviewed in 2003 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Then what? Did you move on to Prague next?

KIEHL: Oh, yes, sure. In fact, I was all set to go to my dream post where twice before I had gotten word that I could be assigned. My dream post was Sofia, Bulgaria, of course, and I was all set, and I was ready to start Bulgarian language training, and the same guy who called me up and said, "Hey, go to Colombo," remember? Jock Shirley, he was still around. He called up and said, "Bill, the fellow that we were going to send out to Prague has just been declared *persona non grata* by the Czech government, and we noticed that you were going to Bulgaria, but wouldn't you rather actually go to Prague? I talked to the director and he'd be keen to send you there." I said, "Oh. Well, I don't know. I'd have to talk this over with my wife. I can't make this decision right now. Can I call you in the morning?" He said, "Oh, sure, that'd be fine." So I talked to my wife about it, and I said, "Well, here are the pros and cons," and of course, the pro set for Bulgaria actually seemed to add up more, because our relationship with Prague was really bad. They had PNG'd [declared *persona non grata*] every USIA person there in the last couple of years. Nobody ever finished a tour. They got there and then they got bounced. In once case somebody was set up with fake drug charges. I already spoke Serbian, which is nothing more than – well Serbs would say--Bulgarian is ungrammatical Serbian.

Q: I used to speak it.

KIEHL: Right. I thought, "This would be perfect, to do this." So we agreed, "Oh yeah, we'll stay with Bulgaria." The next morning I called up Jock Shirley, and I said, "My wife and I talked it

over, and we think we'll stick with Bulgaria," and he said, "It's too late, Bill, the director's already agreed to send you to Prague. I hope that isn't a problem." I said, "No, of course not." What could I say?

I ended up taking Czech for three months, and got my 3/3 in Czech, which was remarkable. I had the best teacher I've ever had. It wasn't at FSI, of course, it was at a contract language school. She had, I think, taught Czech for the intel people, before she was on contract, at 16th and K streets. She would come in and work with me for four hours, converting my Russian to Czech. She was a Russian teacher in Prague at one time. So she converted my Russian to Czech, and then, my deputy, John Brown, who just, if you remember, bailed out of the Foreign Service with an article in the newspaper, came in, and the two of us would be together for an hour, and then I'd leave, and she would have four hours with him, converting his Russian to Czech, also. I got my 3/3 in two and a half months, and he got a 3/3 in three months, and we got out to Prague and we actually spoke Czech, unlike the other people at the embassy, none of whom, unless they were of Czech background, actually spoke street Czech. In other words, they would speak literary Czech, but we actually spoke the Czech that people spoke on the street, and in the universities, everyday speech, which was a huge advantage. Two of the three best Czech speakers at the embassy were the two of us.

She was the most remarkable teacher and the one thing she said is, "Promise you will never tell anyone what my name was," or anything, because she feared for her life and her family back home, and so I said, "Yes, I would," and I meant that so sincerely I have forgotten her name. I couldn't remember her name now if my life depended on it. She was a really remarkable teacher, just full tilt for four hours, then an hour with the two of us, then another four hours with him.

Q: Good God.

KIEHL: He said by the end of the day he was exhausted and she was still going full tilt. It was terrific, I mean, I still can't believe that after two and a half months I went over to FSI and passed the FSI test, having gone to another language school, but obviously she did the job. It was terrific.

Q: We'll pick this up next time. We've already covered your Czech training, but you arrived in Prague when?

KIEHL: I arrived in Prague in January of 1983.

Q: And you were there until when?

KIEHL: Until July 1986.

Q: OK, well, we'll pick it up then.

Today is the sixth of January 2004. Bill, Prague, 1982 to 1986, right?

KIEHL: Well, actually, January of '83. It was the New Year by the time I got there. We decided to spend the holidays at home.

Q: What was the situation in Czechoslovakia in '83.

KIEHL: In 1983 the Czech regime was still very much under the rule of the Communist party, and Gustav Husák and company. It was actually a pretty bad period for U.S.-Czech relations. The reason I actually ended up there is because the public affairs officer, my predecessor, had to leave early, and his deputy was more or less forced out because of a trumped up drug charge at the border, which the embassy resisted rather vehemently, and in the end she was allowed to remain another couple of months, but because of that, the post was seriously understaffed. Fortunately, there was an administrative secretary who carried on as much as anyone could have expected. I think someone from the consular section filled in when there was a need for an FSO to do something, for a couple of months. The person who was originally assigned there was rejected by the Czech government because he had been there before. So there was a bit of a tit for tat, I think we threatened to close the Czech airline office in Chicago, which of course was a nice little listening post for them, in the Czech community out that way, and so on. Finally they did agree to accept new staff for USIS, which of course was called the press and cultural service of the American embassy.

I took the job, I was originally going to be assigned to Sofia, but changed to Prague instead, and took that quick course in Czech with the marvelous teacher I talked about last time, and my deputy, the same, we converted from Russian to Czech, both of us, and so I was going out in January, and I think he was to arrive in February. Got out there in January, my wife was delayed a little bit, she was packing up our stuff, and ran into a snowstorm back in Washington, I think it was Washington's Birthday, there was a big snowstorm then. In any event, she was delayed.

I got out there, got into my apartment, which had been vacant for a number of months and was used as a transient apartment, and it was really a dump, it was all mismatched furniture and that sort of thing. It was a typical transient apartment. I'm sure the bugs that were placed in it, when it was the Israeli *chargé d'affairs*' apartment back in the late '60s, were still in it, and probably upgraded each time there was a vacancy. It was, I'm sure, thoroughly bugged, and we also found out there was a watchtower in the cathedral across the street, in the square. *Náměstí Míru*, or "Peace Square." Actually Vinohrady Square in the old days—it's now Vinohrady Square again. There's an old Catholic church there, neo-Gothic, and in the clock tower was a group of STB folks with long-range camera lenses ...

So where was I? Oh, yes. The *Statni Tanji Bespecnosti* – my Czech's getting a little rusty there – the state secret police, they had a little facility over in the clock tower itself, and they had long range cameras, lenses, and binoculars, and they would hang out in there most of the time. They probably also had eavesdropping equipment in the base there, and they would – in fact, whenever we had guests, they would film the front of the apartment building to clock each guest going in and out, and when we had a big event, they'd even pull up a truck across the street with an ostentatious motion picture camera in the back, filming everyone, and my Czech dissident friends would turn and wave to the cameras. It wasn't terribly intimidating, but you knew you were constantly watched, and followed.

In any event, I got in there, and determined that the ambassador at the time was Jack Matlock, whom I had worked for I worked for him twice, a very solid guy. Brilliant Russian linguist and so on, which, of course, was something of a detriment in Czechoslovakia, because his Czech had a distinct Russian accent, which was a little off-putting to some people, but they understood it's very difficult to switch those. I, on the other hand, maybe because my Russian wasn't as good as his, adapted to the Czech pretty well. People told me that, because of this teacher who was so damn good, my deputy and I both spoke really vernacular Czech, of the Prague variant. That was very useful and very handy.

The first thing I did, of course, was try to resuscitate the post. The FSNs had more or less been left to their own devices and so we had to shape them up a little bit. They were, one assumed, secret police agents or informers, at least, but having worked in that part of the world before, it just didn't bother me at all. I made use of them as best I could, and if they had divided loyalties, so much the better for me, because the dividing part would be at least something I could use, that aspect of it. A couple of them were extremely good workers-- and they were probably the most efficient police spies as well. It was a small staff, and until John arrived I had a little time to get around and didn't have my car coming at that time and there was an office car to use, but I determined that the best way to see Prague would be by public transport, and that's what I usually do. So I took trams and buses all over the city every time I had any business to do, but also in my free time, since my wife was arriving only a couple weeks later I really had a relatively lax schedule, you might say, in the evenings.

So we hired the same maid that had worked for my predecessor, even after that several months' gap, oddly enough, she was free. She was also a police spy, of course. She ended up marrying an Italian businessman, I think, and emigrating from the Czech Republic. She was also -- although, I didn't really realize it for some time, because I rarely saw her, she always left dumplings and fried potatoes with garlic--*brombori* on the radiator to keep warm for me when I got home, I would be working late trying to get the place organized, getting the office organized because it had been vacant for so long, but once I had a more normal schedule, I realized that the Marines looked forward very much to her arrival at the embassy to pick up her TUZEX korunas. [TUZEX was a special currency that could be used only at a TUZEX store which handled imported and luxury goods.] We paid partially in Czech korunas, partially in TUZEX korunas and sometimes in "units"[One unit was one bottle of Johnny Walker Red label whiskey and one carton of Marlboro cigarettes] for evening events. Whenever our maid came by the embassy, the Marines were really spiffed up about it because she was a knockout, a total knockout, and always wore the tightest jeans and the most form-fitting clothes you could imagine, and was just beaming at them. Whether that was her role, or not, she certainly probably went through all of our papers or anything that was left in the house but she was fairly efficient, and not a bad cook for everyday and she kept the place clean between the other duties.

It was a large apartment, it was a whole floor of an apartment building, and as I said, it used to belong to the Israeli *chargé d'affairs* ...

Q: The Israeli chargé?

KIEHL: The Israeli chargé, and when the Czechs broke relations with Israel after the – actually, it was after the invasion of '68. It wasn't the '67 war that did it, it was in '68 they broke relations and kicked him out, and the PAO at the time was clever enough to grab this apartment, which was a real jewel of an apartment, in a great neighborhood, close to the metro, the underground, so people could get to it easily. A tradition had started of New Year's parties, and I followed that tradition and sort of expanded it. I think the first year, obviously, I was late for New Year's, but the next year was the first one of these and I think we had over 350 guests in the apartment, ranging from government ministers to leading dissidents like the Havel brothers, and Jiri Diensbear, and all those people, all mixed in the same cocktail party, or New Year's party. Really quite an event, when the new ambassador, Bill Luers, who came on board only a couple of months before that. It was the first big event that that the ambassador and his wife attended and he shared the receiving line with me. I remember he was just absolutely awestruck that I introduced every single person by name. Actually, when I think back, to know 350 Czechs across the whole political spectrum within a year is pretty darn good, in those circumstances.

Q: How did you get to know them?

KIEHL: In part I was determined that no matter how good or how bad the relations were, I was going to do everything possible to raise the visibility of the U.S. in Czechoslovakia and to raise the visibility of the press and cultural section. So we decided that even though there was a measly little library in the library complex, and maybe 10 or 12 people would sneak past the guards to get in, had the courage to get in and come in to borrow a book, there was a way around that. So what we did is we staged events. We had exhibits in the library, innocuous things, a space exhibit, where we had a genuine space suit and part of a capsule and all that, put that in there. We had thousands of visitors. You couldn't keep people away from it. Because there were so many people, they couldn't do a security check on everybody, they couldn't threaten everybody, they couldn't harass everybody who walked in and out. Everything from schoolchildren to grizzled old retirees would come in there. It became a place where people felt they could go and not be harassed – the fear factor lifted. That was one way of doing that.

My deputy also ran English classes in there. He just informally got groups of people together who were interested in learning English, and conducted English classes in there. We showed films. I went to Germany and bought a couple of hundred paperback books, which we put on a paperback book stand, with the idea that if you wanted to read it, great, if you realized you could only come there once, and would get in trouble if you came too often, you could just steal the book. We had lots of magazines donated, we had all those there. People would come in and stuff magazines in their pockets and get out. It was a way of injecting a little bit of the West into the Czech Socialist country, and also, to show that we were still interested in them. That was the really important thing, I think. People are emboldened when they know that somebody is watching; that somebody gives a damn. So we tried to indicate that as often as we could.

There was an IV (International Visitors) program, but it was totally stuck in dead water, because the only people the Czechs would ever permit to travel were police agents who they wanted to send to the United States. So the IV program had basically been moribund for years. There were, I think, 13 or 14 slots available every year but nobody went, because we didn't want to send their people, and they wouldn't accept anybody we nominated. I came up with the idea of using intermediaries

for that. So I transferred the IV money to grants to American organizations and let them do the inviting of the Czechs so that it didn't appear that they were being invited by the U.S. government. I got Random House to invite editors and writers. I got the University of Iowa to do the same. There were half a dozen different organizations; the American Association of Museums was another. We would give the money to them, they would send an airline ticket, a round-trip airline ticket, the whole works would be as though it were a private invitation, and it worked. We got about a dozen people a year out to the U.S. for these kinds of programs. Sometimes the private organizations liked it so much they'd extend the stay, so they got more than a 30 day visit. Whether the Czechs ever cottoned onto this or not I don't know, but they allowed it, because it wasn't a government invitation.

It made a big difference. The new ambassador, Bill Luers, was the kind of person who was very interested in culture and the arts and public diplomacy and that sort of thing and his wife was very similarly inclined. So I worked with them, and they knew a lot of people in the New York arts scene.

Q: He later went to ...

KIEHL: The Met [The Metropolitan Museum of Art]. So through him, we managed to get people invited, because they would stay at the residence and then I would pick up the tab, basically under the U.S. speakers program, for Updike, and Albee, and Styron, and Vonnegut, people like that, and people in other fields, too, everybody from Madeleine Albright to Bernie Kalb. Well, that example doesn't give us such a wide spectrum, but you get the idea. We brought them in, we had events at the residence, we had events outside, at the universities and various institutes. It became a really fast-paced program. It broadened the world of all these Czechs, both dissidents and people who weren't really dissidents but really didn't like the regime but they were afraid to be outspoken dissidents. They had not joined Charter 77.

I wasn't so interested in the Charter 77 people because the political section was really handling them.

Q: Charter 77 was the ...

KIEHL: A manifesto written against the Communist imposition in Czechoslovakia. There were generally three spokesmen named, and these three people became lightning rods for police attention. But all the members, all the people who joined Charter – and I think there were maybe about 1,500 people who had signed the Charter by the time I got there – all of them were harassed, and all of them were subject to all the penalties that can be imposed in a totalitarian state, but there were many, many thousands of people who chose to be more like the good soldier Schweik, the classic, Czech nonconformist.

Q: World War I ...

KIEHL: Who would nod and do what he wanted anyway. That's what most Czechs did, and most Czech intellectuals did that as well. They didn't sell out. Some did, obviously, the Karl Gotts – you know, the rock star Karl Gott who was the classic sell-out, I guess, to the regime – but a lot of them

didn't. They were maybe best symbolized by a group that, very cleverly, became part of the composers' union. They were the jazz section –of the composers' union, which was part of the Union of Musicians and Composers. They formulated their own group, and they were essentially a dissident organization. They were very much opposed to Communism in the regime, and they wanted more contacts with the West. They were basically what one might call Social Democrats, for the most part, and they were extremely active. They had, by the time I left Czechoslovakia, about 38,000 members. They produced books. They produced CDs. They produced a magazine. They held symposiums. They did all sorts of things that any kind of cultural organization would do, and all of it was, just beneath the surface, anti-regime, every single bit of it, because they wanted Czechoslovakia to rejoin the Western world, Western civilization. For that, the leader of the organization, Karol Srp, was arrested and thrown in jail for, I think it ended up to be, about a year and a half. I know, either because of brutality or bad living conditions, he lost all his teeth in the process, and was pretty well demoralized by the time he got out of prison. In fact, he was still in prison when I left Czechoslovakia.

But the organization continued and survived and prospered, even though they were beginning to be persecuted. We brought people in and we held clandestine lectures with them, where we would tell people to meet at a certain place and we'd bring a lecturer in to talk about popular culture, generally, of the Western variety. They would have a lecture discussion program and sit around and drink some wine and eat some potato chips, and it became a regular lecture program with that group. We gave them a lot of encouragement and a lot of support. We brought Kurt Vonnegut over to their clubhouse to plant a tree, we brought Bill and Rose Styron over to plant a tree, it was part of their – they had their own little park that they managed to resuscitate some brown zone. They were very active environmentalists and very much in the Western European mainstream. They were a constant source of irritation to the regime. For that alone it was worth supporting them, aside from the fact that they were great people and we really enjoyed meeting with them and so on.

They were, oh, I guess age 18 to about mid-30s.

Q: Were they able to keep up with what was happening in the world?

KIEHL: Pretty much. We helped them to do that, hopefully. The other thing that was a major accomplishment over that time – the Czechs were, as a government, were trying to get a better relationship with the U.S., after the first year we were there, and so they gave some indication that they wanted not to be quite so nasty. Of course they were still following us and bugging our apartments and all that sort of thing, but it was a little easier to see people in the government, a little easier to do business, you might say, because what they really wanted, and what they had been wanting for years, was a cultural agreement. They saw a cultural agreement with the United States as a way of limiting U.S. influence. Of course, we saw a cultural agreement, in large measure, the same way, but I think I convinced people that what we ought to do is take advantage of the cultural agreement as a way of expanding influence in Czechoslovakia. Don't look at it the way they look at it, look at it the way we should look at it, which is a way of getting the door open. It took a little convincing back to Washington about it, but eventually we did start negotiating this cultural agreement. Whether it was because the Czechs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cultural department were not too bright or whether they really did want, themselves, personally, to open up the windows a little bit, I'm not sure, but in any event, it was kind of a funny negotiation.

They really didn't negotiate very well. When we did come up with the agreement, it basically said, "OK, we agree to do these things and anything else that's on the same theme." So that meant, OK, we can have at least a dozen IV grantees, but we can do many more, if we want. Or we can have speaker programs at this level, but if we want more, we can do it. It was sort of an open-ended thing. In other words, instead of a maximum, which is what the Czech regime started out wanting, it became a minimum. Now, that minimum was great, because that was basically the budget we had. If we wanted to do more it meant more money, and of course there were financial pressure, but, in a place like Czechoslovakia, if you can do more, the money will come. At least in USIA, it always came for something like that.

So I was pretty confident that our program would continue to expand. (end of tape)

Q: You were saying you eventually got the agreement?

KIEHL: Yes, we finally – and it wasn't really such a long and drawn out process, once we actually sat down and began to negotiate, as I thought. Basically, most of the negotiation took place over several months, myself dealing with a fellow named Don Dvorak, who was the U.S. desk officer in the foreign ministry for cultural affairs, and presumably, secret police, and his boss, who was certainly secret policeman named Ilya Koda, and this guy, I later learned, was in charge of forced collectivization in northern Moravia back in the early '50s. I'm not quite sure what experience he had in cultural affairs, but he certainly had experience in forced collectivization of agriculture. In any event, he was a real thug, by the way, and I didn't underestimate him, but he was so oblivious to what he was agreeing to, it seemed. I'm convinced that Dvorak, who I got to know a little bit and took out drinking a little bit and got to know him pretty well, he was a guy who loved the Beatles and he was about my generation, and he loved Western culture. So I think that maybe, Don Dvorak, whatever his party affiliations or credentials were, was really a kind of Westernizer, and may well have put a few past Ilya Koda. That's perhaps one of the reasons the negotiations went so well, in our direction, with these guys.

Of course, then we also had a deal with two ministries of culture and two ministries of education, because it was Czechoslovakia, the two republics – they maintained this fiction that there were these two independent countries that had come together through a love of Socialism, and while so many of the ministries were federal, but culture and education were two ministries that were local. So there was a ministry of culture and a ministry of education, in Prague and another one in Bratislava. The one in Bratislava was a fraction of the size of the one in Prague but it had at least the legal fiction of being an independent ministry, so we had to negotiate with those four ministries, as well as the foreign ministry, to get this all accomplished.

But it was only a matter of months, and then a team came out from Washington, which I, of course, joined, and we sat down around the table and in a week's time we had it signed, sealed and delivered, including the signing ceremony, which was terrific. I then determined that people have to know about this, and the Czech media, under the control of the Communist party, was not going to tell anybody about this, or if they did it was going to be a one paragraph in *Rude Právo* [The organ of the Czech communist party] So I determined that we had to have a facsimile copy made of the English and Czech of this document, including the ribbon and the whole works, and I had them

printed in Vienna in about 10,000 copies, and we handed them out to every organization, to everybody who walked in the library, to everybody we could vaguely say hello to in that country, so that everybody saw what this obligated the Czech government to do. People came out of the woodwork in every direction around the country and said, “Oh, it’s OK, we can do this!” and suddenly, the whole climate changed, the whole temperature of the country warmed up about 100 degrees.

Q: Were the police still harassing and all?

KIEHL: They were, but it’s funny about a system like that, that when 10 people do something, they can effectively harass them. When 1,000 people do something, they can’t. They give up. They can’t cope with it. It’s like the numbers of people coming to the library. When there were 10 or 12 people a day coming into that library to borrow a book, they were easy pickings for the police, and they felt like easy pickings, and so most people were intimidated. After one visit they would not come back, or some very clever ones would get someone in their organization to fill out a letter saying that their work required them to come there or something, and then they had to show that to the cops. They were literally outside the door of our library, and I actually had to move them physically off our property a couple of times. They would encroach, and I would say, “Gentlemen, you have to move there. Give the people room to get in.”

When these exhibits would happen, and we’d have 1,000 people a day coming to the library, they couldn’t do it. When we had a book signing by Kurt Vonnegut, or a book signing by John Updike, in the library, thousands of people – we have pictures, in fact, I remember a great shot of people lined the whole length of the street, five abreast, to come into that library to get an autograph by John Updike.

Q: How did they know John Updike or Kurt Vonnegut?

KIEHL: >From a little thing called the Voice of America. Everything we did we broadcast. I would send a story back to the Voice of America, saying what was happening and where, what time, and the details and VOA Czechoslovak Service would faithfully broadcast that, and Voice of America was known as – there was Prague One and Prague Two. Everybody knew VOA as Prague Three. It was as clear on medium wave on a car radio in downtown Prague as any of the local stations, and it had an enormous listener ship. You knew it, because the only announcement – we couldn’t get anything in the newspaper about it, the local press, so it was word of mouth and Voice of America, were the only ways we could advertise that Kurt Vonnegut or John Updike was signing books in the American library on Tuesday, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m..

Q: Had they read these authors?

KIEHL: Yes. You have to understand, Vonnegut was not particularly sympathetic to America in a lot of his writings. Slaughterhouse 5 the firebombing of Dresden.

Q: Slaughterhouse 5?

KIEHL: Yes. Updike was widely translated because of his – the Czech ideologues said, a portrayal

of the “decadence” of America., in for example Run, Rabbit Run.

Q: The social, Eastern ...

KIEHL: Actually, people were pining to have car dealerships like Rabbit. So it was all in the eyes of the beholder. The Communists saw what they wanted to see in these books. Other people saw what they wanted to see. The translators of American fiction were close friends of ours. The translator who did Vonnegut’s works was Josef Koran, who was a both playwright and a translator. Translators were very important people in that part of the world, because they were the conduit to get Western ideas into the country. We were very close with the translators, let me tell you, and I’m sure it was true in Poland and other Eastern European countries. Koran later became mayor of Prague after the Velvet Revolution, but I think he got involved in some corruption and didn’t last. Last I heard he was the editor of the Czech *Playboy* magazine, actually. But he was a marvelous guy, interesting guy, great photographer as well. We even did a guide to the pubs of Prague. He did the photos and I did the text. It was never published but it’s in a cardboard box somewhere. These pubs have changed a lot since.

Updike’s translator was named Antonin Pridal, who lived in Brno. We went down to visit him, in fact, as part of when Updike came, and Pridal was a junior lecturer at the university, but he mainly was a translator. After the Velvet Revolution he became a television personality, and actually has been, several times, talked about as a possible presidential candidate. So these people really had a lot of influence in the society, even then, and of course in a free society they were able to move up.

It was word of mouth, but mainly the Voice of America that enabled us to have these large public programs. We did an exhibit at the Brno fair on computers. We had press previews and that sort of thing, but the thing that really drew people out was word spread thanks to the Voice of America Czechoslovak Service.

Q: There wasn’t any jamming of it?

KIEHL: They couldn’t jam the medium wave without overlaying the station and of course these were German frequencies. The Czechs didn’t want to run afoul of that. They made it very hard in other ways for VOA, however. It took me almost two years before I could get the VOA correspondent a visa, the Eastern European correspondent of VOA. He was a marvelous Czech speaker, too. He was a Brit but spoke very good Czech. We finally got him into the country and of course he was harassed the whole time and so on, but eventually I got him accreditation to Czechoslovakia as a correspondent, which meant he had a multiple entry visa. Going from 1983 to 1986 is a sea change, in attitudes and in the way the country developed.

By the time I left I was very optimistic that this would just continue and expand. The other thing we did, which was really a kind of unique thing, was the whole wreath laying business. I don’t know whether you had anybody else from Prague here to talk about that, but it was really an amazing thing. Western Bohemia was liberated by Patton’s army in World War II. Of course the mythology in Communist Czechoslovakia was that “the Soviet Union are our liberators. “ They did liberate Prague because the city authorities told Patton not to come in-- they were Communist party people anyway and wanted the Red Army to get the credit. They said, “No, no, it’s being

handled by the Red Army.” So Patton’s army got as far as Plzen, or actually a little town called Rokycany, just east of Plzen, but southern and western Bohemia remembered very much the American troops there, and they stayed for some months after the war because the U.S refused to leave until the Red Army withdrew. This was a little early Cold War bluffmanship. The people there actually got to know the GIs and so on, so they had really warm feelings about that.

In most of those little towns after the war monuments were put up to the brave liberators, the American army, to General Patton and all the GIs and they would have regular ceremonies to honor them. Of course after ’48 that all stopped, and by the time of the Vietnam war most of the memorials had been ripped up by the roots and carted off to a junkyard. In Ambassador Matlock’s time, the defense attaché’s office began, in a very tentative way, to revisit some of these places and gather information as to where there were still monuments and where the old monuments were, It was determined, I think maybe it was the year before we got there, to make a few trips out there and see if people were still there during that early May period, laying flowers there or anything like that. So it began in a very tentative, small way, a few dozen people who, in fact, were there. There were some contacts, people came up and said, “Oh, yes, I remember the GIs. They stayed at our house,” and that sort of thing.

In Slovakia there were a few American flyers who were shot down, some of whom died and were buried there originally, and others of whom hid out with Slovak families to escape the Germans and eventually made their way back to the West. In a couple of places where the planes crashed or people died, there were monuments as well. The defense attaché’s office did a pretty good job of tracking all that down. They did this for a couple of reason. First of all, they did it because it was interesting to do and it was a good historical thing and GIs – the military likes to remember the military who have fallen, but also it was a great intelligence gathering exercise and nobody would be fooling anybody if they didn’t think that that was the main reason, because riding all over Slovakia was a great opportunity to see where military arms factories were, where air fields were located, et cetera, and where troops were deployed. All that was very useful and it wasn’t an accident that Slovakia was where the military armaments trade was largely concentrated and the air force and the western Bohemia border was right on the border with Germany. It’s not totally accidental that these are the areas where the U.S. military attaches were doing their “research.”

I can’t claim it was my idea, I don’t know whose idea it was, but we decided, in the embassy, that if we could expand the wreath-laying this could be a really irritating thing to do, and it would drive the Czechs crazy, the Czech government crazy, and it would show American interest in real Czechs. So we determined that we’d start stoking this up a little bit. I got the VOA on board, VOA was beginning to announce now that the American ambassador and embassy staff would be visiting some of the sites in western Bohemia to lay wreaths and commemorate the liberation by U.S. forces. That was in May, and in the fall we did one in Slovakia, to commemorate the fallen Americans who fought on the side of Czechoslovakia to liberate the country from the Nazis.

The Slovakian one went pretty well. We got pretty sizeable crowds out there. It was a more difficult terrain, it was also a rainy part of the season and so on, but it more than held its own. The events in Bohemia however, went beyond anybody’s expectations. In a matter of – well, we did this for two or three years by the time I left – by the last year, we had crowds of thousands of people. I had printed an old photograph in postcard form to hand out to people, of the GIs on a jeep,

liberating and getting a bouquet of flowers from a Czech woman in Plzen. I had 25,000 of those printed up. We got rid of all of those in no time. We had crossed U.S. Czech flags that were donated to us from the Czechoslovakian-American society. We gave away 5,000 of those. We had a convoy, of about 20 cars in this convoy, going from town to town with people on the route throwing flowers and waving American flags. This is in a Communist country, right? It had just built and built and built. We used the Voice of America to do it. The speeches were good – Luers spoke a little bit better, his Czech was a little better than Matlock's, but both of them did very credible jobs doing the speeches in Czech.

It was just fantastic. People would take pictures with us, arms around each other, and we would take pictures of them, and of course, surrounding us all were security people, clandestine security people, taking pictures of everybody, going crazy trying to follow us and trying to block roads and, in one case, turning on loudspeakers with martial music to try to drown out the ambassador's speech. The only place we couldn't get to give a speech was in the city of Plzen itself, but the next year after the Velvet Revolution the American ambassador went there to lay a wreath at the place where the monument was, which had been restored, and 150,000 people came out to the square for that one. This was all there beneath the surface, and we brought it to the surface, and there were so many people that they couldn't harass everybody.

Q: What about the English language, were a lot of Czechs learning English?

KIEHL: There were a fair number of Czechs learning English. German is really the second language. Prague, before the war, was one-third Czech, one-third Jewish, one-third German. It was a trilingual city of Yiddish, German and Czech. Of course the Jews were all but eliminated because of the Holocaust. There was a small Jewish community, by the way, which we, again, tried to cultivate and keep in touch with, and there was a good contact, he wasn't a rabbi, but he was president of the Jewish community who was a remarkable man. He died later in an automobile crash, and I still believe he was killed, but you never know. It seemed too coincidental.

He was a remarkable guy. We worked very closely with him. Dr. Galsky was his name, and we worked with him to get something accomplished that had been languishing for probably 15 or 20 years. The Smithsonian wanted to mount an exhibit of Judaica from Prague, because the Nazis, during the second World War, had decided that they would build a museum to an exterminated race, in Prague, a gigantic museum designed by Albert Spier. So they brought to Prague, and they kept in Prague, in emptied synagogues and warehouses, hundreds of thousands of objects. They had warehouses full of the clothing that they had taken, but they had hundreds and thousands of religious objects. Torahs, Torah scrolls, hundreds and hundreds and thousands of them, and very precious objects to very ordinary, everyday objects as well. All these were still in Prague. They were the property of the Jewish community, but within the Czech Communist government these were never exhibited. There were a couple of synagogues that were turned into "museums" in the Jewish Quarter, which you could actually go and see and look at, just a few objects, but the vast majority of these things were simply forgotten, because the government in Prague wasn't particularly sympathetic to Jews.

It took a long time. It took a lot of negotiation. It was largely between the Smithsonian and the Czech government, but even in Ambassador Matlock's time and then later on in Ambassador

Luers' time, the embassy supported this very strongly, and did a lot of running interference with the Czech ministry of culture to get things moving along. They finally did move. In fact, late in the time I was there the exhibit came to the United States and went to six cities and so on. You may have heard about it or seen it, it was a fantastic exhibit, and I think, in large measure, the Holocaust Museum stems from the interest in Judaica among the larger public, and here in Washington it was an enormous success. There's some reason to believe that the Holocaust Museum today may not have existed if it hadn't been for this exhibit of Judaica from Czechoslovakia.

The time was right, things were running in the right direction and the cultural agreement, again, could be used as the wedge to pry this out of the country. So a lot of things were happening.

Q: Was there any reflection of the Gorbachev change in the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia?

KIEHL: Too early. It was too early, then, you see. We're talking '83 to '86. We're still talking Brezhnevian Soviet Union. I don't think the Russians were happy at what was happening, but I think they felt that the regime in charge there had proven itself to be ruthless enough to stay in power. I don't think they thought for a moment that things would evolve the way they did. Obviously, Gorbachev didn't think things would evolve the way they did. I don't want to talk about Czechoslovakia after my time there.

Q: No, no.

KIEHL: But it was clear – hindsight is always 20/20, and if you look at the Velvet Revolution of 1989, and you look back to the mid-'80s, and what was happening there, you could see that this was a growing phenomenon. This didn't happen overnight, it happened over time.

Another thing that happened then, which we had nothing really to do about, which was, again, a spontaneous kind of thing among the Czech youth, John Lennon – the real Lennon, you know – was something of a secular saint among Czech young people, as he was, perhaps to some extent, among American young people, too, after he was killed. There was a Lennon wall, a John Lennon wall, not too far from the embassy, where young people would paint graffiti about freedom and all that sort of thing. The authorities would constantly paint over it and so on, and on Lennon's birthday ...

Q: By the way, this is L-E-N-N-O-N.

KIEHL: Right, not Vladimir. In fact, there's something ironic about that. The real Marxist, Groucho, not Karl. The last year I was there – every year a few hundred Czech young people could gather and do a march of sorts up to the castle, basically, for freedom of expression, and in the context of John Lennon's music and so on. Again, the composers' union, the jazz section of the composers' union, was behind a lot of this. The last year I was there, I think there were 5,000 young people in that march. That's a lot of young people. What they were doing is they were risking their futures, but they were willing to do it. Again, because there were 5,000 of them, nothing happened to anybody. I think when people realized that they had the numbers behind them and the government did not act, even the anniversary of the Soviet invasion, at Wenceslas Square, there was always some sort of demonstration there.

Q: This is the '68 invasion?

KIEHL: The '68 invasion. It was put down rather crudely and nastily each time. Eventually, they didn't have the show of force. They weren't as tenacious, they weren't as mean, as they were earlier. The regime was beginning to loosen its grip, it was getting old and tired and just couldn't handle it anymore, to some extent, and a lot of people within the government and the party were fed up with this kind of life as well. I think there was a malaise that, actually, also happened in Russia with the Gorbachev movement of younger people, who had been exposed to the corruption of Communism and to Western ideas, and just weren't believers anymore. They didn't have the stomach for this. They didn't have the stomach to rule other people by force. That's really what happened in Czechoslovakia. I can't speak to the other countries, but that's certainly what happened there.

Q: Did you find, in the time you were there, '83 to '86, that you were in competition with Soviet cultural presentations or, I mean, how were the Russians, Soviets, received by the Czechs?

KIEHL: It was no competition. The Soviets were received officially by the Czech government with great love and affection, but people, the average person in the street, detested the Russians. They hated the Russians because of the invasion of '68. They hadn't warmed at all to them in the years after. Russian culture was Russian culture. It was Russian, and they didn't like that. Intellectuals in Prague and artistic people could recognize the qualities of Russian opera, certainly, and the ballet. They admired the artistic merits of it, but because it was Russian, it was just not acceptable. In contrast, everything that was American or Western was abhorred by the government but loved by everybody else. It was one of these classic "I don't care if the government hates me as long as the people love me."

When Reagan was re-elected in '84 it was unbelievable. We had a straw ballot in our library, and Reagan got 91% of the vote. It was a joke. The day after the election, when the results were broadcast on local television and radio, and of course VOA, when people saw an American car, they'd all shout like this, "Reagan! Reagan!" Reagan probably could have been president easier in Czechoslovakia than in the United States. They saw in Reagan somebody anti-Communist. That's really what was important to them. It could have been anybody who espoused that kind of philosophy would have been loved by the people in Eastern Europe.

It gave you a great feeling to know that the people were on your side, even if the government hounded you and harassed you and followed you everywhere and bugged your phone and made life miserable for people who associated with you, you knew that you were on the winning side because the people were for you.

Q: Did you get any reflection of the rather large Czech community in the United States?

KIEHL: As I mentioned, the Czechoslovakian-American society donated the 5,000 American flag lapel pins. That probably cost them a dollar apiece to have them produced and sent to us, when they heard about what we were doing there. Of course the people from the Czechoslovakian-American society couldn't easily get to Czechoslovakia and announce the fact that they were part of this organization, because it was seen by the Czech government as

subversive or unfriendly.

The Czech community in the United States was very supportive of the efforts that we were doing there. A number of wealthy Czechs in the U.S. helped to bring artists and writers and so on to the U.S. by donating money to various organization that would invite them, but people had to be very careful not to be associated with a foreign émigré organization, otherwise they could be on trial for espionage. So they were sympathetic, but they couldn't be very direct about it.

Q: How did your wife and family react to all this?

KIEHL: My wife was actually employed at the embassy as the community liaison officer or CLO, and she later joined the Foreign Service as an FSO. So she was very much a part of it. We did a tremendous amount of entertaining in our flat. We'd have groups of people over, showed films all the time, I had a regular motion picture theater in my house just for that purpose, and a projection video. It was an alternate cultural center. She was as involved as I was in hosting all these events. She was delighted to see it happen, too.

We were very close to a lot of Czechs, and a lot of them were couples, as well, so we socialized with a lot of these people. Ivan and Helena Klima, he was a writer, she was a psychiatrist. People like that, who really had Western values and were sort of trapped there. They could have escaped, they could have left, but they chose to remain in Czechoslovakia and work from the inside, knowing that, I suppose as a writer, Ivan was kind of torn, because if he left his milieu – he writes in Czech, so I think it would have been very difficult for him. There were émigrés that were very helpful. Joseph Skvoretsky in Toronto, Toronto '68 publishers, published all of Klima's works in English and in translation, in Canada and the U.S. and UK. So they were being published abroad in Czech and in English. They got known that way, as international writers of some note.

It was at that same time that a Czech poet, Jaroslav Siefert, was given the Nobel Prize for Literature, and that was symbolically very important for Czech culture. He wasn't a dissident, *per se*, but he was not a Communist during that period. He was an elderly man in his 80s when the Nobel was awarded. I gave him a copy of a book that had been published of his work, in the West. I remember that. He was quite old, and his daughter and son-in-law lived with him and helped him around. Not to take anything away from his poetry but his award was a symbol, obviously, of all Czech literature surviving under Communism.

It was a very vibrant, intellectual life there. The theater was incredible. There were 38 legitimate theaters in Prague, ostensibly under the domination of the Ministry of Culture, but it was amazing what they could get away with. They couldn't put on play by Havel but they could put on an apolitical play, and, in such a way, through the translation and also the way it was staged, make it a very political play. There was a fair amount of avant-garde theater going on. A lot of these people were also associated with the jazz section of the composers' union, and close to the Chartists and so on. This was all bubbling under the ...

Q: How about the cinema, because we would get some pretty nice Czech films. The one about Closely Watched Trains?

KIEHL: Yes, Jiri Menzel's.

Q: My Beautiful Village, and all that.

KIEHL: There was a period of real quality Czech films in the late '60s, but after the Soviet invasion and the re-imposition of hard line Communism by about 1970 or so, that had pretty well dried up. Obviously you had people like Milos Foreman, who left the country and became successful abroad. Of course he came back to film Amadeus when we were in Prague. He was basically hung out in my outer office when he wasn't filming, that was his office, I let him use the couch, basically, as an office, and he could read my Herald-Tribunes when he wasn't filming. The crew there was integrated into the embassy in a lot of ways. They used the embassy snack bar and there was a club there that they could join and so on. They brought their own fireworks for the Fourth of July. They shot them off at the top of the Glorietta at the very top of the embassy gardens—high above the city of Prague, without permission of course. The Embassy got a nasty note from the Prague fire authorities but we figured it was worth it because everybody all over Prague saw that symbol of the American flag flying, with fireworks. It was great. These little symbols meant a lot in a place like that.

The Barrandov studios continued to produce quality films, but they were of an apolitical nature. They were very closely watched, not the trains but the filmmakers. Kratky Films, which was an animation studio, did much more interesting work because they weren't as closely watched. We knew people there pretty well, and some of them had party credentials but they were not particularly faithful party members. They were sort of fallen-away Communists, and other people were more obviously not interested in the regime. They did these dark, adult kind of animated films about alienation and so on, and they were brilliant.

Jiri Menzel was probably the best known film director, Closely Watched Trains ...

Q: The Fireman's Ball ...

KIEHL: The Fireman's Ball was Milos Foreman. That was one of the funniest films I've ever seen. I still remember doubling up – I was on the floor of the theater I was laughing so much. But Jiri Menzel stayed in Prague, unlike Foreman, who became successful in the West. Menzel stayed there, and had a pretty restricted life. We would talk occasionally. I would go to a pay phone and talk to him on the phone, sometimes. We would meet rarely. He didn't want to get too close to Americans. Fortunately he was directing a play in Dubrovnik one summer, when we were on the coast, the Yugoslav coast, so we spent a lot of time together, a couple of week, actually, off and on. He was just too fearful for they could have stopped him from filming totally, or they could have exiled him, and for him that would have been the same as cutting off his sight. His career was cut short. There are many people who think he was the better film maker that he was better than Foreman, and he would have had a bigger career in the West than Foreman, but you never know.

Milos Foreman certainly did a lot. He also had twin sons living in Prague, from his first marriage. When he was in exile the Czech authorities would not let him back until he filmed Amadeus. He was never allowed to go back to Czechoslovakia. He'd been exiled from there and stripped of his citizenship. When he was back there, obviously he was under very strict controls and completely

apolitical. He knew better that to meet with any dissidents because of his children, and the commercial aspects of the film, which had to be made. One of the things he did do, however, is give us certain video screening rights, and Saul Zaentz, who was the producer – Michael Houseman was the executive producer and Saul Zaentz was the owner of the film – gave us the rights to show the film in our library continuously, for as long as we wanted, and we did. We played it there for almost a year to a packed house every single time. We also got a 35 millimeter version of it, showed it at the French cultural center, which had a 400 seat auditorium, to invited guests. The invitation was rather loosely conveyed, but we had a half a dozen showings there, a 400 people a throw. So people saw the film.

It was banned from Czechoslovakia, of course, because Foreman's name was associated with it. It was not permitted to be shown, even though it was filmed there and it was about the ...

Q: Why did they let it be filmed there? Money?

KIEHL: They used the Tyl Theater in the film as the Vienna Opera House, and some of the money that they got from that was used to renovate the theater. That was the theatre that the original Don Giovanni was produced in, so they did a Don Giovanni in the Tyl Theater. Prague is a perfect movie set for a period piece like Amadeus because it hadn't changed much.

Anyway, again, everything cultural is intensely political in a place like that. We got a little off the track on ...

Q: No, no, this is ...

KIEHL: Kratky Film was an interesting institution, too, because one of the people, an American, who'd been living in Prague, still lives there – he moved there in the '50s. I think he might have been sympathetic to Socialism at the time. He was a filmmaker and won a couple of Oscars, a guy named Gene Deitch. Interesting guy, he went there to make a short cartoon with Kratky Film, fell in love with the production assistant, got married and stayed in Prague all those years. He was actually quite apolitical, but willing to tolerate living in Prague when he could have left anytime and probably taken his wife with him. So he wasn't a Stalinist, but I think he was on the left end of liberal America. So for him it wasn't a place too intolerable. He and his wife had met a lot of cartoonists and a lot of the animators at Kratky Film, and they were an interesting group of people, a whole subset of people who could create films with political content which totally went over the heads of clucks who were censors, or maybe not so over their heads.

In other words, there was an official at the ministry of culture – and I hesitate to even use his name – who was a senior official at the Czech ministry of culture, and he was responsible for, essentially, keeping everybody down, in that sense, to kick people out of the writer's union. And yet, I would see him at avant-garde plays, given in small theaters on the fringe of Prague, with a largely dissident audience, and he'd be among them, and was always sympathetic to that. He was another one of these conflicted Communist officials, who had to put on, perhaps, the public face of being the model Communist bureaucrat, but his inner self was sympathetic to his government's enemies.

Q: Did you get any feel for university studies, the academics, the students? For one thing, were they teaching orthodox Communist economics and all that, Marxist economics?

KIEHL: They were. Economics was, and political science, were the very restricted departments. There were also the higher party schools where they really relied upon getting the ideology across. The universities were dominated by the Communists. In order to be a department chairman you had to be a member of the Communist party, absolutely, and from department chairman on up. So you had a lot of unqualified people in higher levels who did it purely for ambition and for prestige and power. Some of the best people were not even employed in universities, but more and more, as I lived there, I understood how most of the university faculty got by.

For example, I had a really good session with, actually, almost the entire English department of the University of Brno one time. We sat around, and I asked them how it was, how did they deal with this? They all loved America, they all loved American culture, British literature, they were the English department. How did they reconcile this? They said well, what they did when the bad days came, is they got together and decided that somebody would have to be a member of the Communist party so that they could be the department chairman, and the short straw lost. That person, then, became the party man and ran the department, but in name only. They still taught the way they wanted to, they still did the things they wanted to do. They weren't allowed to leave the country very frequently, of course, and all those other restrictions that go beyond the university, but within the university department they were able to survive, because they had made an accommodation. They had short-strawed somebody to be the bad guy, to be the chairman of the department, to be the Communist party member. That was in name only. It was purely a device to survive.

That didn't happen in every department in every university but it happened in enough of them that you could see that the party's hold over the university was only up here, at the administrative level. At the teaching level, people basically could get away with an awful lot. Of course the students were growing up in a society where everybody was doing the Good Soldier Schweik. Everybody, or almost everybody, except for the –

Q: You better explain what the Good Soldier Schweik is.

KIEHL: Well, it's a character in a Czech novel about WWI and the soldier basically plays dumb and does what he wants. That's the way – that's very much in the Czech character. They would rather switch than fight, you might say, but they keep their own integrity by saying, "Well, I know what I believe, but if he wants to hear something else I'll tell him what he wants to hear." That's essentially what most people did. Other than the 1,500 or so outright dissidents, Charter 77 signers and so on, and a few thousand people who were true, believing Communists, if there were even that many. Almost everybody else, whether they were a member of the Communist party, whether they were policemen, secret policemen, or university faculty, or people who worked in the government bureaucracy or the party bureaucracy, almost nobody – actually, I don't think I met more than I could count on one hand people I thought were true believers in Communism. The people did one of two things. They either accommodated and became zealous in the sense that they could move up in the party and therefore enrich themselves and their lives, or they would go along with the prevailing Communists to the minimum extent in order to survive, but work against it

privately. Almost everybody fell into one of those two categories. The vast majority, I would say, showed a public face of indifference or loyalty to the regime but hated it.

Even those people who were gung ho, on the surface, Communists – I'm thinking of particularly some of the journalists who wrote really ridiculous articles in the newspapers every day and laughed about it and said, "Of course this is nonsense, but I have to do it in order to survive." They hated it. They also hated themselves, I think, for having to do it. The whole system was a house of cards, when you really think about it. It was a hollow government, a hollow ideology. It's surprising it lasted as long as it did, actually.

Q: You left there in ...

KIEHL: 1986. Summer of '86.

ROBERT WILLIAM FARRAND
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1983-1985)

Ambassador Farrand was born in Watertown, New York in 1934 and graduated from Mount Saint Mary's College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Moscow and Prague and was named ambassador to Papua, New Guinea in 1990. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: In '83 where did you go?

FARRAND: Jack Matlock had been appointed as ambassador to Prague which had always been in professional hands going all the way back to the Second World War, except for one time in the late '20s when Prague was in the hands of the Crane Toilet, scion of the Crane toilet bowl manufacturers. I knew as deputy director of the office that I was in a good position probably to get a deputy chief of mission shift in one of these six countries, which was my love. Eastern Europe and the Slavic world was what I had decided what I wanted to do. I got a call from the Deputy Chief of Mission, Marty Weinock, saying to me, "Bill, if you are interested to coming to Prague to succeed me, you'd better let Jack know." So, I got myself, John Davis asked me to take a tour of all of the countries and I did. I went to all of the countries and all the capitals talking to everybody in about a two week visit. In my last stop was Prague and when I drove in there and I really didn't want to go back to Prague, I'd already served there, but when I drove into Prague by train, it was a bright, sunny springtime day and there was something about the way the sun glinted on the city and the embassy look that day. It was an old coming home. I told Jack that if he would let me, I would like to be his DCM so he brought me out. I went to Prague as deputy chief of mission. That's the answer.

Q: Then you did that from '83 to when?

FARRAND: '85.

Q: What was '83 to '85 like, what was the situation while you there?

FARRAND: Gustav Hussack was the Prime Minister and he was the Prime Minister under the president named Sloboda. A war hero, a white man war hero from the Second World War, but the and I may have his name just wrong there, but I think that was it. The Prime Minister was a commie, total totee of Moscow. His name was Gustav Hussack. His only, the only thing I remember about him was he had a deep, sonorous voice. He could have been a radio announcer, he could have been anything he wished to do as long as he used his voice, but he was what he was. It was a very hard time for us. There was very little interaction. They had the embassy under total surveillance. It was a time of testing, always of testing.

Q: The Czechs were notorious for running, training secret service agents of Czechs and East Germans abroad in socialist countries. There wasn't much we could do about that was there?

FARRAND: We had a two-man station and that was their function to watch that aspect. We had, our embassy was about thirty-seven officers, something. It wasn't a large embassy, but it wasn't a small embassy. It was at the smaller end of a medium sized embassy. We had everything we needed. In other words, we had all of the various units. I don't think we had an agricultural attache, we didn't. We took one officer and made him agricultural attache, but that's the only thing. We had USIA; we had a full consular section and all of this. It was a hard time. We had to make such progress I guess as we could, but how do you define progress? Do you define progress, as good bilateral relations in typical Foreign Service is that good bilateral relations, is it progress? No, there shouldn't have been. Now, I'll tell you a small anecdote. When I arrived in Prague in August of 1983, Jack Matlock was the ambassador, but he came in not more than two days after saying, "Richard Pipes and Ronald Reagan want me to return to the NSC as Soviet Affairs Specialist. I don't want to go I'm enjoying this here. I'm really have been enjoying being an ambassador and I don't want to go, but they're being very insistent. I'll let you know." Well, I was there a week, maybe two weeks. The third week he came in, he sat in the office right next door. He said, "Sorry, I've got some news. I've got to go. They have not yet decided who will be my successor, so for a time you're going to be charge." Well, I didn't come here for that. So, I listened and I said, "Jack, give me some hints, will you?" He said, "Yes, I will." One hint he gave me, he said, "Bill, as you go into this, there's one thing you got to keep in mind. As much as you much focus on the larger issues, you must also focus on the smaller issues as well. Don't let them get out of focus because the little things can really trip you up." So, then he left and he came in in a funny way and said, "Oh by the way, I will do all I can to delay my successor's arrival for you." He joked. The successor was eventually Bill Lewers, William Lewers, who had been ambassador to Venezuela and was a Soviet hand and well known, and had been deputy assistant secretary in EUR. Bill was, had been slated to go to Spain, but instead of giving Bill Spain, they gave Spain to that great, big tall ambassador, Thomas Enders. They owed him for something.

Q: Yes. They wanted to get him out of ARA because he was proving to be difficult for the Ollie North and other people.

FARRAND: Isn't, that too bad. Wouldn't it have been better if they had left him there?

Q: Oh, absolutely.

FARRAND: Well, anyway they gave it to Enders, and Lewers then got Czechoslovakia as, what do you call it when you don't get the top prize?

Q: Booby prize.

FARRAND: Well, not booby.

Q: Some consolation, second prize.

FARRAND: Yes, yes, well, so Bill was going to come and it was now August, September, October, November, and December. It was now early part of August. I guess I got there in July. Jack leaves in the early part of August. So, now I'm charge. This is the anecdote. This is I think worth talking about a little bit. In 1977, in Moscow when Malcolm Tomb was ambassador I think it was seven, but it might have been five, but I think it was seven Pentecostals from Siberia came to the American Embassy's consular section, got inside and refused to leave. Refused to leave. The consul general at the time, I was head of the commercial section down below, but the consul general at the time had not either alerted the ambassador or had alerted him and in any way, it just wasn't taken double, triple serious. There were other things going on upstairs in the embassy and it just wasn't taken double, triple serious. Now, a government building in the U.S. government closes at 5:00. At 5:00 all unauthorized personnel leave the government building. I suppose there's large exceptions to this, but as a general rule if you want to get tight about it, that's the way it is. An embassy is a government building. These people had said, "We're not leaving." So, they were allowed to stay in the waiting room overnight. Now, that meant that the rule that you leave a government building at 5:00 had been broken. In other words, you were now pregnant. By the time this got to the ambassador it was a day later or two days later. He said, "What, they have to leave." They won't leave because they were under such pressure from the KGB and not only the KGB, the IBD, the internal police. They were from Siberia, they were Pentecostals and they had been severely harassed. They had children with them, they had women with them and there were two men. The other man was the pastor and he was not going to budge. Now, why is this important? How long do you think it took to get those seven people out of the American Embassy? Years, years, years, years. Apartments had to be prepared for them, beds prepared for them, stoves, places to wash their clothes, the police were all around the outside of the embassy to make sure that they weren't slipped out. We couldn't get them out of the country through the airport because the airport is totally controlled. It became, well, with us. I went from Moscow where I had been commercial attache I went back to the desk and became head of the bilateral section in the political division and I was responsible for working with these Pentecostals and with all of the Pentecostal groups in the United States who were doing everything they could to keep them in the American Embassy. The ambassador wanted them out. They lost that on the first day. They were pregnant. We were pregnant and then all of our because then if we were going to put them out, by then the news had been out and if we were going to throw them out onto the street we were going to do it on CNN with Christiane Amanpour talking into the machine. I don't think she was there yet, I don't think Christiane Amanpour was there yet, but you know what I'm saying. ABC, CBS, they were all there in Moscow and it would have been. The Congress would have been, come on. Now, now

we go back to Prague. That occurred in 1977 and we didn't get them out of there until. I was on the desk '78 to '79 and we didn't get them out of there until '81. Now, I go off to Prague in '83. I made charge. Now let's talk East Germany. If in your mind's eye the listener's mind's eye, you can picture East Germany as being to the northwest of Czechoslovakia connected at a city called Kepp, or right near Kepp, connected, but to the northwest with Poland kind of hovering right over Czechoslovakia, with East Germany off to the northwest. What, this is what happened in those days. Nobody from Eastern Europe could get a visa to go to the West, nobody could defect and get out unless you were very lucky, you married one and somehow you were very, very lucky. But, what happened was this. A great number of Germans would come from Bavaria into Bohemia which is the western most part of Czechoslovakia, come to Prague, drink cheap beer and make some business deals with the communists, Germans, German businessmen would do this.

Q: Oh, West Germans.

FARRAND: West Germans, Bavarians, West Germans would come in, they could do it because Prague and Czechoslovakia liked Germany money. The Deutschmark was considered a hard money. They were playing games, too. Now, now, what happened, the dissident movement and the movement of people who wanted to be refugees out of East Germany and who didn't, learned that they could come south, cross the border from East Germany into Czechoslovakia, a sister Warsaw Pact state and say they were coming into Prague to do so shopping. Not a problem because Czechs went to Poland, Poles came down into Czechoslovakia. East Germans did some of the same because they didn't go to Poland anywhere near like they'd go to Czechoslovakia because of historical reasons and because the Poles didn't have a very well developed economy, the Czechs did more. Then, what was happening and this is very important, these people would come and they started coming in the autumn of 1983. Now this was something I didn't know about. I didn't know about this happening. They would come down, the businessmen from West Germany would be in the beer stuba downtown, St. Thomas' beer stuba, down would come the Germans, East Germans, and they would come into the same beer stuba. They would make all kinds of contacts, which they could not do across the wall and this was insidious and then they would make more and more. They would trade information about families, they would. There were even some cases where they would be smuggled in the West German businessman's car across the border, sleeping, sitting in the gas tank or some damn thing. While this was happening, as more East Germans came down, they realized that Czechoslovakia was a place that they could put pressure on to get themselves out to their families in West Germany. They began to come and stay. They began to come down and refused to go back and they were supported in this by West Germans. Now, right up the street from me from the American embassy. We were on a cul de sac, but right up the street, there were three palaces up the street. There was the German embassy, which was a palace. These people would come up and run into the German embassy. Now, in those days, the German foreign minister was who, Genscher, Hans Dietrich Genscher. Genscher was of the liberal wing of the liberal party, of the free, of the FDP, Free Democratic Party. He held that the German constitution was open to every German returning from everywhere and we could not throw him out of an embassy. So, he put the word to the embassy in Prague, accept all Germans of whatever side. Now, I'll finish this shortly. Up the street from me, which led to a cul de sac, the German ambassador, Meyer, was accepting East Germans into his embassy. In the beginning, one or two, three or four, four or five, five or six, six or seven, seven or eight, and he was coming to the point that his embassy was jammed to the gills. He didn't have enough water, he didn't have enough toilet facilities, he didn't

have places, but they would not leave and Bonn was telling him keep them, don't send them out. The Czechs got very nervous about this and they started putting police along the way and they started harassing. Well, since we were 300 meters down the street from them, these people who were having trouble with the Czech police and difficulties at the German embassy because it was so jammed. They started coming into our embassy; they started coming into our embassy. They would duck into our embassy because it was very loosely guarded on the front gate. They would duck into our embassy, ask to see the consul, get in the consular section and say they wouldn't leave. Now, I had my experience in Moscow, so I said, "No, none of them will be staying here tonight." The consul was a young man, fine young man who was going off to Romania to be DCM right now, but anyways, a fine young man, Thomas Delmare. He said, "But, DCM, Bill, what can I do?" Then I said, "You just tell them that they have to leave by 5:00. It's now 2:30, they've been here since 10:00 this morning, they have two and a half or three hours to get out of here." "Well, what if they don't go?" "Just tell them that." Then I got my marine guards and I said, "I want you to dress up." They didn't have any gun. I said, "Now, I just want you to just walk in there and stand in the consular section and I want you, the consular officer every thirty minutes and tell me what the situation is." "Will you come and talk to them?" "No, I won't come talk to them. I am the Wizard of Oz. You will go, but they will be out." I went through about two and a half or three months of this and every single one of them would crack before the end of the day and would leave through our front door and we would close it at 5:00. Every single one, even the father of a little child who was crying. I said, no they will be out of this embassy. I did not want that to happen on my time. I was doing this, I was reporting this to the Department, but again the Department wasn't going to be interested in Prague and then comes the ambassador and we were still having this issue. The ambassador comes and I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I want you to know what's been going on here for the past four and a half months, five months. I want you to know I received a demarche from the German ambassador asking me to come and see him because I was the charge and he was ambassador. I went up to see him and sat in his office and he said, "Please tell me what are you doing? What are you doing?" I said, "Well, Mr. Ambassador, I'm not doing anything. I'm just not going to have unauthorized persons in my embassy past working hours. They can come, they can petition, they can talk to us, they can give us their stories, I will give you their stories, I will treat them humanely, but they will not stay past." He said, "My God, this is going to lead to a disaster." I said, "Well, it hasn't yet." When the ambassador came he said, "We'd better put this in front of the Department. I want a policy on this." I said, "Alright." So, I wrote up a policy and sent it in and he sent it up to then Undersecretary for Political Affairs Lawrence Eagleburger. Eagleburger came back in a high dudgeon and said, "I, from hence forward, I will approve each of these expulsions from our embassy personally." I said to Ambassador Lewers, I said, "Bill, that is a recipe for total disaster. First of all, no way if one of these East German families comes in here and throws themselves on our mercy at 3:00 in the afternoon are we ever going to get back to the Department with a report of it and all of the details that they will need to see whether this is a legitimate case or not and get the turnaround time. I mean, I can't even be sure we will get the. I mean, in those days we had typewriters right? Selectric typewriters. Get the cable out and approved, get it back there and get the okay to put them on the street by 5:00. I said, "No way." I said, "Second, you know Eagleburger, this is just harrumph and he won't even be available. He'll be in a meeting with the Prime Minister of Thailand and he won't be able to pass sand on this. We will start eating these and you're going to have a situation. Once you've eaten one, you can't then say the next day you're going to have this place jammed just as Hans Meyer has up the street." By that time the German ambassador was going bats. He had one little toilet in an open area. It was a big palace. I said,

“What’s going to happen when one of these young woman is pregnant? Are we going to send her to the Czech hospital to have her baby? Who’s going to come in and look at that pregnant girl? How are we going to get her? Who’s going to take care of that pregnant girl?” Well, it happened. It happened and they had to deliver a baby inside of their embassy. The argument I made to the Department was hey, we are an embassy the way embassies are in this part of the world. We have no commissary; we have no special facility, no clinic. We don’t have a doctor assigned to our staff. Even if we did have a doctor assigned to our staff, is that doctor qualified to practice in another country? Now, in an emergency, of course, but so Ambassador Lewers saw this immediately. This can’t work and I said, I explained everything I explained to you. I think it’s a big mistake if we soften on just one case. By the way, the word then was getting out in the community, the American Embassy will not accept you. It was keeping the people away; otherwise we would have gotten our entire courtyard filled. So, this was a time when experience that I had seen in another place that worked to our disadvantage, four years is a long time to have people. I didn’t know at that time, nor did Mac Tomb, nor did Bill Lewers, nor Lawrence Eagleburger, or anybody that the communist party was going to collapse in six years. We could have had huge numbers of people in our courtyard for six years. All right, that’s my hero speech.

Q: So, anyway, what happened?

FARRAND: Eagleburger backed off and actually what happened, the Czech government negotiated with the German government, and I’m talking here western, the Federal Republic of Germany and they were working all the time. A big deal was made and about five big busses were sent in from Germany, people were loaded on and taken straight out as a convoy and then they agreed not to take anymore. That defused it.

Q: Well, Bill we have to stop at this point, but I tell you what, the next time we come before we leave Czechoslovakia, ‘83 to ‘85, I’d like to ask you about how we saw relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks. Also, did you have any connection with the dissident movement and the Helsinki Accords? Was this beginning to resonant? We’ll pick that up the next time.

FARRAND: Alright.

Q: Today is the 16th of July, 2001. Bill, we’re still back in Czechoslovakia. What was your take on the relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks at that point?

FARRAND: That situation I feel particularly badly how it has all come out, but Czechoslovakia, if I have my history right, was essentially broken and put back together after the First World War at a conference held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Largely brokered by Woodrow Wilson or at least he had a role in it. The Czechs made up roughly two-thirds of Czechoslovakia, with the Slovaks one-third. This may have contributed to the problem. The Slovaks were more deeply indebted in the Slavic world, that is being further to the east. The Czech Republic as it is today or back then, Czechoslovakia, the Czech part of it, Bohemia and Moravia were like a thumb sticking into what I guess you would call traditional Western Europe. That gave them an outlook possibly that,

possibly the fact that they had had Charles University since 1348. They had had a great relationship under the Holy Roman Empire. Some of their kings were related to kings from Western Europe, principally France. So, that they had a Western outlook, perhaps the Slovaks had a more Eastern outlook. I don't know. I do know this, that there was a problem all along and, I guess it comes down to use pop psychology to one of kind of a superiority inferiority relationship.

Q: Well, I'm trying to get at how you saw it at the time, members of the embassy. Was it something that you thought was significant or was it just?

FARRAND: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, it was, there was I think it wasn't spoken about a lot because it didn't look like there was going to be a real movement to divide, but if you had asked any of them, the ambassadors under whom I worked, deputy chiefs of mission, there would have been unanimity, that in unity the Czech and the Slovak peoples had a better chance in the world. They were landlocked after all; they had no outlet to the sea, north, south, east or west. The Danube River came through on the southern border for part of it with Austria, but really the Czechs had to rely and the Slovaks had to rely on highways and secondary, really secondary rivers for their goods. So, there would have been no difference of opinion within the embassy that this union should stay together particularly because it was brokered by the United States, but there was in the United States a very strong Slovak American movement. There was a congress, maybe still is a Slovak American congress unless I remember it was focused in Pittsburgh, could be wrong. In any case, these people were constantly pushing to have a hyphen; they were pushing for a hyphen. They wanted Czecho-Slovakia. They could not stand Czechoslovakia because it gave the Czechs the capital C and they didn't get a capital S. Stuff like this and it was.

Q: But, relations were so, I take it, relations were so poor with Czechoslovakia at that time that we weren't really looking at the divisions and what this would cause because there just didn't seem to be any room for any political movement to wiggle in, in that?

FARRAND: Absolutely right. The Soviets would have had no interest in splitting up Czechoslovakia, but made it more difficult for them. They had unity of command or command control by having them together, no, absolutely right. That's an excellent point because the larger problem was the dead end of communism.

Q: What about the dissident movement, which became so important four or five years later. Was that at all apparent or did you have any contact with the embassy?

FARRAND: We had a three person political section. I instructed the political counselor, well when I was charge and then when I was deputy chief of mission. I instructed the political counselor to be in touch with the dissident movement, but I left it to him. He, in fact, delegated it.

Q: Who was that?

FARRAND: That would have been, now we're talking about my second time, when I was deputy chief of mission, correct? That would have been James Bodnar. He was not a Foreign Service officer. He was a civil servant that had spent about eighteen years roughly in the Bureau of Intelligence and Research focusing on Eastern Europe. Jim was a good man, but he was, I will

have to say it, he was not a street man. He simply wasn't a street man.

Q: You mean somebody to go out and meet people and all, looking at papers and so on?

FARRAND: No, he was excellent when given the job of analyzing what might appear in the newspapers, most of the news in the newspapers when it came to political matters, of course was air sots. That was his strength. His strength was not the street, the back. It was very difficult. I mean, you're still talking, the hold of communism was still strong. The Czechs had an intelligence service internal that rivaled the KGB. It was as good as or better than the KGB. They went to school on the KGB, but being Czechs and being more exposed to the West they had more chance to exercise, whereas KGB was deep inside. Their targets of opportunity were fewer and they stuck out more strongly and it didn't require quite the, I don't know. The fingerspitzengafeela, as the Germans say it. It didn't require quite the same thing, but the Czechs had a very strong and vicious STB they called it, it's the same thing. Well, so the contact with the dissidents fell to a young woman, whose name I'll remember, excellent and she and her husband, he was a spouse, a dependent spouse would have the dissidents around and I encouraged that. I told them that I, at the DCM house, because my house was on the ambassadorial compound. The ambassadorial compound had three police kiosks watching everything we did. I said, "Look, it's not a good for these people to come to my house, but they can come to your house." Then occasionally, maybe once a month invite me and my wife, just invite me and we'll come and then we'll mingle. I had no trouble with the ambassador, I mean, he put, this was his house, but we thought absolutely alike because we were old Soviet hands and knew how crucially important it was to keep in touch with the opposition and we did. The dissidents came to this young woman's house, we would sit and I'd have conversations well into the night. She did too, more than I.

Q: How did you see the dissident movement at the time?

FARRAND: I saw it as I saw Czech opposition in major wars that they had endured over the years. The Czechs are not a confrontive people. They are, the Czechs are a quizzical people. The difference between a Czech and a Russian after I've lived both places for a long time is quite remarkable. Both are capable of hardship and enduring hardship, but the Czech is going to be, is going to retreat into his mind and in his thoughts. The Russian is going to let you know what his thoughts are right out there on the table and then he gets on with his life, hard as it may be. The Czech is more self-contained.

Q: You left Prague in 1985?

FARRAND: I left in '85.

Q: Where did you go?

FARRAND: But, before we leave, you had another part to your, you had three things you wanted to talk about with the Czechs. You had the dissidents, you had the Slovaks and the Helsinki Accord. If I might say just before we leave the Slovak thing, that I followed that and after in the early 1990s, the Slovaks split and became a country, Slovakia. I remember hearing that where I was, I guess I was out in the South Pacific and I just shook my head and continue to shake my head.

It just seems to me that the Slovaks in doing what they've done is to shoot themselves directly in the foot.

Q: When you look at it, it was really not even put to a vote, it was a political thing.

FARRAND: No, Mechear pushing it then and it was given support by this congress back here, of course. Now, here they are even more isolated, even less supported and the Czechs would and Hovell, Hovell would have resisted, I don't know about Klauss, but Hovell was resisting and he would have. It is probably true that the Czechs in their internal conversations looked down on the Slovaks and the Slovaks feel this, but that is not a reason to break up a country. In the intermarriage rate was something in the rate of, I don't know, it had to be a significant number in the double figures.

Q: Oh, yes. Well, it's the same way when I was in Naples, the northern Italians looked down on the Southern Italians, but you know they not going to, I mean, I don't think the Italians are stupid enough to declare a northern republic. There are some that talk way.

FARRAND: Both the Czechs and the Slovaks have been diminished, both have been diminished. Mostly the Slovaks have been diminished. You know, you talk about dissidents, when Hovell was released from prison and Yurgi Deemspear, who is their foreign minister, I had them, all of them, over to my house on that occasion, had Hovell sitting in my front living room. He was nothing but an ex-con sitting in the front living room. I didn't speak really fluent Czech, I spoke decent Czech, but not really fluent. So, he didn't speak any English. We couldn't communicate, but I communicated with his wife and others. On one occasion I had Yurgi Deemspear try to come see me one night and he was hiding in the bushes outside my house in the porch to give you an idea. I mean, we ere giving them considerable amount of support. I would have to say as much; well I won't get into comparisons. I was going to say in comparison with other Western embassies. I certainly, we were after near the top. But, now on the Helsinki. Now on Helsinki it worked out that Albert Scherer, Jr. was the first ambassador under whom I served, not during the tour that we're talking about here, but earlier. He had been pulled off by the White House to become the United States Representative at the Helsinki Talks. He went there and did that. At the same time, having his hat as ambassador to Czechoslovakia. So, the embassy in Prague had contributed directly to at least by our ambassador being there, so we knew probably as much about that or as maybe as any other non-supporting embassy. Helsinki Talks, they became an increasing factor in 1975, they were signed up there in Helsinki and they became an increasing factor in our work. Actually they were very helpful because we could quote parts to the government and put out to press, media, freedom of the press.

JULIAN M. NIEMCZYK
Ambassador
Czechoslovakia (1986-1989)

Ambassador Julian M. Niemczyk was born in 1920 in Oklahoma, the son of an Army officer. He went to Oklahoma University and then went into the Army during

World War II, eventually being assigned to the OSS serving in Burma and China. He remained in the Air Force and served in Japan and the Philippines and eventually Warsaw as an air attaché. He was Defense Attaché in Prague during the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. He was appointed as ambassador to Czechoslovakia in 1986. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: What was the situation in Czechoslovakia when you arrived in 1986?

NIEMCZYK: Naturally the Eastern Europe division and the Czech Desk officer and others filled me in on what was going on over there. So I knew when I arrived that both people in Washington and Prague would be asking me, "What changes have you seen in the hierarchy, etc.?" Well, there were no changes. The same people who had gone in 1968 when I left...Husak was still President, Bielik still the Chairman of the Communist Party, and Jakes the Prime Minister. There had been no changes. We had this big thing printed in 1969 with the photographs and titles and two photos had been x-ed across...both had deceased. The rest had remained for 20 long years, taking the perks and dealing the hardship to the people. In that respect there was no change.

I used to say that I noticed when I was there 20 years ago, to get from Prague to Brno it took you four hours on a two lane highway, now, 20 years later, it takes two hours on a new four lane highway. That was one thing that I would point out. There was probably an improvement in the variety of commodities in the store fronts in the town. I said earlier that in '68 there were a lot of commodities but not a variety. Clothing was more abundant in the stores. Not too expensive.

I think Czechoslovakia kept the lid on prices as it did keeping the lid on its people. They had those advantages. Then they had the cons as well. I am reminded that if a Czech national or a Slovak national didn't toe the line of communism, if they were in a two-bedroom apartment, they would be threatened or in fact moved to a one bedroom apartment with all their family. Or, if they were in a Charter 77 group and were involved in opposing the government or participating in night time meetings, or meeting too often with members of the American Embassy, or the Ambassador, their children would not be permitted after elementary or high school to go on to higher education. Travel in and out of the country was very tightly controlled. So with those things staring them in the face, it had a tendency to keep the people in line.

Religion was about the same. I saw a different improvement. I am a Catholic as I mentioned earlier and my wife and I would go to the different churches around Prague to see the Gothic, the Renaissance, the Baroque architecture, and also to go out and get a free instrumental ...some churches would be only organ, some organ and choir or vocalist, but there were one or two churches where every Sunday you could count on an instrumental group of horns, violins, harps, etc. They would play a Mozart Mass in D, or something like that. It was truly a pleasure. Not only a religious pleasure but an appreciation of architecture and music hour. What we would see would be more young people when I was there as Ambassador 20 years later. We would see these young people come in, churches were unheated in the winter, all bundled up and be in groups and if there were no seats available they would be seated over on an elevated platform just listening to the music, maybe not the sermon. There was a tendency more of the youth to get involved in religion and still later for the youth to get involved in this opposition to the government...The youth, the

Catholic Church and the Charter 77.

Q: Would you explain, because this was a very important element, what Charter 77 was and how you, as the Ambassador, and your Embassy dealt with it during this period when you were there from 1986-89?

NIEMCZYK: Charter 77 was a group of, I think, about 1,200 people who in 1977 signed a charter opposing certain activities and principles of their own country and the Communist leadership didn't like this at all. Therefore, they accused the Charter 77 people in opposing the Communist government, of being traitors, etc. The officials to me would even refer to the Charter 77 people as their enemies. So the Charter 77 people were often under surveillance, often jailed, as was Václav Havel and many, many others. Their life was miserable and they went from Jiri Dienstieir, for example, who was in public affairs, press, in 1968 was relegated to being a coal stoker. He is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Havel, now the President, was jailed so many times and I as Ambassador with the Embassy, with the State Department, with the White House, were responsible for getting him out of jail. During the period he was in jail only his wife could visit. We tried to get members of my staff to visit. Impossible. My wife would visit, Olga, his wife, at their five story walk-up apartment with boxes of two items...one he needed and one he didn't. Very strong vitamin tablets which we would get at the Nürnberg Exchange, which he needed because he had respiratory problems and health problems and cigarettes, which he didn't need but he was a chain smoker and still is. Then his wife would take those over to the jail.

There was a Catholic priest, Father Maly, who was defrocked, not permitted to do anything like serving mass these 20 years, now has his own parish in Prague. And I could go on and on.

Q: The Embassy with the full support of the American Government was responsible for getting Havel out of jail. Now Havel was a Czech citizen, there was no connection with the United States. How does one be instrumental in accomplishing this?

NIEMCZYK: I would go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and say, "I have a list of four things here that I have been instructed by the State Department to bring to your attention, Mr. Minister. Out in Slovakia you have Mr. Novotny in jail and you ought to be giving some thoughts to improving your human rights which you tell us you want to do. Get him out of jail. You have Václav Havel in jail now for the second time and you are talking to us about your not having Most Favored Nation treatment and you desperately need it and you do, in fact, need it, but you are not going to get it unless you do a couple of these things."

Then a CODEL of Senators or Representatives would come in. I can remember John Glenn, Senator from Ohio, with a group of five. Barbara Mikulski, who is of Polish heritage, Senator from Maryland. Senator Thad Cochran from Mississippi. Senator Kit Bond from Missouri. Another time Senators John Warner of Virginia and Sam Nunn of Georgia came in to discuss arms control matters with the military. But each time we would set meetings up for a CODEL they would always ask for the highest level...the President, Chairman of the Party, Minister of Foreign Affairs...some times they would get two out of three or three out of four...and out of meanness the

Czechs would not let them see somebody. But on those visits there would be an opportunity again at a very high level of government...Senators and Representatives, and we would talk in my Embassy secure room..."Senator here is what we hope you are going to drive home when you talk...Havel was in jail, Novotny was in jail, the continued surveillance of these people, etc....they are not helping themselves by improving their human rights so that they can ultimately get MFN."

So to answer your question, through myself, my private visits with them, and bringing in these senior level Senators and Representatives, they too would extend the voice of the American Government to these leaders and they would take note at times.

Q: The MFN, Most Favored Nation, why would the Czechs be interested? They were integrated into the Soviet economy so what difference would it make to them?

NIEMCZYK: They truly want to trade with America and without the MFN the meager five or six items that I recall that they were able to sell to the US...ham, beer, leather goods, etc....had such a terrific tax, 37 or 47 percent tax not being a member of MFN, but if they got MFN treatment it would be reduced to 7 or 8 percent tax.

Q: What about the British and French Ambassadors? Were they playing an equal type game?

NIEMCZYK: The Czechs will tell you, as they told me, that the French and the British and others came in after they saw what the US, we, were doing. My predecessor, Bill Leurs, was involved as well in supporting them in this respect. My effort was just a continuation of his effort. The Dutch, I guess, came in first. They were very effective. Then the French and the Italians and West Germans learned. We would have NATO meetings monthly at various embassies and would report on what we had done. I would report on what our last visiting Congressional delegation was able to do. They got the idea that this was the way to go.

Q: Did your Embassy have contact with members of Charter 77?

NIEMCZYK: Yes. I had an officer on my staff who had as a big part of his job to maintain contact with the Charter 77 people. He would invite them to his home for drinks, would have once a month an open house for them to come. Of course, there would be surveillance and everybody who went to his house for drinks and small finger food would be noted and surveilled. Some of them would not be permitted to leave their apartment or be permitted to enter his house from the street side. So once in a while I would go. My wife and I would occasionally entertain them, half a dozen more or less, at the residence. Of course they were surveilled there. But Bob Norman, who was the person in charge...my staff used to get a little envious of Bob because they all wanted to help these people out and be in touch with them. I spread the wealth around a little bit. But it was Bob's main job.

Regrettably for him, three weeks before he was to leave, he was PNGed by the Czech government for his dealings with Charter 77, the opposition and the enemy. This meant that all the farewell parties that had been planned were scrubbed. It was unfair.

Q: What was your impression and those you were working with in the Embassy of the Charter 77 people at the time? Was this in a way a PR job? Did you feel these were ideologues or nice people

but it wasn't going any where but we should support them? What was the feeling towards the group?

NIEMCZYK: Clearly they were being discriminated and persecuted in many respects. They were jailed, surveilled, arrested and their apartments were entered and ransacked. We felt for them. We were concerned that their numbers didn't grow as you might have expected them to do. I think I mentioned that there was originally 1200 or 1500 signatories, but for some reason...maybe they didn't recruit...their numbers always remained constant. But you would have other elements out there. The Catholic Church and the young people and others who would have a participating part to play, but they would not identify themselves as a Charter 77 person.

Q: What was the role of CIA there? How did you find it, as Ambassador, as a tool to keep you informed?

NIEMCZYK: Satisfactory. Nothing real great. The benefits that we derived from the Station, and we had both CIA and NSA, was from the electronic devices that we had in the Embassy. As a CIA operation they would read the papers and look at what was going on and make their reports. I had access to their chron file. They were reporting in competition with the State Department. That didn't bother me. It might have bothered the State Department. It was a small, three or four person station. All of them had some sort of cover that permitted them to operate all right. But they were never out doing the more covert type operations. They would do a little surveillance once in a while and they had a dead drop where they would leave messages or pick up reports. I can't recall anything of extreme importance. It was helpful. Except for the electronics which was very good.

Q: We are talking about the first two years that you were there when things seemed to be static. What would a typical day for an ambassador be like?

NIEMCZYK: Up in the morning. Do a little exercise cycle at home. Get to the office early, often before some of the staff. They finally got the idea that they should be in ahead of me or with me.

I would go over the previous night's cables which had been sorted out for me...I didn't see the routine administrative cables...read them and put routing slips on them. The DCM, sitting in the next office to me, would have the same stack of items, maybe he would have something more like admin, finance, etc. which he later would bring to my attention. But I would read first the traffic and designate the responsible action officer or note it to be an item for discussion at the next NATO ambassadors meeting. Or, if a response was required I would note that.

Then our mail would come in. The secretary would have a folder for me with the incoming mail and I would read all of that, again with routing slips indicate the action officer, or I would send it to the DCM...

Q: Who was your DCM?

NIEMCZYK: I had for the first year the man my predecessor had selected and because he still had a year of his tour...I learned later that it was really set up by the State Department while I was involved in consultation and meeting the Departments and Agencies...they permitted him to travel

back on State Department orders and per diem to meet and talk to me and tell me that he had one more year to go and would like to be DCM. I didn't have a chance to meet with his wife and that was part of the problem that I experienced later. But the good natured part of me took hold and with all the State Department people saying this man was top notch, and he was good, I said all right.

But this man had worked two years for my predecessor. There was a loyalty factor and a difficulty on his part to adjust, but the handwriting was on the wall. I had a year with him when I wasn't getting the max out of him for me. Bill Leurs would call long distance from New York and talk to Carl Schmidt and say, "Hey, Carl, I am coming in next week. Could you do this and that for me?" I finally told Carl, "Look, if Bill Leurs, who I know, wants anything from this Embassy, tell him to call me." It was just one of these little predecessor/successor things that was carried over by the DCM.

Then I was able to select my own guy. I got a guy, Ted Russell, who had served with me during the Soviet invasion, he was a junior officer and I was the DATT. He knew the language. He was Terrence Todman's DCM for four years. And that told me a lot. Ted was a top notch person.

That answers your question. I had one year with my predecessor's DCM. Not the best arrangement but we made it work. His wife was something else. Then Ted Russell and his wife came in and we had a real find operation. Then Ted stayed on for one year with Shirley Temple Black. She now has her own person there.

I would certainly make the recommendation to the State Department that it make every effort, unless there is a problem of death or illness in the family or something like that, not to leave the ambassador position empty for more than two or three weeks, four at the most. Because, if you have a DCM there as Chargé d'Affaires for three, four or five months, there is a normal situation that develops where he is elevated in stature and status by not only his counterpart DCMs but by the ambassadors from the various countries. He participates in ambassadorial meetings. This makes it very difficult, on occasion, for the incoming ambassador to have this situation exist. A maximum of two, three or four weeks between the outgoing ambassador and the incoming ambassador.

Q: While you were in Czechoslovakia did you have a feeling that things were beginning to stir and change?

NIEMCZYK: We could see more interest by the Czechs and Slovaks people in the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe. Those people that lived down on the Austrian or German border who had television sets could get programs, news, could see commercials...see what kind of cars people in the West were driving, type of necktie wearing, shoes, bicycles, etc. This word would spread inland and throughout Czechoslovakia.

We would see more interest on the part of the youth in what was going on outside. We would see people being prepared to take more risks. I said earlier that the Czechoslovak Communist Party elements did a super job in keeping the lid on for this many, many years. I arrived in 1986 but in '87, '88, and early '89, you could see various changes. More people attending church. We would go

out on wreath laying ceremonies...ten sites in the Western Czech Lands in the spring; 14 sites in Slovakia in the fall. The Voice of America would announce where I would be giving the date and time and where. The numbers would grow from 200 to 300, or from 300 to 400, or from 400 to 500. These people were truly taking risks because we would be accompanied by the secret police who would be there with their still camera or video tape. But nevertheless the people turned out in increasing numbers.

People had more of a tendency to turn up at our national days, or come to our homes, where in the past they would say, "I want to come but would rather not because they will have me under surveillance and I might get in trouble again." Things were going in this direction.

The Czechs and Slovaks were not as aggressive as the Poles to the north with their Solidarity, for example. There were no labor unions in Czechoslovakia.

My three years I consider were critical and crucial to the things that ultimately happened in the November/December of 1989. It was during this three year period that people's attitudes were changing and they were becoming more courageous, a little more aggressive, a little more prepared to get involved. What they saw which was happening with the Polish Solidarity success and the mass exodus of the East Germans through Czechoslovakia into Hungary and on into Austria and then out into West Germany...and hearing this and then seeing it on CNN if they had television. Word of mouth got around pretty well. There was the underground press and radio. Then with the news of the Berlin Wall coming down and the...

Q: This was in late 1989?

NIEMCZYK: Well, yeah. This was in the months of August, September, October. The Czechs developed the courage that they had been developing where instead of 2000 turning out at demonstrations, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 would turn out. So, yes, I could see gradual things happening. I couldn't have predicted what happened.

Q: All of you must have been looking to the East at the rise of Gorbachev and his change. In a way Gorbachev and his policies and eventually the renunciation of the Brezhnev's doctrine of interference into neighboring socialist countries was crucial. But were you getting good reports on Gorbachev and were you seeing the impact both from the viewpoint of the Embassy but also of the Czech Communist Government view of Gorbachev?

NIEMCZYK: Yes, and I have to say what I didn't say earlier, a factor in all of this was the Gorbachev change in policy. No question about it. This gave the Czechs and Slovaks the feeling that there was hope. The Czechoslovak Communist Party didn't like it at all and we would go into meetings, either myself or with Embassy staff or with a Congressional Delegation, and say, "Well look, President Gorbachev is doing such and such." The hard-line Czechs even at the 11th hour in their futility would say, "Just because the Russians opened their umbrellas in Moscow, and when it rains, doesn't mean we will do the same in Czechoslovakia." They would say that they didn't necessarily follow everything. But I feel that some of them saw the handwriting on the wall.

Q: Did they really? They seemed to have hung on. It just seemed at one point that they couldn't use

force, it wouldn't work. Did you see any let up or were the government people hanging on?

NIEMCZYK: There was let up by some early on, but the hard-liners held on until the very last hour.

Q: What was your impression of the Czech Party people in dealing with them?

NIEMCZYK: You know, some of them would take me off to the side and say, "Look, this is my livelihood. I have to feed my family and I have to do something. I joined the Communist Party but I don't like...." One person who was in the Foreign Ministry, he had been Czech ambassador to Canada, took me off one time and said, "Look, in my youth I was an altar boy, Catholic. Even now I slip away and go to confession once a year just to stay with the Church." This is one of a few examples that I could recall and cite. But it was sort of a gradual...the hard-liners, no, they did stay on until they were thrown out or were overwhelmed by the demonstrations.

We mentioned the Gorbachev factor and Solidarity. Another factor I feel had strong influence over the years but which hasn't been given proper attention to was the election of the current Pope.

Q: He was Polish. John Paul II.

NIEMCZYK: His periodic, frequent utterances against Communism and Communist rule...naturally the Poles were the first ones to be grateful for this, but it had a swelling effect and filtered throughout the other areas of Eastern Europe. He stayed with it throughout the 12 or 14 years and I really feel strongly that his persistence in doing the things he did in his announcements and comments against the Communist regime played an important role in the minds of the people.

Q: What about security during this time? For one thing we had a problem in Moscow with our Marine Security Guards who felt that they were compromised. During the time you were there did you feel the still dead hand of the security surveillance, entrapment type problem?

NIEMCZYK: It was ever present. There was entrapment on occasion. They tried with our Marines and some of our Embassy people. Any time in the Middle East, before the Persian Gulf, that an American would shoot down an Iranian plane or something would happen with the PLO there would be a demonstration against the American Embassy or some other Western Embassy. Stones would be thrown to break windows and Czech police would do very little if anything to dissuade or stop them. We were concerned about that both at the Embassy and out at my residence where my wife stayed and there were visitors and an Embassy family living in an apartment on the third floor. We would have bomb threats and scares which would be of some concern to us. The Marines would go out and check it out, either at the Embassy or the residence. That gave Security problem areas. These were just occasional or periodic events that would be caused not by the Czech and Slovak connection, but by a Middle East event or an event outside of the country.

Q: Did you protest or make it known to the Czech Government that we were very concerned about the fact that almost everything that gets blown up in this period was using Czech explosives and that there was a lot of evidence that they were training terrorists, etc.?

NIEMCZYK: We talked to them about the training of the terrorists. We didn't know about this until later on, but then we did make it a topic of discussion. Of course now they say that they don't sell it for those purposes.

But I should go back to the demonstration by outside country students or people living in Czechoslovakia. Later on, close to the end of this, still in my tour, we would be tipped off on occasion by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that they have learned that there would be a demonstration against the US Embassy or the NATO Embassies and there would be police there. Now this didn't happen in the early part of my tour, but in the later part of my tour it did.

Q: You left in 1989 after the Reagan Administration is over and George Bush is taking over and your normal time was up. Did you plan to leave at that time?

NIEMCZYK: We all went out, as they are doing now, with the understanding that it would be a three year tour. I left a month and a half short of my tour. In retrospect I would have liked to have been there when this took place. My wife and I were glued to the television as it took place. And even today, I am on the speaking circuit and I talk about Czechoslovakia principally, and refer to Poland to the north and Hungary to the south, and the problems of the transition period, but I have been invited to things like the Association for the Former Members of Congress which had a meeting a couple of weeks ago. Rita Klimova was there, the spokesperson. I was invited to a reception at the Czech Embassy a few weeks ago when the Prime Minister, who may not be Prime Minister after June 5, was present. And on each occasion...Rita Klimova, the Ambassador, would make the comment that I was there during the critical, crucial hard time period and was not able to be there during happier times to enjoy the results of some of my efforts. She was vocal on that. Those sorts of things are not often said. It is always good to hear them.

Q: How did you find the East European part of the European Bureau in the Department of State? How responsive was it to you?

NIEMCZYK: At times very helpful, more often mediocre.

Q: Why was this?

NIEMCZYK: I would rather not get into that. There were just a couple of senior personalities that felt that Czechoslovakia was totally lost. I didn't believe that. I felt that you had on the one hand the hard-line Communist Party to deal with, and they must be dealt with not only by me but by the hierarchy of the US. The policy at the Assistant Secretary of State level and elsewhere was "We won't give them any recognition by sending over anyone higher than a GS-15 or a Deputy Assistant Secretary." My attitude was to send in the senior people and let them pound the desk. You have on the one hand the Communist leadership to deal with, but you had 15 million people that counted on encouragement and support from the United States. And as a People-to-People man I gave high priority to that and I felt let down at times.

Q: Poland was running ahead of events. By this time Poland was really pretty much out of the Soviet orbit, wasn't it? Things were changing so rapidly even while you were there. Did you feel that Poland was absorbing...?

NIEMCZYK: Poland and Hungary.

Q: But wasn't anyone looking...the Czechs may be quiet right now but very obviously they are a well educated people and if Poland and Hungary are moving so rapidly, shouldn't we be nudging and doing things in Czechoslovakia?

NIEMCZYK: In Poland and Hungary the police had a tendency to ease off. In Czechoslovakia they did not. They maintained the hard-line right up to the end. My position was to get in the higher level American official instead of the low level types and read them the act. This was not done for the most part. A couple of instances, yes. John Whitehead would come in and he was real stern and tough with them. His visits were very important and useful. But he would come and go and then they would go back to square one. I wasn't overjoyed with the East European Division's support in Czechoslovakia. Some of it was good, better at times, but normally mediocre.

THEODORE E. RUSSELL
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1988-1991)

Ambassador
Slovakia (1993-1996)

Theodore E. Russell was born in India in 1936 and educated at Yale and the Fletcher School at Tufts. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963. His career included posts in Naples, Prague, Trieste, Rome and Copenhagen and he was named ambassador to Slovakia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: Sounds like to hell with this. I have got my assignment.

RUSSELL: Yes, I was delighted to be asked to stay for a fourth year, but I couldn't stay more than four years. When coming to the end of my assignment I began looking around for jobs. I wanted another DCM assignment. I thought that was a good experience and I enjoyed it. Personnel said, "Okay, look, you have just served four years in Denmark. It is time for you to have another hardship post." I had one in Prague for several years. So I said, "Okay, I speak Italian. I can learn Spanish in short order. I would be good at that. I have some French." So I bid on Colombia and Peru DCM jobs. Both were hardship and danger posts as I recall. So I bid on both of those places, and then I found that the Prague DCM job was coming up. So, I put that in and bid on some other hardship posts as well. They said, "Prague, okay that's fair, it is a tough post." They said, "You don't speak Spanish do you?" I said, "But I could learn Spanish." These were serious bids and I was seriously starting to read up on Latin America. They said, "But you speak Czech, right?" I knew that a friend of mine who had been DCM was about to leave Prague, but the Ambassador there was staying on. The Ambassador as it turns out was the officer who was defense attaché in '68 when I was first assigned there, Ambassador Jay Niemczyk.

Q: I have interviewed him, yes.

RUSSELL: I called Jay. I said "Jay, do you remember me?" We had a little chat. I said, "I understand you are looking for a DCM." He said, "Yes, I will put your name on the list. I encourage you to bid." So I did that, and that came through. So anyway, I ended up going back to Prague as DCM in '88, which was great. It was fascinating because Gorbachev was in power in the Soviet Union and things were not going well for the Soviet empire in Central Europe. Certainly no one thought it was going to collapse, but it was obviously going to be a very interesting time. We were trying to see whether it was possible to have a better working relationship with some Communist governments in Central Europe while at the same time pressing them on human rights issues. Jay Niemczyk had one more year there as Ambassador. I went over at a fascinating time. The Czechoslovak government was really totally discredited and lacking in popular support. The impact of this wasn't clear at first. However, there were signs of unrest. For example, on August 21, 1988 you had the first mass anti-government demonstration that you had had since 1969 on the anniversary of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion. I had been tear gassed in Wenceslas Square in 1969 covering the big demonstration on the first anniversary of the invasion. Then in January 1989 there were major demonstrations in Prague on the anniversary of the death of Jan Palach.

Arriving at that time and working with someone that I knew already and having a really fine embassy staff was really great. The problem was that you had a hard line Communist leadership, although some of them posed as reformers. Czechoslovakia was generally seen as a block of ice politically speaking. We were trying to figure out what changes were going on. We were trying to influence the regime to curb some of the more brutal human rights violations. In some cases dissidents would be so badly treated they died after being released. Havel and other dissidents were periodically arrested and so we were busy pressing the regime on human rights. They were busy lobbying to get most favored nation treatment (MFN). We were trying to see whether there were ways we could have a more normal relationship with the regime. We set up two working groups, one on human rights and one on trade. We explained the barriers to giving them most favored nation treatment in terms of their human rights practices and listened to them plead for us to open up to them on the trade front.

Q: When you say you started working groups, is this with the Czechs?

RUSSELL: With the Czechs, and we would meet periodically and talk about trade and business issues on the one hand and human rights issues on the other. We would present each other with an agenda and they would say "you realize we are going to raise your human rights problems." We said, "Fine." So then they raised the case of the Native American man that murdered a couple of FBI agents in 1975.

Q: Yes, at Wounded Knee or something.

RUSSELL: Yes, I have forgotten exactly how it happened. He shot dead a couple of U.S. law enforcement agents and was locked up. I remember the Czechs raised the case from their side. Our Human Rights bureau was very good at giving us the background on these cases before our meetings. So the Czechs said "We understand he is being denied the right to practice his religion."

They were vague on the details and we were able to point out that he was being denied the use of a tomahawk in his cell. We said, "This is clearly ludicrous. In your wretched prisons, you would not give Vaclav Havel a tomahawk." The main thing is we were trying to work out a more rational exchange of views with the Communist government while at the same time broadening our ties with the dissident community and monitoring that more closely. In fact, these exchanges were sometimes useful in getting a dissident better treatment or setting an environment for getting a consular protection case resolved. The U.S.-Czech humanitarian affairs working group co-chair was a very bright and cultured Office Director from the Foreign Ministry, who always gave me the impression that he was faintly embarrassed by the positions he was required to take.

Q: You know, for years after the '68 invasion, the Czech government had the reputation of being very hard nosed, very nasty. Were people who had been dealing with them seeing a change in this group? I mean were they so looking over their shoulders at this point?

RUSSELL: If you are talking about the summer of '88 the answer is no. They typically were not killing people anymore as they had in the late '40s and early '50s. What they would do if someone went against the regime in some public fashion would be to take away their employment. The spouse would also lose employment. The kids would be barred from going on to anything past high school. The individual involved would be given a job as a window washer or furnace stoker; these were the class of jobs, unpleasant and not exposed to other people in society. They were very tough on dissent. They locked up people like the man who became Foreign Minister, Jiri Dienstbier, and they locked up Havel. They locked up a number of these people for periods of time, and then they would let them out. When they arrested younger demonstrators in August 1988 they would often beat them up before jailing them or sending them home. But typically if they picked up dissidents it was unusual that they would really beat them. They would grill them and threaten them and then usually they would lock them up for awhile or dismiss them. I only remember one case toward the end of the Communist period when we heard they had really beat up a leading dissident. He was a very brave guy who actually climbed over a cemetery wall to lay a wreath where President Masaryk was buried in the face of a police ban on that kind of thing. He did it in such a way that the StB felt it was really in their face, and they beat him badly. So we were trying to mitigate some of their human rights abuses. It was an authoritarian Socialist regime that was very tough, very unyielding, but not Stalinist in its methods. They would just take it out on you, take it out on your family and just make your life so miserable that very few people would risk opposing the regime. But they no longer physically eliminated dissenters as they had in the earlier days after the 1948 Communist coup. They didn't have to in order to maintain control.

Q: Were the Helsinki accords the formation of the OSCE and particularly the human rights side, was it basket three or whatever it was in, was this something were we deliberately using in our dealings? We are talking about '88.

RUSSELL: Yes. It was clear that Helsinki codified certain principles on human rights and on economic exchanges. In fact that can be seen as the intellectual basis for having two working groups. I think it had a much greater subversive effect on their totalitarian system than the Soviets understood when they signed it. I think they felt it was opening things up on the economic side and did not understand the power of human rights.

Q: And also solidifying the borders.

RUSSELL: And the political side, that was “basket one.” But basically what the Soviets thought they got out of it was strengthening their borders, guaranteeing them their empire and opening up the prospect of more trade with the west. What we got on human rights made it clear there was a case for raising human rights issues. It solidified our right to raise those legitimate issues, which they should discuss if they wanted to prove they were living up to Helsinki. Since their whole system was fundamentally anti-human rights, it was very easy for us to make our case against them. Foreign radios raising these issues like Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America and some other stations like German stations and the BBC had a profound effect in questioning the legitimacy of the Communist governments in Central Europe which had been imposed on people who had once experienced a better, freer life. That was particularly true in Czechoslovakia. As we were discussing, the Czechoslovaks had a reputation of having a very repressive regime. In my view, particularly in Bohemia and Moravia, that was due to the fact that in the ‘30s Bohemia and Moravia, if they had been a country, would have been one of the richest countries in the world. So the Communists I think felt they had to be particularly severe to repress anyone who disagreed with their system based on knowing from their grandparents or their parents that there was a better, democratic, capitalist way to organize a society. I think that is a reason they were so tough there.

Q: Well, why were they agreeing to these talks on human rights?

RUSSELL: Because they wanted most favored nation treatment and freer trade with the West. They honestly thought that if we reached a modus vivendi, in other words if the Soviets could keep their empire and the Communist regimes could continue in Central Europe and they made a few gestures on human rights, we would be willing to open up trading relationships. They had a lot to gain by getting most favored nation treatment. They were hurt by not having it. They couldn't sell their excellent pilsner beer in the U.S., for example, at a price that anyone would want to pay. Czechoslovakia in the ‘30s was a very powerful trading nation. They manufactured a lot of high quality export goods like machinery, arms and shoes. So they had a big interest in getting into a more open economic relationship with the U.S. The quid pro quo was they had to agree to discuss human rights.

Q: Well, sort of in your minds, either that or instructions, I would have thought that most favored nations agreement with the Czech regime the way it was in 1988 was just not really in the cards.

RUSSELL: You are absolutely right. My thought on the proper timing of extending MFN to Communist Czechoslovakia was shortly after hell froze over. I thought there was very little chance they would qualify for that. On the other hand, had they changed their evil ways, they could have. I didn't think they were going to change.

Q: But that was also going to happen after hell froze over. I mean in one's thinking at that time.

RUSSELL: That's right. That didn't mean you couldn't chip away at the ice, so I think that is what we felt we were doing. I remember late in the year, actually it was probably early in '89, I remember, skipping ahead a little bit, we even sent in a cable with the subject something like “cracks in the ice”. We could see things starting to change. But certainly we had no real thought; I

certainly had no real thought that it would make sense to actually give them MFN. Now occasionally you would have that idea advanced. Well if we did that, wouldn't they then move quicker and perhaps solidify the relationship. My very strong view and the preponderance of opinion in Washington was that it would be a very bad idea and we shouldn't do it unless they changed their human rights practices. And that's why we didn't do it.

Q: How did Ambassador Niemczyk operate using you as DCM?

RUSSELL: Ambassador Julian Niemczyk. Ambassador Niemczyk operated in a way that I was his Deputy in that I would review things coming to him. In other words I would help organize the political section and its reporting, the economic section and its reporting. I would try to keep the Embassy working in a smooth and effective fashion and he would make the big decisions. It was a typical way an Ambassador operates. We knew each other, so that was a pretty good basis. So it was basically a chief of staff role in the military sense.

Q: Yes, his background was air force, I think.

RUSSELL: Yes, he retired as an air force Colonel.

Q: How did he get along with the Czech government at that time?

RUSSELL: I think that no one got along with them particularly well; they were not our friends. He had access. Typically the Foreign Ministry would deal with us at the level of Office Director. In other words the Office Director would summon the American Ambassador to come in for a lecture on something the government was upset about. He occasionally would see a Deputy Foreign Minister, but not very often did he get to see the Foreign Minister. The Foreign Minister was dealing with the Soviet bloc countries. The Czech MFA had one deputy Foreign Minister, a heavy set, tall, dark extremely unpleasant guy named Vacek, who was almost threatening. In fact some of the female members of the staff found him physically threatening. He was the one who typically dealt with us. The Ambassador sometimes would see him, but if they had a protest, it would often be the Office Director for American Affairs who would call the Ambassador or DCM in to complain about something like an official statement in Washington they objected to.

Q: What about moving around? Were you very much followed and were you provoked?

RUSSELL: It wasn't as heavy as it had been from '68 to '71 when I was there, where they would do things like drive nails in you tires. I remember we went on leave once and they unplugged our freezer with about a month's supply of meat in it, which rotted. There were maggots and blood all over the floor. In various ways they would overtly harass you or overtly follow you. We were bugged to a fare-the-well and kept under surveillance when we were there. However, when I came back as DCM I didn't get overt harassment. I don't remember sabotage against our vehicle or anything like that. On the other hand, our very capable Political Officer, Bob Norman, who maintained very close and effective relations with dissidents, had his headlights smashed and his tires slashed. There was a listening van parked in front of his house. They treated him very badly indeed. So they were capable of that, but when I went back as DCM they were not physically doing things to me, although certainly there was surveillance everywhere.

Q: How about Americans coming to, was there much tourism there at that time?

RUSSELL: Not a great deal. In fact the Czechoslovak government had a pretty bad reputation that scared away many American tourists.

Occasionally a tourist would be given a hard time. They would really go through your bags very aggressively, for example.

Q: This was the border.

RUSSELL: At the border. People didn't know exactly where they stood or what to expect. It was not as bad as say 20 years before when I was there where the police would actually pick people up and tourists sometimes got into serious difficulties. American tourism was limited, but it was increasing.

Q: Did you have any contact, did the Embassy have any contact with dissidents at this time?

RUSSELL: We had very extensive contacts with dissidents. Our dissident officer, Bob Norman at the time, had constant contacts with the dissidents. We were trying to upgrade the level of our contacts with the dissidents, but the Czechoslovak government was saying if you keep this up, we cannot have any decent relationship. Basically we answered "don't make us choose." We would frankly have chosen the dissidents over the government.

Q: What do you mean by upgrading?

RUSSELL: In other words if our Ambassador had frequently invited the dissidents over to the Residence, the Czechoslovak government would have reacted in some pretty dramatic way. They kept warning us "you are paying too much attention to these people. They are a tiny minority. You are sticking your thumb in our eye. You say you want a more normal relationship, then knock it off." We didn't pay much attention to that, but we did not go out of our way to stick it to them, since we were interested in encouraging a more normal relationship in order to encourage a less repressive regime. So we had an officer whose main job was to contact the dissidents and keep track of them. If they were in trouble or arrested we could go and protest. Then we upgraded it to the extent that I would have any high level Washington visitors like Deputy Secretary Whitehead, who would come over quite often, or Congressman Solarz over to the DCM residence typically for breakfast with a selection of dissidents for them to talk with so they could get a picture of the situation from the horse's mouth. Havel would often come, as well as others including Jiri Dienstbier, Martin and Radim Palous, Sasha Vondra and Rita Klimova, who would translate. Rita, Sasha and Martin all later served as Czechoslovak and later Czech Ambassador to Washington. So the upgrade was that a lot of these meetings took place in the DCM's house, and occasionally in the Ambassador's residence and not as before mainly at the home of the Political Officer who had this responsibility. So we were upgrading our relationship with the dissidents, and if, for example, one of them would tell us the police had stopped him from coming to a meeting with Deputy Secretary Whitehead, we would formally protest that.

Q: I mean it sounds like the Czech government at this time wasn't quite sure of how to deal with these dissidents in a way.

RUSSELL: That's right. I think that they realized and we weren't the only ones interested in the issue. The British and the Dutch in particular were staunch human rights defenders. These guys were arrested and various Western Embassies protested and it hit the Western press. The Czechoslovak government didn't need that. They didn't want that. In that sense I think we helped protect the dissidents from worse treatment than they otherwise would have received. They weren't treated well, but we helped keep them out of the can to a certain extent.

Q: Well, were we coordinating say with the British and the Dutch and all that? Would you get together and say you know, we have got this problem, what do we do?

RUSSELL: We had excellent cooperation. We had a NATO group which would meet regularly. Our Ambassador, or the Brits and I think the Germans all had a secure room where you could actually meet without fear of bugging. The NATO Ambassadors would get together and meet. We also had a DCM club, which would meet and talk about what was going on. The Political Officers would get together. We had very good cooperation with NATO allies keeping track of what was going on. Some were more interested in keeping track than others, but I would say particularly the British and Dutch were very solid on human rights issues. We kept very close ties. We had very good relations also with the Germans and the French to a slightly lesser extent.

The other thing we were doing was to counter the way the Communist government denied any U.S. role in WW II worthy of the name. I mean they just made every effort the way the Soviets did to downplay that. So, since we had liberated western Bohemia, we thought we ought to make that point. Also, our air campaigns had lost a fair number of fliers flying over Czechoslovakia to bomb targets in Poland. So every spring we would set off on a WW II commemoration trip, announced on RFE and VOA in advance. We notified the Foreign Ministry, but never asked for approval. They would urge us not to do this. We would send a note to the Foreign Ministry saying we are going to visit the following towns in the following time frame. We would set off with wreaths to lay at the sites of local monuments to U.S. liberating forces that had been set up and later mostly torn down by the Communists. Then we would go and have a ceremony and lay the wreath. Some of these ceremonies even took place next to a highway laid right over the monument, but then we knew where they were. We had good records of that. We would go and the Ambassador would make a speech, and I'd go off to another site and make a speech and lay a wreath. It was amazing, large crowds would often be there at considerable risk. The StB, secret police, would be there photographing the whole thing. Some of these people would be picked up and risked losing their jobs or worse. They took a big risk. Typically we had quite a crowd, and we passed out little crossed American and Czechoslovak flag pins. They were enormously popular. People would wear them year after year. They would come wearing the pin showing they had been there before. However, we didn't do a ceremony in Pilsen, a large city, because we figured that was simply too provocative and risked violence.

Q: Why?

RUSSELL: Because our monument had been in the middle of Pilsen. In fact in '69, I had driven

there with a wreath in the back of the car to lay it on the monument to the U.S. liberation of Pilsen in May of '45. There was still a little monument left at that point. I think they tore it down later. There was a demonstration going on, and the police were closing in. I thought this was not the time to get out and make a speech and lay a wreath. So we didn't do it in Pilsen then or later until after the Velvet Revolution, but we did it everywhere else, in smaller towns and out in the country. Also, we would drive to Moravia and Slovakia to sites where airmen had been shot down and where townspeople had built little monuments, some of which were still standing. We would lay wreaths there and make speeches and have a good turnout there as well. Then there was the furthest site, in Slovakia, where an OSS mission had gone in during the Slovak national uprising in 1944 and many of its members were captured and tortured and executed at Mathausen. We would climb a small mountain and lay a wreath at this little hut where these poor guys had hidden out. We made a big effort to emphasize the U.S. wartime association with the Czechoslovak people and our role in liberating Europe.

Q: Now let's sort of talk about in '88 when did you say cracks started, you were seeing cracks in the ice or something in early '89 was it?

RUSSELL: Yes, in '88 there were some odd things that were going on. For example, I remember going to a movie, called "Five Prague Pieces" I believe, where one of the vignettes was of a Communist movie critic who was discussing a film and progressively getting drunk and talking in Marxist jargon. He was smoking a cigarette and ashes gradually covered his shirt front. By the end he was just babbling. It was very unusual to see a film making fun of Communist jargon and depicting this guy as kind of a clown. Then in about mid-1989, Jakes, the first secretary of the Communist Party made a secret speech to a session of the Central Committee, and someone taped it. I think the StB secret police did it actually. I think there were enough ambitious young Turks in the secret police who saw their country falling increasingly far behind, not making any progress economically and Gorbachev advocating reforms in the Soviet Union. These guys I think felt that the old leadership really should go. I think there was a certain amount of effort in secret police circles to have controlled modernization and reform a la Gorbachev. So this tape was made, with Jakes sounding like the uncultured lout that he was. There was also a place in the speech where he was denouncing Bob Norman, our dissident contact officer, saying it is intolerable that Norman is stirring things up. We figured that was a pretty bad sign that he was being denounced by the First Secretary of the Communist Party and it was not a great surprise when Bob was later PNGed. Anyway the point is someone had taped this and an Embassy Czech employee, who I suspected of working for the StB, handed it to me in the Embassy courtyard one day. Besides this, all kinds of jokes were circulating, more jokes than usual, suggesting that the people thought the leadership was pretty much stupid as well as evil. Then, also, we were getting approaches from government people saying they were really reformers. They said there were reform movements in the Communist Party and didn't we realize this and wouldn't we work with more reform-oriented people. In late October of that year we had a gathering of dissidents to meet a high level visitor. Havel and many of the others were there, and they said "Things are getting worse. The oppression is getting worse. We don't see any light at the end of the tunnel. The situation is really miserable for us; this regime is hopeless." It was true that the Husak-Jakes regime was hopeless, but essentially Gorbachev pulled the plug on them, and because they had no real credibility or popular support in Czechoslovakia, as soon as the Soviet protective shield was lifted by Gorbachev, they crumbled when mass demonstrations broke out.

Q: Were you following events in, I mean how are we seeing, I am talking about from the Embassy, sort of American diplomats, How were we seeing the Soviet Union during this period, '88 or early '89?

RUSSELL: We were reading about it in the U.S. and local press, but I don't remember a lot of focus on it in reporting. We weren't getting a lot of cables from Moscow for example. It was clear that Gorbachev was trying to get the message across with perestroika and glasnost and the promise to withdraw some Soviet forces from East Europe. What really caught our attention was when Hungary opened its borders and let East Germans escape into Austria.

Q: That was when?

RUSSELL: That was in September 1989. So then a lot more East Germans started coming through Czechoslovakia to get to Hungary. The East German authorities asked the Czechs to stop that, and they did stop it, so all these East Germans were trapped in Czechoslovakia. So they converged on the large back garden compound of the West German embassy right next door to us. We could see from our garden into their garden. They started climbing over the walls into this big park behind the German embassy. There were pictures of the police trying to haul them down off the fence. They made terrible publicity for the Czechoslovak state. Then the West Germans started pressuring the Czechoslovak government to let these refugees out to West Germany. Finally they left on special trains via East Germany to West Germany. At that point you could watch Czechoslovak citizens looking at what was going on, walking by the German compound, looking in. That was an untenable situation for the Czechoslovak regime. You could tell something very strange was going on, but the government was still keeping a lid on its own folks. Then of course, you had the 17th of November come along in Czechoslovakia. The demonstrations that I mentioned in 1988, on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion, did not involve many university students. University students knew that they would be kicked out instantly if they were caught in a demonstration. A university degree was the ticket to a good career. In August 1988 the demonstrators were apprentices, young people, a mixed bag, but not the crème de la crème university students. The 17th of November was different.

Q: Why the 17th of November?

RUSSELL: The 17th of November commemorated a date in 1939 when the Nazis who had occupied all of Bohemia and Moravia March 15, 1939, cracked down on university students in Prague and killed one of them named Jan Opletal. That became a big date in the Communist calendar for anti-fascist demonstrations and parades. The Communist government actually struck a coin, which I have, showing the symbol of Charles University, barbed wire and gives the dates 17 November 1939-1989 to commemorate university students subjected to police brutality. They actually issued a beautiful silver commemorative coin celebrating the beginning of their own downfall. The government authorized a big demonstration by university students. About 30,000 students and others finally joined in. It started smaller than that, and then at one point in the demonstration the cry went out "let's march to Wenceslas Square." This was no longer an anti-fascist demonstration but an anti-government demonstration. So the demonstration changed character and a march was started on the center of town to Wenceslas Square. At this point the

police riot squads, which may or may not have known what was going to happen, closed in and beat the hell out of those demonstrators trapped in National Avenue who dared to march on Wenceslas Square, the historic site of anti-government demonstrations. They beat them very brutally and there were a number of concussions and serious injuries. There was a rumor started that a student had actually been killed. No one was killed, but a lot of people were severely beaten, including a half dozen western correspondents. That was the start of the revolution because these university students were the cream of Czechoslovak society. Their parents and brothers and sisters and grandparents saw these university students beaten bloody by the riot police and it just set off a huge protest in Prague and then nationally. The next day, things started moving and people started coming into the streets. Then every night the demonstrations became larger. At first you would have 50,000 then 100,000 then 300,000 taking to the streets. The government just didn't know what to do about it. It gathered steam and within a week it had gotten beyond government control. The reformers, led by Havel, proclaimed a national general strike for November 27 at noon, and they did it very cleverly. They proclaimed it for just two hours during the lunch hour. Sure enough during the lunch hour, whistles went off and people briefly had a national general strike showing great solidarity with minimal economic damage. At that point it became pretty clear that the Communist Party apparatus had lost control. The Communist Party Politburo leadership had already resigned and then other hardliners, including Stepan, the hard line Prague party chief, quit before the general strike.

Q: What was happening in places like Slovakia, Bratislava, you know elsewhere?

RUSSELL: In Slovakia you had had a major demonstration the previous year in March. It was a demonstration in Bratislava demanding religious freedom involving peaceful demonstrators with candles. The police broke it up violently, beating the demonstrators with truncheons. When the mass demonstrations broke out in Prague after November 17, 1989, you had similar but smaller demonstrations starting in Bratislava. What happened in Prague was literally that leading dissidents like Havel, supported by theater directors and actors, dissident intelligentsia and university students came together in theaters across the city. Every theater was packed and dissident spokespersons went on the stage to formulate demands, including the end to the leading role of the Communist Party. In Prague, Havel organized Civic Forum the day after the beatings in National Avenue and the next day a group of Slovak artists and intellectuals organized the Public Against Violence movement in Bratislava. Then the university students, as the thing got mobilized, fanned out to factories and got the workers on board. Little by little the movement spread out from Prague to the countryside. The Communist government didn't know how to react.

Q: Well, at the Embassy what were you all doing and thinking?

RUSSELL: We were thinking that when you have a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand or three hundred thousand people in the streets, this was a revolution. So all U.S. resources at our Embassy were monitoring what the hell was going on and talking to as many people as we could and trying to figure out if this was for real and if this was for keeps. I think when the general strike succeeded, we figured this is really serious. The government doesn't seem to be able to do anything about it. The reporting we were getting suggested that they had not decided to use force and were debating what to do. The people's militia we thought was more likely to do something violent than the military, but if the military had been ordered to use force, they might have obeyed. Fortunately

the leadership lacked the will to put up a fight once the strength of the revolution became clear. We started seeing the reaction of some of the politicians which was very ineffectual. For example in downtown Prague, we watched the tough, relatively young Prague party boss, Stepan, trying to rally factory workers. He had earlier played the reformer and had even gone to New York and spoken to various groups portraying himself as a Communist modernizer in the Gorbachev mold. Actually he was a first class SOB and one of the few Communist leaders eventually locked up after the Revolution. But he got up in front of an audience of factory workers in Prague. He addressed them and said, "Don't let yourselves be led by these children." The workers, and I saw the film of this, the workers were quiet for a second. Then they started chanting "we are not children, we are not children." They just kept chanting. He looked nonplused, and finally just turned and walked off. The leadership simply could not believe what was happening to it. It was also clear the Soviets were not going to back them up, and they just dissolved like the wicked witch of the west when water was poured on her.

Q: The timing of this, was this happening at the same time or was East Germany going through it a little later?

RUSSELL: Hungary had let DDR citizens cross into Austria in September. In response to the surge of East Germans then crossing through Czechoslovakia into Hungary the DDR had then banned visa free travel to Czechoslovakia. As I mentioned, many East Germans took refuge in the West German Embassy garden, but were eventually allowed to leave for the FRG via the DDR in special trains. In early November there was a new surge of thousands of East Germans climbing the fence into the West German Embassy garden. They were soon allowed to leave directly for West Germany. The Berlin Wall came down November 9 before the November 17 Czechoslovak revolution started.

Q: During this time these demonstrations were going on, were we in consultation with the Department of State trying to figure out what to do or were we just watching it?

RUSSELL: We were watching. There wasn't anything much we could do, so our reporting was focused on what is happening, how serious is it, how likely is it to lead to a change of regime. I think we reported by early December that this was going to be a change of regime.

Q: When you are talking about a change of regime, you are talking about a revolutionary change of regime.

RUSSELL: We are talking about a revolution but not a bloody one. At no point was it bloody. We are talking about the Communist regime collapsing and then, by the end of the year, a non-Communist, democratic government coming in. Dubcek was named head of the National Assembly and Havel was then elected President by the end of December. That was just the final confirmation of success, because by early December it was clear this was for keeps. The leading role of the Communist Party was abolished. The border was opened with Austria. You had a rapid crumbling of Communist power and a non-Communist majority taking over the government on December 10 for the first time since the 1948 Communist coup. President Husak, who had replaced Dubcek in 1969, then resigned.

Q: Were any of the leaders of the dissidents or maybe people who had been fence sitters before beginning to come and make contact with the Embassy and with the British and other embassies?

RUSSELL: We were in close contact with the dissidents, had been and continued to be. We knew what the dissidents were doing, although they were so busy we weren't able to see all that much of people like Havel and Father Vaclav Maly who were in the middle of conducting a revolution. We had not been able to keep up contact with Dubcek during his internal exile, but resumed contact when Havel brought him into the leadership of the revolution. But yes, we were talking to dissidents constantly and finding out what was going on. There was one interesting thing that some of us were reminded of as we watched events unfold. One of the top assistants to Deputy Foreign Minister Vacek, in the fall of 1988, after they suppressed the demonstration in Wenceslas Square, was talking with me. I said, "Look, you guys look terrible before the world. First you beat up peaceful religious protesters in Bratislava and then you beat up these young people demonstrating in Prague on the invasion anniversary. You look like a really brutal regime. How can you possibly expect to have decent relationships with the West and certainly with the U.S. if you do this kind of thing? Look at the image you are creating." He said, "As long as there are five or ten or fifteen thousand people involved, we can handle that. Now if it ever got to be a hundred thousand..." We remembered that. That was what actually happened. The size of the demonstrations got way beyond what they could control and they simply folded.

Q: Did you find members of the Communist regime beginning to almost look for safe haven and sort of coming over and chatting with you all and sort of preparing the way, rats deserting the ship and that kind of thing?

RUSSELL: It wasn't that we were a safe haven for them, but in the very early stages, before the revolution, before the 17th of November, we were getting some strange approaches from people in the government saying there really are reformers among us who want better relations with the U.S. We were getting intriguing approaches like that. When the demonstrations had started we began getting funny approaches from people we knew were connected with the secret police saying there are some forces among them who are reform minded and asking how we might react to them. We said essentially "we don't want to talk to them. We don't trust them. Forget it." There wasn't anything we could offer them or would have offered them.

Q: Then Havel came in; I mean when it collapsed, it collapsed in a hell of a hurry didn't it?

RUSSELL: The regime collapsed amazingly quickly. By the time of the general strike, it was pretty clear the Communist Party was losing control, although they still had the security apparatus if they decided to use it. Then it was a matter of the reformers increasing the pressure and their demands until the Communist Party leadership was squeezed out of the government and the Communist regime collapsed. It was wonderful mingling with the crowds during the first two weeks after November 17 and watching them react as one person to the speakers. I remember hundreds of thousands of people up on Letna Hill near Prague Castle jangling their keys in unison to signify the "last rights" for the Communists.

Q: I remember seeing a Czech movie that came out some time later where somebody was having to deal with the secret police and was being given a very rough time. At the end you saw the

protagonist in the crowd and looked over and saw the secret policeman sort of smiling at him tickling his keys along with everyone else.

RUSSELL: I remember my wife and I attended these demonstrations, particularly the one up on the Letna plain. I remember we were being filmed by the secret police still at that time during the middle of the demonstration a week after November 17. The Czech crowd was incredibly disciplined. They are a disciplined people, and particularly in this truly national uprising, people were thinking and acting in unison. You had perhaps 800,000 people. At one point an ambulance had to get through and everyone just opened up and allowed it through the packed crowd. It was like a flight of birds or school of fish would move. The crowd would move as one. It was absolutely peaceful, absolutely disciplined. I remember at one point there was this stir in the crowd and unusual pushing and shoving. A sort of a flying wedge pushed through the crowd trying to move up nearer to the stage. What was going on? It was a flying wedge with Dan Rather pushing his way through with a film crew trying to get up closer to cover this event.

Q: American television. Did the government shut down? You know, did we have business? What happened during this time?

RUSSELL: That is a good question. We were so busy I don't remember much normal business being conducted. The embassy was basically trying to keep track of what was going on. We didn't know at first whether the regime would call out the troops to put down the demonstrations. It became pretty clear after a week or two that they were not going to and there was not likely to be any major violence. So after that we weren't worried so much about evacuating Americans as we had done in 1968. We were basically trying to determine how definitive the changes seemed to be and reporting developments promptly to Washington.

Q: Was there sort of a professional cadre of civil servants who were there before and were going to be there afterwards and all that.

RUSSELL: We had the clearest view of what was happening in the Foreign Ministry. As a new government came in, they didn't immediately fire everybody. They couldn't. This was true in most ministries. Even the secret police didn't fold up their tents and disappear right away. Even during the big Christmas and New Year's celebrations we saw signs of some police surveillance. In the Foreign Ministry they went about replacing people fairly gradually. I remember going in and talking to one of the new Deputy Ministers who was in charge of personnel security. He was saying basically that Ministry employees working for the StB and ratting on colleagues were being fired. If, he said, they were working against the West, it is a bit different. He would vet them on a case by case basis, but they are not the ones he really was going to go after. He was going after the ones who were doing internal espionage against their colleagues. The Czechs took a harder line vetting people than the Slovaks and did purge most of the people who had been Communist security functionaries or had worked for the KGB.

Q: Well, going back really before these events, going back to '88 when you arrived there, were we watching what the Czechs were doing overseas, because my understanding is the Czechs were one, home to terrorists, training terrorists, very effective, and also involved in a security matters in other countries unfriendly to us and all that. Were we monitoring that?

RUSSELL: We were monitoring that, but that wasn't what the political section was doing, at least not the State Department.

Q: We are talking about the agency then.

RUSSELL: We are talking about the agency. I know the agency was monitoring that, but it wasn't something that I was directly involved in. My impression was that the Communist Czechoslovak services were very active in cooperating with other countries against the West, that they had sheltered terrorists, and there were rumors starting to come out about training camps, but they were more terrorist places of refuge at that stage was my impression. I really didn't have the inside scoop on that. I do have the impression foreign terrorists had an ability to stay in Czechoslovakia when they needed to and perhaps get support and supplies like Semtex.

Q: Semtex being an explosive.

RUSSELL: Yes, Semtex blew up Pan Am 101 for example. That is another story that I'll mention.

Q: I thought we might stop at this point. Let's talk about Pan Am 101 and also talk about what happened really after the government changed and what we did. Let's pick it up there. This is a good place to stop.

Today is May 31, 2000. Ted let's talk about Pan Am 101. What was Pan Am 101 and how did that affect where you were?

RUSSELL: Well, it affected where we were in the sense that our kids were flying over to be with us in Prague for Christmas vacation in December 1988. So they were scheduled to fly over on Pan Am 102 a couple days after Pan Am 101 went down.

Q: Could you say what happened on Pan Am 101?

RUSSELL: Well, Pan Am 101 was blown up by Libyan terrorists in the air over Scotland December 21 on the way to the U.S. A number of Americans and Brits on board, including many students were killed. Our immediate concern was that our kids were arriving two days later on the sister Pan Am flight. When they got over, I remember talking in the master bedroom with my older son Douglas. I said, "I bet it was that damn Czech Semtex that was involved." It was obvious that Pan Am 101 was a terrorist event and I had heard that the Czechs were providing Semtex to terrorists like the Libyans. This was on a Saturday the day after our sons arrived. Within half an hour or so of this statement to my son in the bedroom of our home, I got a call from the Foreign Ministry denying that the Czechoslovak government had anything to do with the downing of Pan Am 101. Talk about real time bugging!

Q: Actually I think they did find Semtex in it.

RUSSELL: That's right. So my outburst apparently hit a nerve. They felt compelled to call me on a weekend and make a mini demarche to deny Czechoslovakia had been involved.

Q: We are talking about now...

RUSSELL: December of 1988. The Communists were still in power and they watched us very closely at the Embassy. We assumed our houses were bugged, but we hadn't had too many such direct indications of the real time quality of that bugging. Our kids were coming over for Christmas vacation as they always did.

Q: Well, let's talk about what happened when the change of government came. I mean how did we see things. I think of everybody out there jingling keys and all this, but at a certain point the professionals had to take over in our embassy. What were we seeing?

RUSSELL: As I recall, what the Embassy reported by early December 1989 was that the revolution was succeeding and the Communists were gradually being forced out of government. In fact on December 10 a new, non-Communist majority government came in and locked in the transition from Communist rule. Then, when Havel came in as president at the end of December 1989, what we saw was a situation, replicated throughout Central Europe, of a total change in our diplomatic opportunities. The dissidents, Havel, Jiri Dienstbier, Radim and Martin Palous, Rita Klimova, Sasha Vondra, Zdenek Urbanek, Jan Urban and other leading figures with whom we had been meeting periodically appreciated the fact that we had supported them very strongly when they were out of power and the Communists were harassing them. So when they came in, we had exceptionally warm relations with President Havel and the new Czechoslovak government. So we saw this as an opportunity and urgent necessity to help these guys succeed. We wanted to see the democratic revolution consolidate itself in Czechoslovakia as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. We would ask "how can we help." They said "we want your diplomatic support. We want you to show your interest in what is going on here. Help us consolidate this change." So every section of the Embassy developed a very close working relationship with their new Czechoslovak counterparts. There is one interesting story I'll share where Havel came in as President and yet was surrounded by people wearing the old Communist security guard uniforms. He hated the sight of these uniforms and wanted them changed. We heard that he asked the man who designed the costumes for the film Amadeus to design new Palace Guard uniforms.

Q: Could you say what Amadeus was.

RUSSELL: It was the wonderful film about the life of Mozart with fabulous period costumes. The story we heard was that Havel had uniforms, very handsome uniforms for his new presidential guard designed by the Amadeus costume designer. Then there was a problem with getting the proper hats to go with the new uniform. We got this request saying the president or someone on his staff had noticed that our U.S. air force hats, worn by Colonel Ed Motyka, our very effective Defense Attaché, were handsome. He asked if we could urgently get a bunch of those hats which could then have the insignia of the palace guard incorporated. What I understand happened is we actually quickly obtained some U.S. air force hats and turned them over. What I was told was we got this request and filled it. Sure enough these palace guards looked sharper than hell. Then a good friend of President Havel's, Michael Kocab, who was a hard rock musician, was asked to

compose a presidential fanfare for use at the palace. He did a wonderful piece of music in just a couple weeks. So President Havel had his guards in handsome new uniforms and this splendid fanfare and there was quite a different atmosphere in the Prague Presidential palace.

Q: How did Ambassador Black work under these, respond on this?

RUSSELL: She was very adept at using the very warm contacts she and her staff had established with the dissidents to then carry over into the new government relationship. She had a very good relationship with President Havel and members of his staff like Sasha Vondra, who later became Czech Ambassador to Washington, and other members of the government. She used that very effectively in terms of making any of our requests or concerns known at a very high level. She would always go to the highest level. Other members of the staff would go to the next appropriate level. For example, I would see people at the Deputy Minister level whenever necessary.

The main thing we were concerned about was how we could help Czechoslovakia succeed. So one of the things the U.S. embassy did was to beef up our own resources to cope with this. We had a very small staff in Prague. We were absolutely overwhelmed at first because we were starting to get normal government to government relations. In the old days we just reported what the Communist government was up to and whether there were any signs of cracks in the ice. Now we were reporting the success of major programs and the results of demarches on all kinds of issues where Czechoslovakia was helping us, as they did in the Gulf War. So we were acutely understaffed.

One of my big jobs as DCM was to try to improve the staffing situation. What I basically was involved in was trying to get TDY support to cover the shortfall. We finally did get an approved 50% increase in positions which were being filled initially with TDYs. So one thing was getting the Embassy cranked up to handle the situation. The other was getting the assistance effort launched. We had a request from AID to set up an AID mission in Prague. The problem is, as you well know, that at every American embassy it is the State staffed administrative section that to some extent services everyone. The administrative section was ably manned but extremely thinly stretched. We had an old, rather decaying facility. I remember when I was there on my first tour 1968-71 a State Department inspector said "this Embassy looks like a Balkan interior ministry." It was not a modern, well functioning set up. The issue was how to support AID if they came in. Ambassador Black wanted to make damn sure that they didn't come in and overwhelm the staff, and that they followed what she wanted to see done. So we got AID in there on those terms. Actually the American embassy was responsible for launching an initiative with the other OECD member embassies to try and coordinate or at least inform each other on what we were planning to do for Czechoslovakia and to get the host government to tell us what it was they really needed. What programs do you need; what kind of military cooperation programs do you need; what kind of programs involving all sorts of American voluntary organizations do you want? The American Bar Association, for example, did a wonderful job helping provide advice on a new constitution. So there was just a huge range of things that were going on. Above all, we were trying to get from the Czechoslovak government a coherent picture of what they needed, and then try to figure out what we could really provide. A significant problem that I found in Prague was the tendency within the U.S. government to offer Czechoslovakia programs that various bureaucracies in Washington or that NGOs for that matter, wanted to deliver. So you get a bureaucratic tension

there which is important to resolve. What we tried to do is emphasize to the Czechs “look, coordinate your assistance request. Make sure you know what you want, and then ask us for it. We will try to meet your requests rather than just offering you things and to be polite you say, okay, I’ll take that and that.”

Q: I'd like to talk a bit about this. I have a little experience and I have talked to other people who have been involved. I was in Kyrgyzstan for a little while. You know they were swamped with people who were adept at writing, I am talking about Americans, writing up grants to push whatever they wanted to push, you know whether it is a better form of toothpaste or something of this nature. Of course a place like Czechoslovakia is rather appealing. It is a nice country. It is not a central Asian country. These people, many are well meaning but also they are the people who write these grants for whatever they are worth and they say let's do this, and it is very hard to say no on the part of the Embassy. Could you talk about dealing with this?

RUSSELL: Well, that was a problem we were dealing with. Now, obviously I don't want to knock a lot of these excellent charitable foundations, like the Ford foundation and individuals trying to be helpful. A number of different organizations did a really great job. But you have to be a little bit on guard against self promoters. This was particularly true in the area of promoting entrepreneurship, which was one of our biggest priorities. A lot of people, including many Czech and Slovak Americans would come over with warm feelings towards their ancestral homeland, vague feelings of wanting to do good together with wanting to make a buck, combined with maybe not very precise ideas of what they were going to do. Therefore you had the Czechoslovak government coming to us and saying “who is this guy?” and “what is this organization?” Of course the Embassy couldn't say “Well he is probably a crook.” You can say “well there are various rating services and we suggest you go and check up on this firm or organization.” But in general terms what we tried to do is facilitate people getting together with the right recipient organization on the Czechoslovak side. So, for example, you would have the very well managed Executive Enterprise Corps linking up with Czechoslovak firms and doing a good job.

Q: Yes, these are retired executives for the most part who could go out and offer advice and help start up. They are essentially volunteers. As you say it is well managed.

RUSSELL: Well managed and good people who wanted to do something useful and they are not in it to make a buck. So one of the top managers or the head of that organization would come over and sit down with us at the Embassy and say, “What do they need? Who can I go see?” So our role in case of private donors was to hook them up with the right part of the Czechoslovak government or private sector to see where they could help. In the case of AID it was to try to get them to move a little bit quicker, because one of the problems we found with AID is they are hopelessly snarled by Congressional fiat and mandates with all kinds of requirements that slow down enormously their ability to respond fast to anything. So while the people we got were good and dedicated and trying to set up some good programs, it was like pulling teeth sometimes to get things launched. Basically our job was mediating between the private people who would come over, and trying to get U.S. official programs targeted in the right direction.

We tried especially to stimulate exchange programs and the sort of initiative where you don't just have a paid consultant from the U.S. coming over, spending a day or a week, lecturing to the locals

about how we do things in America and then flying home, business class probably. What you try to do is get Czechs and Slovaks to go over to the U.S. where they have a longer period of time, where they are exposed to how an American company operates, particularly an American company in one of the sectors that they are familiar with, or have some expert come over from the U.S. and really spend a long time. What we also did is help establish American expert positions in some of the ministries. I am talking generally in Czechoslovakia and then in the Czech Republic and then Slovakia. What we tried to do is get advisors to come over longer term where they could really be a resource person for a particular ministry like the Environment Ministry or Finance Ministry.

Q: Well now, was there anything, I mean here we had been up against probably next to East Germany as hard nosed a regime as one can think about for some time, and we must have had all sorts of things like family unification, property cases. There must have been other things I mean a whole backlog of issues, many of them sort of basically consular cases, but there probably were other issues. How did we work on those?

RUSSELL: We handled a lot of those, but I don't remember that as something I spent a lot of time with. The consular section was chronically overburdened because suddenly people who previously had been forbidden by their government to travel ran up against U.S. visa laws. The problem they then had was would we let them in. We also had a lot more Americans coming over, which resulted in all kinds of protection and welfare cases and citizenship services, particularly lost passports due to pick pocketing which increased tremendously after the revolution with the massive influx of tourists.

In terms of citizenship cases, we did have some anomalies in our relationship with Czechoslovakia which under Communism was good because they made you either a Czechoslovak or an American. So the Communist authorities couldn't fool around as easily and say they were going to arrest a dual national because he or she is really a Czechoslovak. We would say no, that person is an American citizen. We have a treaty that says he automatically lost his Czechoslovak citizenship when he acquired U.S. citizenship. But after the revolution people liked the idea of keeping their Czechoslovak citizenship along with their American one. So there were some legal citizenship issues we were negotiating.

On the administrative side, there was a huge infrastructure problem that the State Department was very slow to deal with. They were extremely inflexible in responding to situations which involved moving resources around. Particularly as State had meager resources to begin with, reallocating resources was an extremely painful process. One of the major issues dealt with in terms of workload, but also from a foreign policy point of view, was the fact that after the revolution Prague became the Mecca for every Congressman, Senator, and senior administration person that you can imagine. From the end of December, when the revolution was consolidated and Havel was sworn in, we had a Congressional delegation, CODEL or STAFFDEL, and sometimes several in town, every single day through Easter. We sent a back channel "Official Informal" cable back to Washington after about two months of this, tongue in cheek obviously, saying "Look, we have a deal for you. We are going to have a bus stationed at the airport. It is going to have an extremely polished political and economic analysis of what is going on in Czechoslovakia. It is going to take visiting delegations to Wenceslas Square where they are going to have the opportunity for hourly press conferences. Then they will have the chance to be photographed with Cardinal Tomasek,

President Havel and National Assembly Chairman Alexander Dubcek. There will be extremely lifelike mockups of these three individuals in Wenceslas Square under the statue of St. Wenceslas. Then the bus will take the delegation back to the airport." We got a wry reply which basically said "no dice."

We were totally swamped with these visits. I remember going out to the airport to see off a CODEL on a U.S. air force plane which was taking them out. Another air force plane landed within half an hour with a Congressman who was coming in, and another air force plane landed an hour later with another Congressman. In addition, the Secretary of State and then the President and then the Vice President also all came to visit. I had the pleasure of coordinating all three of these visits which took about four months of my life. These three visits were very useful and very effective in making clear to Czechoslovakia that we really cared about them. Secretary Baker made a major policy speech in the Grand Hall of Charles University where Jan Hus had preached 600 years ago. While the massive security connected with a Presidential visit shocked the Czechoslovak officials, the Bush visit was a huge success and cemented our warm relationship. President and Mrs. Bush were generous in thanking Embassy staff for their efforts and posing for family photos. Vice President Quayle made a good impression during his Prague visit and a trip to Slovakia. His staff was so agreeable that we gave them a pre-wheels up party – a unique honor. In fact a lot of the Congressional visits were very useful too; it is just that it became a bit taxing for our small Embassy staff and Czechoslovak leaders who unfailingly made themselves available despite the demands of their other duties trying to create a democratic Czechoslovakia.

Q: Were we getting rumblings or mutterings from the Foreign Ministry saying "can't you do something about this?"

RUSSELL: Well, the Czechoslovak Government leaders were extremely gracious, particularly President Havel, who had a few other things to do. If humanly possible, he would agree to meetings with CODELs even on a Sunday.

Q: Well, I assume we were getting the same things from Germany I mean from the European countries too weren't they? Delegations coming over there.

RUSSELL: Yes, but it wasn't to the degree that we had and the security precautions were certainly not so intrusive. Some of my diplomatic colleagues would say "what else are you doing besides hosting visitors." It was a flood of high level visitors. It wasn't quite so much from most other countries, although the major European countries were also anxious to cement good ties with the newly democratic Czechoslovakia.

Q: Were you up against the phenomenon which probably developed a little later, of American students going over to teach English in Europe. I mean having a wonderful time. I mean this became a Mecca of the wandering year of American students. Had that happened yet while you were there?

RUSSELL: Yes indeed. But that was very good because a number of U.S. private organizations recognized, and certainly the Czechs and Slovaks recognized, that their first priority to get back into the game should be to learn English. So a number of private organizations organized squads of

university age students and older people to go over as volunteer teachers. As you say, Prague is a pretty nice place as is Czechoslovakia in general. So you had literally hundreds of these people coming to Czechoslovakia and by and large doing a lot of good. There were some people who came who were unqualified. The Czechs and Slovaks at various times didn't know exactly what to do with them. An individual town might have someone assigned to it; in effect their new English teacher had arrived. The person might or might not be particularly competent, but by and large they did extremely well, made lots of friends, and were very much appreciated. It was a very good program. I think Havel and others captured the American imagination.

Q: I remember Havel came to address Congress and I saw them too. Somebody analyzed it, here is Congress, Havel was making his very obscure philosophical statements and all and Congress was getting up and applauding away, and some are saying what the hell does this mean. Did you find that in a way it was difficult to sort of understand some of the things that were coming out of I mean sort of the philosophy and all that?

RUSSELL: Not really. I think that the initial inclination of the new Czechoslovak government was to do the opposite of whatever had been done before. In the case of the Warsaw Pact, it was to do the opposite of having a military alliance. So the feeling was to let the OSCE handle Czechoslovakia's security concerns. Let's not get locked into another alliance. There was a "let's abolish arms sales" idea that Havel also came up with. There was a general amnesty. A lot of criminals were actually let out. The police force was rather demoralized. However, in overall terms, what Havel did for Czechoslovakia was fabulous. Not only did he get favorable world attention and put the seal on this dramatic change in direction, but I think he motivated his own people and was an inspiration during a very difficult transition. For example, the GDP was going down after the revolution, not up. Many people felt they were better off economically under Communism. But in the context of his very idealistic approach, which I think was very appropriate for that revolutionary period, I think you had some things that were done that were perhaps politically unrealistic.

Q: I would have thought there would have been two elements to your embassy. They would have been like kids turned loose in the cookie store, one would be the CIA and the other would have been the military. Yes, because here was a bulwark of the Communist thing with equipment and secret police and everything else. How did they act on this?

RUSSELL: Yes, it was kind of a cookie store in that respect. But you have got to remember the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 so the utility of analyzing what was in a Soviet tank or other piece of equipment diminished somewhat. Yes, obviously all sections of the Embassy, all branches of the U.S. government, suddenly had a totally different relationship with their Czechoslovak counterparts than what they had before. Because we had supported the dissidents so strongly during the Communist period, there was a very warm relationship and requests for help across the board, and we provided it. I think that the U.S. diplomatic and assistance effort after the revolution in Czechoslovakia was very effective. I think we could have devoted more resources to it and acted more quickly. I also think we could probably have been more flexible, but on the whole we did a good job in helping out.

Q: Did you find yourself, let's take the Foreign Ministry which would have been the place where

your professionalism and their professionalism meshed. How did they go through their transition? I mean were we giving them advice on how to run a diplomatic service? They already knew how to do it; it was just changing their attitude.

RUSSELL: They certainly knew how to run a diplomatic service, but they were short on personnel who weren't compromised under the Communist system. Basically their approach was to purge the people that were intimately associated with the secret police and their efforts to control the domestic population. Those people were fired. But they held over large numbers of people. They had to because they didn't have substitutes. They kept many people who worked as diplomats or military officers under the Communist regime. Our relationship with the Foreign Ministry was a very friendly one. We could go in and be extremely frank about our concerns. There was one case where they were getting ready to sell tanks to a state that we considered sponsored terrorism. We really raised a ruckus about it. We said you really shouldn't do this. That was a fascinating exercise because, as I said, the relationship was extremely warm. They didn't want to do something that would really offend us. On the other hand, they didn't want to pass up needed money from a sale that really wasn't that objectionable from our perspective. It was interesting because my reading on it was there were mixed signals being given from Washington. While the Embassy was being instructed to go in and pound the table and say don't do that, we heard that in Washington there was a certain amount of winking and nodding and downplaying of our concerns going on.

Q: You can't say what the state was?

RUSSELL: I'd rather not just because it is still a lively issue in that part of the world, but it was one of the usual suspects. The Czechs were really confused as to what we really wanted. That was an interesting situation because here you had a government that really wanted to work with us, and we as a government were sending somewhat confused signals. However, by and large the relationship was if we had a UN issue or almost anything involving arms sales or cooperation on any given diplomatic issue, we had a superb opportunity to tell them our position and typically get their support. If not, we'd get a frank explanation of why they couldn't help.

Q: Were we seeing an exodus, you mentioned Czechoslovakia as sort of a terrorist R&R place, of terrorists and all that. Where were they going? I assume they didn't stay there.

RUSSELL: I assume they didn't. I know that the Czechoslovak government was aware of the security problem, and wanted to get control of the intelligence service. They wanted to get control of what was going on within their borders. I think the best example of the change in our intelligence relationship on terrorism is their reaction during the Gulf War where they were extremely cooperative and shared helpful intelligence about Iraqi WMD capabilities and other issues with us based on their good contacts.

Q: Because they had been through the period when the Soviets had been a big supplier of Saddam Hussein's military.

RUSSELL: Yes, and they had diplomatic representation there and knew where the bodies were buried. But the other thing they did is their security people intercepted a number of suspected terrorists and prevented them from entering the country. So they got pretty good control over their

own security apparatus, and were very cooperative in trying to avoid things like terrorist incidents against us in Czechoslovakia. We even had an armored car posted in front of our Embassy.

Q: Well, was there in the society as you were observing it, how did they treat those who had cooperated with the police and those who didn't? I mean the Czechs have a pretty tight society and they had been working on this for a long time. I would have thought there were an awful lot of people involved.

RUSSELL: I think almost everybody was involved. I think that Havel for example, recognized that in a speech where he basically said, "we are all guilty including me." Of all the people I can think of he was the least involved, and one of the people who most strongly represented idealistic, consistent dissent even at great personal cost. But he insisted everyone is compromised to some degree and therefore people should not judge each other too severely. He urged everyone to pull together and try to build a democratic society. That was the tack that the dissidents took even during the revolution. Consider their slogan, "No violence." It was a pretty good slogan from a small bunch of unarmed people in a police state. So their attitude in a state where almost everybody had been compromised in one way or another was let's move forward rather than look back. Now they did on and off develop a so-called "lustration" or personnel vetting procedure for people who worked for the Communist security apparatus to make sure they were not going to be employed in sensitive government positions. So they went through a certain amount of purging of people who had very specific secret police and high party affiliations. A very few people were locked up, but they weren't kept in that long. Basically they had been trying for a policy of reconciliation, and the deal when they took over was if you wretches will step out of the way at this point, we are not going to shoot you, hang you or really persecute you. Just get out of the way and let a decent government come in. That was the deal that was struck. Had the Communist party security apparatus leaders feared for their lives, I think they would have resorted to force rather than simply slinking away.

Q: Well, you were there until when now?

RUSSELL: I was there until the summer of 1991.

Q: The issue became very important to you later on, but were you seeing any fissures between the Czechs and the Slovaks at that time?

RUSSELL: Not a lot. We were seeing some reports even at that early date that some of the Communist officials were favoring more Slovak autonomy on the grounds that the Czech approach was going to be tougher on them than what they might experience in a more autonomous Slovakia. We had a few scattered reports coming in saying these guys thought they would be better off if they could get further away from the reach of Prague. However, these were really straws in the wind. What we did see is that the Slovaks not surprisingly wanted to get greater autonomy now that they were free of the Communist control. They wanted to go back to what they were trying to get in 1968. Part of the deal in '68 was democracy. Part of it was more autonomy for Slovakia that Dubcek was particularly pushing. So they wanted to follow up on that and get much greater autonomy, but not necessarily independence. We saw that as a possible area for friction, but it was not clear to us that they were going to split.

Q: Was the dissident movement pretty much a Czech movement?

RUSSELL: The dissident movement in the sense of charter '77 signatories and people who were involved in starting the '89 revolution was a predominately Czech movement. The Slovak dissidents were more associated with the underground church which kept going in Slovakia. The Communist security apparatus, the StB, actually had intelligence agents infiltrated into the church itself. The underground church was something else. The underground church and some of the environmental movements were more prominent in the dissident movement in Slovakia, whereas in the Czech lands it was more the intellectuals associated with the Charter '77 movement. In Slovakia in general, the Communists had not been perceived as ruling with such a heavy hand. Slovak industrialization occurred under Communism. Czech industrialization occurred more under Austria-Hungary. I remember being driven around by a Slovak regional Communist Party secretary when I went to lay a wreath on a monument to a U.S. OSS mission that was captured in Slovakia during the war. The Communist Mayor was pleased to have us come and make that kind of a gesture. He would support that, as long as there was no public ceremony. So I remember this regional party secretary drove me around in his big black Tatra limousine, and kept commenting "see that car, see that nice little house? We have given the people these benefits. We brought industry to Slovakia. We are responsible and that's why we are popular." I don't believe they were very popular, but Communism was perceived by many as less onerous in Slovakia. There were a lot of capital flows from the Czech part to the Slovak part of the country under Communism. So while there were a number of courageous dissidents like Jan Carnogursky in Slovakia, opposition wasn't as pronounced as in the Czech Lands.

Q: What about our embassy? I mean you must have had an awful lot of people there who had been highly cooperative with the secret police. I mean they wouldn't have gotten their jobs. How did that affect you as our foreign national employees?

RUSSELL: That is a fascinating question. I am sure it was true throughout the Communist bloc. We knew that the Czech and Slovak employees at the Embassy had to go to meetings with the secret police periodically. I think it may have been weekly, but I am not sure. I know our maid during our first tour appeared to be going to weekly reporting sessions. In fact, when we eventually fired her for letting our kids almost climb out a second floor window, she replied that we could not fire her because she had been assigned to us. The FSNs at the Embassy were a very diverse group; most of whom I think had rather warm feelings for us, as we did for them. When I was in the consular section for example, we had some wonderful people working there. If they did have to go to meetings, I cannot imagine that there were many who gave reports that actually hurt us. After the revolution, we got some information on what had been going on. The information confirmed this impression. However, there were some FSNs who were actually officers in the secret police. I don't know what the highest rank was. I think it was a Colonel. These "professionals" were a sinister lot, but at least I think we had identified most of them.

Q: You always hear the story of the Colonel as a chauffeur for the Ambassador.

RUSSELL: As I said, some of them were agents or active cooperators with the secret police. However, most of the FSNs were passive or reluctant cooperators who had to answer questions

and who I think probably avoided giving information which they thought might hurt their U.S. colleagues. There were constant efforts at physical penetration of the Embassy, constant efforts using personnel to try to infiltrate the Embassy and efforts to compromise Embassy personnel. I remember a security expert discovered that an extra computer terminal had been set up on our unclassified network. It turned out a line had been run through the wall in the Admin section to the next door Police Station. However, I think the StB was unsuccessful in penetrating classified security areas. Everything that occurred suggested that unless they were actually working for the secret police, most of the FSNs were not out to get us, and were a fine bunch of people. I feel very warmly still towards many of them.

Q: Well, what happened to the ones that were identified? Did they leave?

RUSSELL: They weren't always fired as soon as they were identified, as we figured the StB would just stick someone else in. You work with the devil you know. But when they did something really stupid, we would have to sack them. There was this one guy who was a real pain in the neck, who was incompetent at his Embassy job in addition to being a secret policeman. He put a bug in a packet of curtain samples that were going up to the Defense Attaché's office. Now they didn't let anything unexamined enter the Defense Attaché's office in Communist Czechoslovakia. So naturally it was screened and they found the bug in it and this idiot, who had carried it up there, was fired. This was the same guy who my wife found in our apartment fiddling with our couch which had been turned on its side. She said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I am checking the inventory number." There was a guy named Joe Kaplan, who was above him and was one of the top StB people in the Embassy. We knew who he was and that he was a bad apple. The FSNs knew who he was and when he asked us to let his dog breed with our champion dachshund, an FSN approached me and bad mouthed Joe's dog as having a bad back. We turned down Joe's offer and later found big nails driven into our four snow tires stored in the Embassy garage. I guess he was mixing business with personal motives.

Q: Were you sort of dangerous to the FSNs both by your own efforts and with them coming and telling you stories you hadn't heard before?

RUSSELL: No, I didn't ask them. It wasn't my job to delve into that. Others were responsible for these security and Intel issues after the fall of Communism. The FSNs obviously didn't want to talk about it. I didn't want to scratch a wound unnecessarily.

Q: How about economic relations, did that change?

RUSSELL: Yes, they changed a lot in the sense that we made a big effort to attract American business into Czechoslovakia. There was a lot of interest. When we managed to get authorization for a 50% increase in the staff, one of the things we fought hardest for was a Department of Commerce guy to come out. Our lone economic officer was suddenly in a major commercial operation and overwhelmed with work. A lot of American firms did come in including some individuals whose proposed deals sometimes hit the press in a negative way, like a gentleman who was reported to be trying to buy the Tatras mountain resorts. By and large, good American firms came in and hired very competent people as their local representatives, often former deputy ministers and people from that level. So all the big firms, GE and others came in very quickly. A

lot of American investment poured into Czechoslovakia. And it kept pouring into the Czech portion, but less into Slovakia after the split.

Q: What about the commercial side? One thinks of Czech guns. I would have thought that guns would be a big thing to sell in the United States, particularly handguns. Was this a problem for us almost morally?

RUSSELL: I don't remember that problem arising, but we were concerned about Central and Eastern European weapons sales to rogue states. That was what we were focused on. I don't remember the issue of handgun sales in the U.S. coming up. Certainly the Czechs made some very fine quality weapons. My big regret is not buying a Czechoslovak shotgun. I could have purchased a fine quality Czechoslovak shotgun at a reasonable price. I love to hunt. In fact when I was there the first time, I used to go pheasant hunting and enjoyed it tremendously. Czechs and Slovaks are great hunters and take good care of their woodlands.

Q: How about while you were there, the Soviets were still Soviets. Were there Soviet troops in the area or what about the Soviet embassy?

RUSSELL: There was a huge Soviet embassy not far from our Ambassador's residence complex. There was an enormous Soviet presence in a country where they had called the shots since 1948. I got to know their DCM. His Ambassador was one of the few Soviet Ambassadors who denounced the 1991 coup against Gorbachev. He struck me then as a new school kind of guy, as someone who had hopes for a more democratic, open society in Russia. It was interesting to see the change in the Soviet stance and the way they were starting to view the world.

Q: There weren't Soviet troops...

RUSSELL: There were Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia after the 1989 Velvet Revolution until June 1991. Michael Kocab, who had been a hard rock musician and composer, became one of the leading members of the new Parliament. He was a big friend of President Havel and a very tough minded, smart guy. He was put in charge of negotiating the withdrawal of the Russian troops. I remember he told me at one point, "well I've gone from hard rock to heavy metal." He negotiated the withdrawal and the Soviet forces did pull out of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs had made it clear they wanted them out of there as quickly as possible. During their stay the Soviets simply dumped bottom of the tanker car gasoline and oil into the sandy areas around their main base and it went straight into the aquifer. When they left they took the plumbing, doors and windows out of buildings. It was a very unfriendly leave taking. They managed to trash everything and caused a huge amount of pollution over time. In Slovakia they made the same environmental mess, but left under different circumstances. Even some of the leaders of the dissident movement like the Christian Democratic Party leader Jan Carnogursky took a much friendlier approach on the Soviet departure. Whereas in the Czech Republic there weren't any bands seeing them off, in the Slovak part of the country, they did have cordial departure ceremonies.

Q: When you left there in '91 it must have been quite an up beat mood.

RUSSELL: Very much so. Czechoslovakia had moved from authoritarianism to democracy and

the Cold War was over. It had been a fabulous assignment. I left, and came back to Washington. I bid for the job of Director for Eastern Europe, an Office Director position. There were a lot of people bidding for that and I didn't get it. I got a call and was urged to bid for the Deputy Chief of Mission job in Argentina which I would have liked because my old friend Terry Todman was Ambassador there. I have enormous respect for him and would have liked going there. However, I don't speak any Spanish and I don't know anything about Latin America, so I didn't feel I would be any added value there. I also got a call from a friend, Sandy Vogelgesang, who was over on detail at EPA as Deputy Assistant Administrator for International Activities. The job of Director for International Cooperation was coming up. That appealed to me a lot because it involved environmental clean up efforts in Central Europe, as well as other areas. It also offered the possibility of moving up in a year to Deputy Assistant Administrator and further management experience with a large staff, a big operation and a big budget. So I finally decided not to compete for Argentina and to go on detail to EPA.

Today is 11 July 2000. Ted you were nominated to go where?

RUSSELL: Slovakia. My name was sent over by the Department to the White House I think in February of '93. What I was hearing was there was some thought the White House might want to send a political Ambassador instead.

Q: I assume a political of Slovakian ancestry.

RUSSELL: Yes, with some Slovak tie. I knew of at least one political nominee who was interested in it, a rather high ranking and respected staff person from the Congress. So that went on for awhile. Finally the White House announced me, I think in July or early August. Then I was able to start to get ready, but as you know the Congressional Affairs Bureau is very careful about what you do before you are actually confirmed, so my preparation to go to Slovakia was mainly limited to the Department and other foreign affairs agencies. I was not supposed to run around and talk to American businesses and that sort of thing outside the Executive Branch.

So I was announced in mid summer and started to read in on the situation. I would go around and talk to people in the Department. I knew something about Bratislava because I had been in Prague when we first reopened the Consulate in Bratislava in 1990. Of course Slovakia became independent January 1, 1993, so our little consulate there became an embassy. I started going around the Department trying to find out exactly where we stood. That was a rude awakening, because actually we had done almost nothing there. We had a skeleton staff. We had not really done anything on the administrative side. We didn't have a regular admin officer there for the first seven months or so of the existence of the Embassy. They would have TDY people come in. The Department basically did nothing to get Slovakia spun up from an administrative point of view. You had AID going in gradually building up a mission and getting good office space and nice housing for the staff. They were well ensconced by the time I started reading in. USIA had an officer out there as well. She had enough funds to set up a decent office and get a nice apartment. But still the Department had done almost nothing by way of administrative support for its own staff and basic Embassy functions like communications and security.

Q: Was this just oversight or did you feel there was a certain amount of being almost miffed that

Czechoslovakia had split up and to hell with that?

RUSSELL: You have captured it exactly. I know some of the personalities involved. I know some of the things that happened early on even when there was only a consulate there. There was literally a sense of "Don't those people understand we are being stretched thin on resources." I assisted Ambassador Black in building up the staff to credible proportions in Prague to handle the emergence of a new, democratic Czechoslovakia. We were under great pressure to get the staff up to an adequate level in Prague. We worked hard and succeeded, but the Prague staff certainly had no fat. Then the Department said, in effect "Who are these people splitting and suddenly making us staff yet another embassy." So the reaction from Embassy Prague or even more back in Washington was "we can't afford this. We will take a few people from Prague, very reluctantly surrendered, and send them to Bratislava." That was it. So we had no classified communications by cable or telephone. If people in Bratislava wanted to send a telegram about this newly independent country, with a Prime Minister we didn't trust in power and in an area where we had major policy concerns, the reaction was Embassy officers could drive to Vienna to send any cable. The Embassy reporting officer had to drive to Vienna, which could take at least an hour if there was no traffic, to send anything that was classified because the Department refused to pay to set up classified communications. The second thing that I learned was that even if we received classified communications capability, there was no place to prepare them. We didn't have a safe shielded room nor did we have machines that you could use to type classified reports in the Embassy. The Department refused funding for that. We did not have an assistant Administrative officer or "GSO" to help an Admin officer, who unfortunately was not up to the job.

Q: Sounds like this is the whole syndrome, you know. Here is someone, let's get them over there.

RUSSELL: So we were in a situation where it was an administrative nightmare. What I was being told in Washington was "Yes, we know the admin situation at the post is awful. We know you do not have someone who is able to do the admin job there. But that's the way it is."

Q: This is interesting because it is not quite a parallel, I interviewed Alan Wendt who was in Slovenia. Alan was saying there were a lot like Larry Eagleburger these old Yugoslav hands, at that point they were saying well Slovenia started this whole disintegration and screw you. I mean there he was going out as an Ambassador to a country which had a bunch of people who were being rather piggish and nasty just because it was inconvenient.

RUSSELL: It was inconvenient to have to staff these new posts. I think there were several things at work here. The Department went into this in a situation where, as I understand it, there were all the new posts having to be opened in the former Soviet Union yet the decision was made not to ask for extra money.

Q: This was Jim Baker.

RUSSELL: That was a Baker decision as I understand it. I don't know exactly how that worked with respect to Slovakia because Slovakia didn't go independent at that time. It went independent a little later than that. But certainly we were in a pinched situation with respect to resources, really very badly pinched. But the problem was that there was no relation that I could see in the

Department at the top between policy and resources. Top policy people, who were very smart, had all kinds of wonderful ideas and wanted an extremely activist approach. I had a visit from a senior policy official out there who said, "Well how are you spending your time?" I said, "I am spending about 70% of my time on admin. I have inadequate communications, my people are still living in hotels and I have totally inadequate admin support. It is something that I am trying to rectify, and at the Department's request, I spend a lot of time on that. I'd appreciate your help." He said, "Oh that is terrible. You ought to spend almost all your time on public diplomacy, on lobbying for our political objectives." I said, "I would be much happier believe me, doing exactly that. Right now we are working in administrative chaos." There was an absolute lack of communication as far as I could tell between the 7th floor resources people, who were totally unsympathetic, and the policy people. The policy folks well understood our political interests in Slovakia but did not force the reallocation of resources to help achieve them, so I felt whipsawed between them.

Q: I was saying you really have to point the finger at Secretary of State Warren Christopher. I mean having his predecessor, Jim Baker, say not to use any money, and then Warren Christopher is basically a lawyer and had no sort of administrative experience or interest. You know, they just didn't get their act together.

RUSSELL: I think it is something that the Department has suffered from for a long time that resources and policy have not been particularly well matched. I think they have also suffered from inability to reallocate resources. That doesn't mean they are not able to cut things, but what we saw in Slovakia was that big cuts were being made in big posts in Europe in Paris, in Rome and other posts. The European bureau was being whacked at very hard. I don't know how many dozen officer positions they were being required to cut. But the point is if you have a post that is just starting, it isn't staffed, and you have either across the board cuts or a situation where the new post says we need additional positions in order to be able to function, the resource people are going to say "when we are cutting Ambassador Harriman's Paris Embassy, we are certainly not going to give you additional positions." So there was a disconnect between the big policy issues which we had there, which were understood by policy people at the top in the Department and the resource shortfalls where the top resource people in the Department were totally unsupportive. European Bureau administrative support staff were caught in the middle. They tried to be helpful. I got a GSO finally in 1994 after months of demoralizing administrative vacuum, but we were in a situation where admin issues were absolutely fundamental because they hadn't been addressed when the post was set up. When I arrived at the post in December, Bratislava had been operating as an Embassy for 11 months and still was an administrative mess.

Q: Were you the first Ambassador?

RUSSELL: I was the first Ambassador. Bratislava was set up as a consulate in 1991 and this tiny consular operation suddenly became an embassy. AID and USIA got their acts together relatively fast, State did not. So you were asking what did I do when I was reading in. What I spent most of my time doing was going pillar to post within the State Department and the Washington bureaucracy trying to get people focused on the serious administrative problems at post involving lack of adequate U.S. or trained FSN administrative support, lack of classified telegraphic or telephone facilities, lack of adequate housing, lack of Embassy and Residence security and myriad other resource problems. We had only one American staffer on the administrative side. I was

hearing in Washington, and this was confirmed after my arrival, that the individual was not up to what was admittedly a daunting task. An officer, who became my Deputy, was sent out in mid 1993 to replace Paul Hacker as Chargé until I was confirmed. Paul had done good work as Consul in Bratislava prior to the split and then held the fort pending nomination of an Ambassador. My future Deputy, sent out as Charge, worked hard to improve the very unsatisfactory administrative situation and to get up to speed on the dicey political situation.

Q: Who was that?

RUSSELL: Eleanor Sutter, a very bright and energetic officer. I said, "Look, Ellie, why not get together with admin. and send in a cable describing what you are facing out there so we will have something on the record." All I was seeing were records of telephone calls saying nothing is working. So we got the most pitiable message in. It was as if someone had typed it on an old fashioned typewriter and it had come over the airwaves in this kind of scrambled, garbled form, this pitiable lament about how nothing worked, there wasn't enough money, everyone was upset and morale was low. Things were a total mess from an administrative point of view. So armed with this document, I went around to the administrative folks and said, "Look, we really have got to do something about this." EUR/EX was obviously interested in seeing that this post worked. Many working level people in the Department were helpful, but there simply wasn't any money being allocated and additional staff was not being approved. When I had a chance to meet Secretary Christopher briefly for a photo op at a group lunch for outgoing Ambassadors, he asked "how are things in Bratislava" I said "other than lack of staff, housing and communications, fine." His answer was "good luck." So what I finally did was approach another agency on the communications issue. At that point there were expressions of horror from the folks at State who had maintained there was no money for classified communications for Bratislava. Suddenly, communications money became available, and we received enough to set up a little khaki colored tent in the attic in which our communicator could sit and actually type one classified telegram at a time on a little box. I had to fight like hell to get that. Then I got a little bit more money for a few more FSN positions. We had very few FSNs, and they weren't trained. A lot of them didn't know what they were supposed to be doing. They didn't actually have anyone to train them. And then I talked with people about how we could coordinate better with Vienna. The people in Vienna under Ambassador Hunt were really great, and they were our support for many services. Anyway, to make a long story short, I spent most of my time trying to get more admin. support. EUR/EX finally, reluctantly because they were hard pressed, said, "Okay, we will try to get you a GSO sometime next year," and they did. Really that was the single most important thing because we got a superb GSO, David Newell, who came out in late spring of 1994. Anyway, I got out there after I was sworn in in December. It had been a particularly long process from when I was announced in mid summer, to when I went out in December because we had some controversial people in my group of Ambassadors up for confirmation by the Senate. One of them was the ill famed Larry Lawrence. I remember Ambassador Dennis Kux on behalf of AFSA, blasting Lawrence's appointment in appropriately strong language.

Q: He was going to Switzerland.

RUSSELL: He was going to Switzerland, exactly. So that was one of the reasons why our whole group was held up, why it took me so long to get out there. When I got there it was clear there were

an awful lot of serious political issues that we needed to report. But, at the same time, there were overwhelming administrative problems. That was the dynamic of much of my tour I would say, trying to work with those two sets of problems, one fascinating, challenging and a great deal of fun, and the other extraordinarily frustrating, but satisfying when you could make a breakthrough. I arrived, got very speedy access to the Slovak President and presented my credentials.

Q: Who was the president?

RUSSELL: President Kovac. He was very friendly from the start. It was an interesting dynamic because he didn't get along with Prime Minister Meciar. In fact, they came to hate each other. Meciar was a strong authoritarian type who was for the second time Prime Minister of Slovakia when I first arrived. I got to see Meciar very quickly and had a long and cordial initial conversation. I had been warned about him by briefers in Washington. He was very manipulative and I was briefed that he used various techniques to throw you off balance when you were talking to him. He had been a boxer at one point in his life. Supposedly, he would stare at you just above your nose as he was speaking. That was supposed to be disconcerting. I don't know whether that would be disconcerting or not, but he didn't do it with me, and we actually had a good conversation.

At one point I said "We want a good relationship with Slovakia. We want to help you. Your government has asked for our support in a number of different areas in moving forward to establish a working free market and democracy. How do you see our relationship?" He answered, "Well, you won the cold war. It looks like we should be with you." That was his succinct reading of the international situation. No ideas about "democracy vs. totalitarianism." At another point, we were talking about political philosophy. I said, "One American president I have always admired a lot was Teddy Roosevelt. He had this philosophy of 'speak softly but carry a big stick'." By the way, Stu, I still think this should be America's foreign policy in a nutshell. Meciar responded, "That sounds pretty good, but really the Romans understood politics the best. You remember the Romans said 'Divide et Impera'. That is really what it is all about." That encapsulated Meciar's approach to everything. That was a clear statement of how he maneuvered during his political career by pitting competitors against each other, creating a constant atmosphere of tension.

Q: When you went out there and you weren't doing the administrative side, what was the reading you were getting from your colleagues in the Department about why Czechoslovakia had broken into these two parts, and how did we feel, we or the United States government feel about it?

RUSSELL: I had gotten that reading back when I was in Prague and had followed Czechoslovak events since that time. We knew for certain that Slovakia was going to demand more autonomy as soon as they got the chance. It was predictable and not a bad thing. I guess in the summer of 1992 I started talking to Personnel and said, "I want to be considered for Ambassador to Slovakia." They said, "There isn't a Slovakia." I replied "Yes, but there will be." It was clear to me already by then that things were moving in a direction where there might very well be a Slovakia, because I knew from having dealt with him in Prague that Vaclav Klaus, the Czechoslovak Prime Minister from July 1992, was not going to do anything that would compromise the Czech part of the economy and his planned reforms. He would make any deal with Meciar, who was the Slovak Prime Minister, short of one that would compromise the economy. What Meciar essentially wanted was a

loose federation, not a split. He was not demanding an independent Slovakia. He wanted everything short of that because among other things there were substantial economic benefits to remaining linked to the more prosperous Bohemia and Moravia. Meciar simply demanded more than Klaus was willing to give. I think Meciar was surprised when Klaus refused and felt he had been pushed into a definitive split rather than having chosen it himself. But Meciar then accepted the split and took great pride in characterizing himself as the father of Slovak independence. I remember Havel was extremely upset by this notion of splitting and was very much against it. But Klaus and Meciar declined to hold a national referendum on it. Polls showed that a large majority of Czechs and Slovaks would have voted against splitting at that point.

I was convinced well before the split that this was going to happen. The way the U.S. looked on it was that it was not good for the Slovak economy in particular. The feeling was that this was not a good thing for either side because they were only a country of fifteen million splitting into ten and five. Slovakia had a large Hungarian minority population and a weaker economy and the situation in the Ukraine made it a risky neighborhood. On the other hand, it was not our call. Our position was "Do it democratically and peacefully and good luck." After the split, we immediately recognized them both and asked "What can we do to help?"

Q: How did you find by the time you got out there, you know taking on being a nation. How was that taking hold?

RUSSELL: I think that once they split, gradually you had a growing majority accepting the notion of Slovak independence and supporting it. Many Slovaks felt that the Czechs had always treated them like little brother. There is certainly a big majority which wouldn't want to go back but would rather be independent.

Q: Were things kind of working?

RUSSELL: No, not really. The Slovak economy took a bigger hit after the collapse of the Soviet Union, because they depended a lot on their heavy military industry. They had a lot of tank and APC factories in Slovakia and produced more than half of Communist Czechoslovakia's huge output of military equipment, most of it sold to the Middle East and South Asia. Czechoslovakia was one of the top ten arms producers in the world. These heavy defense industries were mainly in eastern Slovakia where the Soviets wanted them so they were further behind the lines. Some had been moved there before World War II. They were doing very well under Communism.

As I mentioned to you talking about my service in Prague, the fact of the matter is the Slovaks had industrialized under Communism. The Czechs had industrialized under Austria Hungary. The Slovaks got a chicken in every pot and a car in most garages mainly under Communism. Some of them actually got that under the Slovak Clero-Fascist state during WW II when they did fairly well as kind of a granary for the Reich, until the Slovak national uprising in 1944. So you had a situation where the loss of the Soviet market for Czechoslovak exports with the collapse of the Soviet Union in '91 really hit the Slovak economy very hard. Also, the heavy arms industry, which had already started to decline in the 1980s, was gradually squeezed down in Slovakia as they lost their traditional customers and state subsidies. So their economy was not doing well. The GDP dropped and unemployment rose. This was true of most of the former Soviet bloc countries in the area after

the fall of Communism. Inflation was high, around 24-25% at one point. The hope was that they could attract foreign business and they could privatize and this would make things move forward. Indeed the Slovak economy by about '94 started to turn around to some extent. They had a very smart economist at the head of the central bank, a brilliant guy, who I think, helped them with their international credibility, and helped start the economy back. Actually Slovak economic statistics during 1994-'96 were pretty good. Slovaks, particularly the younger generation, are very entrepreneurial and Slovakia is strategically located in terms of exports. However, they didn't get much foreign investment under Meciar. He scared a lot of foreign investors away and privatized a lot of state properties to his cronies who ran them into the ground.

Q: I was looking at the map and you have got the Ukraine which essentially you had while it was part of the Soviet Union had grabbed a bit of Czechoslovakia.

RUSSELL: The Soviet Union had grabbed a corridor. They wanted to connect with Czechoslovakia so they would have a corridor, and they just seized Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.

Q: Well, Ukraine was going and still is going through a lot of bad times economically. How did that impact on Slovakia?

RUSSELL: Not a lot. The loss of the Soviet Union market, which would include the Ukraine, hurt Slovakia. But like the other countries in the area, they gradually reoriented their trade and fairly quickly most of it was going to the West, the EU, particularly to Germany and to Austria and the Czech Republic. Those are still their biggest trading partners.

Q: We are still on the economic side. What did these tank factories turn into or do?

RUSSELL: Well they went from about 90% capacity or more down to about 10% capacity, and a lot of people were laid off. When I was there, there was still a concern about Slovak shipments of heavy weapons if not to pariah countries, then to countries that we didn't want them to ship to like Syria. So they were still making some of them, but it was a much lower production rate.

Q: Well, were they finding other things to produce?

RUSSELL: Yes, but they weren't doing particularly well at it. They were making some low end electronics. They had some agricultural exports. I mean they weren't doing an awful lot. They were doing fairly well on some of the foreign investments that had come in. Volkswagen set up a very successful plant in Bratislava, so they were exporting cars from that. Whirlpool had a very successful plant up north. They had some machinery exports, electronics exports, that kind of thing, but it wasn't a very prosperous economy.

Q: How about agriculture?

RUSSELL: Agriculture had once been the backbone of the Slovak economy, but by the time the Soviet influence was removed, agriculture wasn't a big factor.

Q: Well, then did the Czechs do much about Slovakia? Was there still much connection between

the two?

RUSSELL: That is a very good question because the answer is that at first people were shocked by the split. A lot of Slovaks were married to Czechs. So there was initial shock, and then there was a funny reaction. It was almost as if the Czechs reacted by saying "Well okay, they wanted that, to heck with it, because they caused this split and they were the ones who benefitted most economically from being with us. If that is what they really want, let them have it." There was some of that kind of bitterness in the initial Czech reaction. The Slovak reaction became "That's too bad. We don't dislike the Czechs, but we are glad to have our independence; now let's see what we can do." There were mixed reactions to it. However, the Visegrad countries, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, are now working very closely together to help each other get into the EU and to help Slovakia get into NATO because Slovakia leaves a big geographic hole in the area. This has brought the Czechs and Slovaks back closer together. They have settled virtually all of their outstanding problems stemming from the split. There was the problem of how to divide the national wealth. There was the question of Slovak gold being held by the Czechs and how much they should pay to get it back and small border adjustments that under Meciar couldn't get solved because he always took such a tough approach to things. Now these transition problems have virtually all been solved and the relationship is fast improving. That's where it is right now. (Note: the Czech Republic had already joined NATO in March 1999, while Slovakia, held back by the Meciar period, did not enter until March 2004. Both joined the EU in May 2004. Relations between them are excellent, the Slovak economy is doing well and foreign investment has greatly increased since the Dzurinda government came into office in 1998.)

Q: How did you find the government there? I mean what sort of role were we playing with the government that was there when you were there?

RUSSELL: It was very interesting. We recognized Slovakia immediately when they became independent. The basis was they declared "We want to become a democratic country with an open market economy and we'd like your help in moving in this direction." That was the stated basis of the relationship when I arrived. Meciar's natural predilection was to look more towards Eastern ways of doing business economically and politically. He was gradually realizing that Slovakia's future lay in the West, but he didn't trust the West to accept the way he wanted to run Slovakia and to accept him personally. He basically wanted to have Western acceptance without giving up his autocratic ways. He also appeared anxious to play a bridging role between the U.S. and EU and Russia.

We didn't trust Meciar, but we were willing to work with him and judge him by his actions. Basically what I was instructed to say was "We want to work with you; we want Slovakia to succeed; we want a good relationship, but that will depend on your policies. If you are moving in a democratic, free market kind of way, we will totally support that. If you are not, we won't. But we want a good relationship and we want Slovakia to succeed in joining Euro-Atlantic institutions which is your government's stated goal." So we had a cautious relationship. The problem was you couldn't trust Meciar. He dominated the government. He had the charisma and force of will and the intelligence to succeed. He was a good political tactician, but could not escape his desire to control others and his propensity for confrontation.

Our job was to persuade Meciar that it was in his interest to maintain good relations with the U.S. and other Western countries by not pushing the envelope on authoritarian solutions. Yet you couldn't trust him to do that, even if he said he would. For example, in our first meeting he said U.S. – Slovak relations were great and there were no bilateral problems in his view. Then within a week or two we learned he was getting ready to break the contract which allowed Radio Free Europe to operate in Slovakia. I went to him late one Saturday afternoon, as I recall, and said, “Prime Minister, what is this? What is going on? You are meeting President Clinton in a summit in Prague in a few weeks and that is going to sour things if you force Radio Free Europe out of Slovakia by breaking a legitimate contract.” “Oh, no,” Meciar said, “We wouldn't do that. I can assure you we will roll that right back. That was a terrible mistake. How could my minister have done that?” Although it seemed likely Meciar himself was behind the decision, I decided to take him at his word and press for its revocation. I therefore called about every third day to his office or the Foreign Ministry to urge the matter be rectified. I had a call the day of the summit where he was to meet with President Clinton in which he again gave assurances the measure would be rolled back. Clinton did not raise the matter and the game went on until I got a letter from the Foreign Minister the day before the contract was due to be revoked saying the government had rescinded the order. Meciar repeatedly showed himself untrustworthy and did not seem to realize that he was creating an increasingly negative impression on the U.S. and Western European countries that would be deciding whether to let Slovakia into NATO and the EU.

Q: Was there a Parliament?

RUSSELL: There was a parliament in which Meciar had really lost the majority. It was a situation where he started out with a majority, and then because of this “divide and conquer” mentality combined with an extremely confrontational way of doing business, he gradually alienated his leading allies. He was a bit like a shark that needs to keep swimming to breathe. He seemed to need constant conflict to function. Because of that he had gradually alienated enough people from his own party that they split and formed another party. He literally created an entire party, former friends of Meciar, whom he hated, and who hated him.

As Meciar gradually alienated people, opposition built in the parliament. He lost his majority, and in mid March 1994, his opponents combined together and voted him out. He knew what was going on. Meciar was an intelligence freak, loved anything to do with intelligence and intrigue. I was seeing him regularly. “Well, Mr. Prime Minister, what is going on?” “Well, they are plotting against me. They are going to throw me out. But I will come back. You watch; you just mark my words,” and he would tell me about all these plots some of which I heard about from others. He just loved to show how much he knew. Sure enough, his opponents got together and got him out. But, I kept in touch with Meciar. When he was in power, he was interested in having decent relations with the Embassy. When he was out of power, he really wanted good relations with the Embassy. He and his people would go out of their way to keep up good contacts. Once I went to call on him, he said, “Well, the new government people think they are in power, but I control the civil service so they are going to find out who really is in charge around here.”

The new Center Left reformist government under Prime Minister Jozef Moravcik came in with high hopes but didn't have time to accomplish that much. A majority agreed in parliament that, having thrown the Prime Minister out by a Parliamentary no confidence vote, early elections were

required in the fall. Well, the Moravcik government made a number of significant reform moves and gained a lot of international good will. However, they were lousy campaigners. They didn't understand the first thing about campaigning, and they had very few charismatic candidates to put forward. Meciar had more charisma in his thumb than some of them had. So he put on a really vigorous campaign, allegedly with electoral advice from Berlusconi's party in Italy, brought some actors and stage personalities into the campaign and promised money to everybody. It was a really rip roaring campaign, and Meciar won.

Government leaders were predicting to me that even if they got a majority, if the majority was based on the participation of the Hungarian Party they would not be able to form a new government. The Hungarian Party during the election campaign was really short sighted because they played the Hungarian ethnic card so vigorously that they alienated supporters of the other pro-government parties. For example, there was one TV ad which showed Slovakia with the band of territory where the majority of Hungarians live in the south along the Hungarian border in Hungarian national colors instead of Slovak red, white and blue. Now if that didn't annoy Slovaks, what would? So I was hearing from the government leaders that there is no way we can work with the Hungarian Party so we are just not going to be able to govern any more.

Meciar came roaring back in. He was really angry and was going to get back at those, including Moravcik, who had defected from his own party, the HZDS, and who had maneuvered the no confidence vote in March that had ousted him. If there is anything that pleases Meciar more than conflict, it's revenge. Parliament, which Meciar now controlled, pushed through a whole series of measures excluding the opposition from key committees, and putting all the opposition leaders on the environment committee and excluding them from any role in oversight of the secret police and privatization decisions. Many people termed this episode the "night of the long knives." Things then went from bad to worse.

In reaction to Meciar's authoritarian moves, the U.S. adopted a very consistent policy. We wanted Slovakia to succeed as a democracy. We had spent trillions of dollars in the Cold War to achieve a free and democratic Central Europe. We therefore said to Meciar "we will judge you by your actions; we will help you in any way we can to move Slovakia towards democracy and a free market economy, but we will not support backsliding, including some recent actions against the opposition." Now, if we had gone to Meciar and said, "Look we don't give a damn what you do domestically. If you want to use the security services to intimidate people, if you want to whack the opposition while they are out of power, be our guest. Just give lots of contracts to American companies and support us in UN votes," he would have happily said "I agree." But that obviously wasn't our policy.

Q: No, it was not our policy. So he was kicked out originally while you were there.

RUSSELL: He was kicked out in March 1994 after being Prime Minister for the second time. He was the Slovak Prime Minister 1990-91 after the velvet revolution in the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CSFR) as it was known officially after December 1990. He was kicked out for about a year from mid 1991-92 in a Parliamentary "coup" engineered by the Christian Democrats. He came back as Prime Minister for the second time from mid 1992 until March 1994. The reform parties led by Prime Minister Moravcik were in charge from March until Meciar

formed a government in mid December 1994. The elections were late September, but then it took a long time to form a government. He finally formed it with the right wing extreme nationalist party and a far left “know nothing” party led by a real dummy who was appointed deputy head of Parliament. I had to pay a courtesy call on this man. He spent most of the time trying to explain to me why barter was the most effective means of international trade. So anyway, Meciar had this awful coalition with the far right and the far left. We sent in a cable after the elections titled “coalition from hell.” So Meciar put together this anti-reform coalition with people that he didn't even like, but who gave him adequate support in parliament to squash the reformist opposition.

Q: Well, it sounds like fun for a political reporter.

RUSSELL: Exactly. Political and economic reporting, policy development and public diplomacy were really very satisfying. I think the U.S. had an extremely effective policy there. We had an AID policy for example, where we were trying to help Slovakia particularly on the economic side because we figured that if they can get it right economically that would buttress the Moravcik government's reform efforts. We put a lot of money into helping them figure out the value of companies they were trying to privatize. But when Meciar came back in power, he didn't care about their value. He wanted to sell them cheaply to his cronies. So we concluded that this was a waste of money. We were paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to firms like Deloitte and Touche, which were doing very good work, carefully evaluating companies to be privatized. Then Meciar would just privatize them for political purposes. So we shifted the funds to helping the NGOs, the non-governmental organizations. We thus shifted the focus towards democratization. That was far more effective. I worked very closely with all my European colleagues. When you are an American Ambassador in an Embassy now you don't belong to the local EU club, often the most active group in town. I consulted very closely with the EU Ambassadors, particularly the ones whose countries were really interested in Central Europe and with the Ambassador representing the EU Commission. We shared information; we consulted and kept each other informed on impending demarches we were going to make and the results of those demarches. It took about two years, 1993-1994, to get the new Embassy on its feet administratively. Then, after that, we had an administrative platform that could support these policy initiatives, which I think were well conceived from the start. It was just that we didn't have the wherewithal in terms of staff and funding to carry them forward without extreme stress on the small staff. The staff at post has now doubled and is still extremely busy from what I hear.

Q: You were there from '93...

RUSSELL: I was there from late 1993 to the end of March 1996.

Q: Did the Slovak population of the United States play much of a role?

RUSSELL: No.

Q: Because you know the Latvian Americans did and Lithuania and Polish Americans, but this was not a...

RUSSELL: No, but you would have Slovak Americans come over to Slovakia for business or

family reasons. Some of the business interests were productive while others were dubious.

Q: Yes!!!

RUSSELL: Slovak Americans.

Q: Well, I take it I think of the Slovak Americans mainly heading to the mines in Pennsylvania or something.

RUSSELL: Yes, the immigration.

Q: You never hear very much about them being a major political force.

RUSSELL: They are not, just as the Czech Americans are not a significant lobbying group. There are more Czech Americans who are better known. Eugene Cernan, for example, is a famous "Czech American" astronaut. However, while his mother was Czech, his father was Slovak. The Slovak Americans have never been as well organized politically as have groups like the Polish Americans, the Greek Americans or even the Lithuanian Americans. And while certainly a few leaders of some of the Slovak American fraternal groups would come and pay a call and I would chat with them, they didn't really have any significant impact on the situation.

Q: Sometimes this is handy.

RUSSELL: Well, yes. I wish they had had more impact, because they might have come over when Meciar was in power and said, "Hey look, you are getting a bad press in the U.S. because of some of the things you are doing." Meciar constantly complained that his government was getting a bad press because they were misunderstood. He blamed the U.S. Embassy, in particular, and the Western press corps for "unfair" reporting. If more visiting Slovak Americans had said "Look, you really need to get your act together to attract foreign investment. You need to try and strengthen your relations with the U.S. You need to stop trying to control the electronic media, kicking opponents out of parliament and using police strong arm tactics to intimidate people." That might have made a small dent, but that really didn't happen as far as I could see. However, I don't know whether that was a realistic possibility.

Q: That whole area was a great source of integration during the turn of the last century, and had played quite a role in, I mean obviously Italian Americans, Greek Americans with the Croatian Americans, all had a hand in changing policy.

RUSSELL: Yes, but Czech and Slovak Americans typically have not been a similar political force.

Q: Well, what about sort of under the general rubric of human rights? I mean were you running around making human rights demarches? Were people being thrown in jail and that sort of thing?

RUSSELL: We paid a lot of attention to human rights. We spent a lot of time on the yearly human rights reports which for a very small embassy took an awful lot of the time available. However, Meciar was not involved in locking up a lot of people or regularly having opponents beaten up or

otherwise physically intimidated as under Communism. He preferred misuse of economic power in the privatization process to gain support and punish opponents, the wielding of his majority in Parliament to emasculate the opposition and a systematic effort to dominate the electronic media. While there were not blatant human rights abuses in Slovakia, there were some exceptions. A nasty exception was the case of the abduction and brutalization of President Kovac's son and the murder of a secret service agent involved in the case who was about to turn state's evidence. The chief of the intelligence service under Meciar was certainly directly involved in the affair. In any case, the President's son had a bottle of liquor poured down his throat, was thrown in the trunk of a car and dumped over the border into Austria. The idea was to embarrass Kovac because his son had a pending legal charge against him in Austria for some commercial deal he had been involved in. Well, that is a pretty interesting way to go about embarrassing the president.

Q: It sounds really subtle.

RUSSELL: Yes, really subtle. The people who thought that one up were not particularly subtle people. It was pretty clear from the outset that this was something the regime was directly involved in. That kind of thing really made people upset in Slovakia, in the EU and in Washington, including in the Congress. That was probably the most repugnant incident the Meciar regime was involved in. That was something that made people across the board come to the conclusion that Meciar simply didn't accept the constraints of democratic government.

Q: Sounds like a big city American political boss.

RUSSELL: Yes, it was something like "boss politics." I remember I had a conversation with Meciar at a private dinner organized by a Central European Ambassador. I could have very frank and even cordial conversations with him as long as I was not making a formal demarche that would become public. I said, "You know, we have a cherished concept in the United States of avoiding tyranny of the majority. We have a tradition of our Congressional majority not using its majority position to suppress the opposition and strip them of their rights." He shot back "The concept doesn't exist." It was clear that he thought tyranny of the majority was what politics is all about. It was a very revealing conversation.

Q: How about the media? Did you, get a Washington Post, New York Times correspondent coming in once every six months or something like that? Did you get much coverage there?

RUSSELL: It was a bit more often than that. Meciar and his colleagues would always complain they were getting a raw deal in the Western press. I always used to argue with them that they were getting bad press primarily because of what they were doing. However, I would admit that they were also getting a raw deal because too frequently the reporters would be based in Vienna or Prague or occasionally Budapest and would only make the trip to Slovakia when something bad happened. In Vienna they would tend to cover any interesting stories whereas when they came to Slovakia it was typically something unpleasant. If it was not about Meciar's authoritarian course, it was usually about something like desecration of tombstones in a Jewish cemetery or a Roma having been beaten up by skinheads.

I guess I talked with journalists about every two or three months. They were typically well

informed and had a pretty good general sense of what was going on, wanted to be fair about it, and were very reliable about observing any ground rules that we set up. I was never double crossed by a U.S. or British journalist while I was in Slovakia. As a result, I was always very frank with them and would tell them exactly what I thought was happening, although often I would speak on background only. The other group of observers I talked with rather often involved friendly Ambassadors from Prague who did not have an Embassy in Slovakia but were accredited there and wanted to know just what was going on. I was very frank with them as well. Then we had a fairly decent flow of American visitors. One of our priorities was to try and get more high level official U.S. visitors. I could go in myself at any time and talk with the Foreign Minister, but if you had an Under Secretary coming through, that would make a much bigger impact, or, of course Secretary Albright, who came a couple of times. So, we had a good number of visitors. Then, of course, a lot of U.S. business men also visited Slovakia, but they got very little out of the Meciar government.

Q: I take it Prague was sort of among the young folks of the United States, the place to be during much of this time. I mean a lot of kids were going over there and teaching English and sort of congregating at that time. So the Czech Republic was getting attention this way. Did you get any reflection of this American exodus to Slovakia, Ex-pats and...

RUSSELL: Not much, no. But I used to talk with the Slovak tourist bureau and people in government urging they make a major effort to get tourists visiting the usual trio of Budapest, Vienna, and Prague to include Bratislava. As far as young people becoming involved, there weren't many coming to Slovakia. There were some younger Slovak Americans visiting relatives but not many tourists. What you did have though were wonderful Peace Corps people. We typically had 45, 50, 60 Peace Corps people in the country, and they ranged in age from early 20s to mid-70s as I recall. They were terrific. They were teaching English, business practices or environmental techniques. They were really a dedicated and effective group and made a good impression in Slovakia.

Q: Well, what about the military side? Were the Slovaks doing anything on the military side, or, had whatever forces they had sort of been demobilized?

RUSSELL: They Czechs and Slovaks divided up the military establishment based roughly on a two to one split according to population. It was a lot of work and a little bit rough, but it worked out fairly well. The Slovak military was trying very hard to modernize. After the summit in Prague with President Clinton, where the Partnership for Peace initiative was launched, the Slovaks quickly announced their intention to join. They worked very hard to get all their planning documents in order. They were one of the first ones to join the Partnership for Peace. They became more interested in getting into NATO. Even Meciar insisted Slovakia wanted to get into NATO. What he meant was getting into NATO on his own terms. He didn't want to join any organization that would put curbs on his ability to do pretty much what he wanted domestically. While saying he wanted to enter NATO, he did nothing to advance that. Indeed he sabotaged a May 1997 referendum, which should have been about direct election of the President, by inserting three negatively loaded questions about NATO membership.

Q: Was it a referendum on NATO membership?

RUSSELL: It was supposed to be a referendum, desired by the anti-Meciar opposition parties, on direct election of the President. The opposition was afraid Prime Minister Meciar would accumulate Presidential powers once President Kovac's term was up by delaying the choice of a new President. Meciar's Parliamentary majority pushed through additional referendum questions on whether Slovakia should join NATO. These included loaded questions about locating nuclear weapons and foreign military bases on Slovak soil. Meciar's Interior Minister illegally removed the question of direct election of the President from the ballot and the referendum, in which only about 10% of the electorate participated, was declared invalid. The U.S. and EU both protested Meciar's actions and became more convinced than ever that Slovakia under Meciar should neither get into NATO nor the EU. Throughout this maneuvering the Slovak military played it cool. Their leadership made clear that they were ready and willing for a serious NATO bid once the politicians decided to pursue it.

Q: Of course.

RUSSELL: I had a good relationship with the leadership in the Slovak military, including the Defense Minister and the Chief of the General Staff. It was very clear to me that the Chief of the General Staff was acting in good faith trying to prepare the Slovak military to go into NATO if the politicians decided that is what they really wanted to do. He could not force that decision, but he could try to get the military in better shape for eventual membership. I don't think Meciar's Defense Minister, who was a decent guy, was against going in, but his far right, nationalist party was.

Q: Well, at that time, if you were the defense minister of Slovakia looking at a very unruly neighborhood, would you see a military threat?

RUSSELL: I don't think so. The only security threat I think they faced was severe political unrest in Ukraine or Belarus, for example, or a natural disaster like an earthquake. They were concerned about an event that might create a wave of refugees or a mass casualty situation of some sort. There was no concern really that another state might attack them militarily. However, the problem was that Meciar had too often played the Hungarian card, and so you literally had the sense that he thought Slovakia ought to be militarily prepared to deal with potential Hungarian aggression. Now Slovakia belonged to Hungary for 900 years, had suffered enforced Magyarization in the late 1800s, and in World War II had seen Hungary annex a broad strip of territory including its second largest city, Kosice. However, it was really absurd with the Central European states all trying to join NATO to see a military threat from Hungary and I don't think many people outside the far right nationalists and probably some of Meciar's people did. So the answer is no, Slovakia did not then and, of course, now does not face the threat of military attack from its neighbors. Given this situation, it has devoted considerable resources to peacekeeping initiatives in the Balkans and Middle East. However, it has understandably been developing a small but effective military to deal with any contingencies in its unsettled neighborhood.

Q: It hasn't been a very stable area.

RUSSELL: It is not a stable area, and therefore it makes sense for them to have a highly competent small military, and that is what they are trying to develop. As I say, that costs money and is a real

organizational problem. We tried to help them in every way to develop a modern, NATO compatible military. We spent a lot of money on that. When I was there initially we had a Military Attaché, Colonel John Miller, stationed in Vienna. We didn't have one in Slovakia, which was a problem; although our Military Attaché based in Vienna was superb. We finally got a fine Military Attaché of our own, Lieutenant Colonel Jim Spears., who was kept extremely busy. At the same time we had a small military liaison team (MLT) which would take Slovaks to view U.S. military units in training of various kinds and bring U.S. military units into Slovakia for the same purpose. It was a small but reasonably effective effort and we had good relations with the Defense Ministry even under Meciar.

Q: You know, during this '93 to '96 period, Yugoslavia was undergoing all sorts of problems. Did this impact, after all the Slovaks are Slavs and all even though they are settling from the area by the Hungarians who aren't.

RUSSELL: Well it impacted in the sense that we wanted Slovakia to take a helpful attitude on issues involving the problems in Bosnia. It wasn't anything Slovakia was directly involved in. Meciar was interested in those problems and sometimes was anxious to share his ideas on how they might be solved. These usually weren't ideas that were compatible with ours. But there wasn't a direct Slovak involvement. There was certainly an indirect one however.

In December 1995, we got a request from Washington and from U.S. Army Europe to get the Slovaks immediately to approve the transit of trains and trucks bearing U.S. supplies and forces to bases in Hungary for jumping off into Bosnia. We didn't have a status of forces or similar agreement with Slovakia to build upon. We had absolutely nothing to go on and I had recently made a stiff demarche to Meciar that had him literally red faced with anger. That was a major effort for our small post and my Deputy, our Military Attaché and his NCO assistant and our Political Officer, Tom Yazdgerdi, did a fantastic job in helping me work the problem. When it was over, we had over 200 trains and truck convoys pass through carrying U.S. military supplies. Meciar was out of the country when the request came in, but his Chief of Defense was very supportive. The Foreign Minister was also very helpful and Meciar finally approved the transit and, in fact, the Parliament had to approve it as well. But that was a case where the Embassy lobbied effectively and got a very quick turnaround on a rather tough request when you consider our relations at that time with the Slovak government. It was a huge effort. The Czechs were equally helpful, but interestingly the Austrians were not.

Q: This is when we were putting our troops into Bosnia.

RUSSELL: Yes, our troops were heading to bases in Hungary.

Q: In sort of looking at it, I wonder why Slovakia?

RUSSELL: I think the Czech-Slovak route was really required because Austria took a very long time to approve such a transit if they did at all, I'm not sure. The Czechs and Slovaks both had to approve it obviously for it to work. Both of them reacted in a very positive and expeditious manner. The Slovaks put together an operations team working 24 hours a day to push the thing through and coordinate among their police and railroad officials and the Foreign and Defense

Ministries. This Slovak team and the U.S. officials sent in from U.S. Army Europe and our own Embassy team worked very hard to pull this off.

Q: What about the summit that took place in Prague? When was it?

RUSSELL: January 1994

Q: Now, you were a brand new arrival?

RUSSELL: That's right, yes. I had arrived in December 1993.

Q: Did you get involved in that?

RUSSELL: Yes. I helped provide inputs on the situation in Slovakia for the President's briefing papers and for the Secretary. I participated in all the meetings involving the Slovak delegation. The Slovak delegation included Prime Minister Meciar, President Kovac and the Slovak Foreign Minister. It was a very successful summit and a good meeting with the Slovaks. However, Meciar was very angry because he felt that President Kovac, who he hated, did far too much talking. He was also annoyed because he had tried to keep Kovac's Foreign Policy Adviser, Pavol Demes, out of the room but failed to do so. I had to personally escort him into the meeting. The President did a great job in presenting our position on the Partnership for Peace and affirming U.S. support for Slovakia's democratization.

Q: President Clinton.

RUSSELL: Clinton, yes. The Slovaks were very interested in joining and were actually one of the first Central European states to join as I mentioned earlier.

Q: Well, was there any jealousy on the Slovak side about Havel being a world figure, you know, and sort of the glitterati and sort of everyone else. I am not denigrating because Havel is a genuine hero. Not only was he a hero but he also was the focal point of an awful lot of very favorable attention. Did this cause problems?

RUSSELL: Well, Meciar didn't like Havel one bit and people in his party didn't like Havel. Are you asking did it cause problems at the Summit?

Q: I am looking at it in general.

RUSSELL: There were people in Slovakia in Meciar's court who did not like Havel at all and this complicated the relationship with the Czechs. However, at the summit it wasn't a problem. The meeting was in Prague, but I don't think that bothered the Slovaks. The Poles were coming there and the Hungarians; everything was done very smoothly.

Q: Did you see a change in relations between the Czechs and the Slovaks. I am talking a sort of intellectually bureaucratic side. Did one look down on the other? Were there problems there?

RUSSELL: A change after when?

Q: A change while you were there. Did you see a gradual sort of getting back together taking this not when the split came it must have been quite difficult.

RUSSELL: Well after the split, I had the impression that some Czechs were saying “well if that's the way the Slovaks want it, let them go their own way.” Some Slovaks on the other hand were probably saying now “the Czechs aren't going to boss us around or act like big brother anymore.” But it was a totally peaceful split. It wasn't unfriendly. The Slovaks and the Czechs don't dislike each other. They are pretty close culturally and linguistically. Their languages are mutually intelligible. They were together from the end of World War I, with the sad hiatus of the Clero-Fascist Slovak State during World War II, until the end of 1992. They are pulling closer together now and I think there is a feeling of shared interests in Central Europe now that is very positive, including particularly between the Czechs and Slovaks.

Q: What about you mentioned you were on good terms with other Ambassadors. Was there a sense that the EU was beginning to, that there really was an EU as opposed to before where it was sort of an idea and customs are down, but as a unified group were you...

RUSSELL: Yes, there was an EU presence in Bratislava and it was significant and effective. The difference between an American Ambassador in Prague at the end of the Communist period with the dawn of democracy and an American Ambassador in a post Communist country was that the most important exchange of information in Prague took place in the NATO club. The most useful exchange of information in Slovakia took place in the EU club. However the EU was just as worried about what Meciar was up to as we were. I had friendly and productive relations with all of the major EU Ambassadors. I saw them all regularly. I was therefore sometimes invited to important EU lunches and EU meetings, even by the very effective and subtle French Ambassador. We would share assessments of the situation and exchange information on forthcoming plans for visits and demarches. So we had an extremely useful relationship which I worked very hard to develop and which they appreciated and reciprocated.

Q: Was the OSCE, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe, a significant organization at that time?

RUSSELL: It was significant. They met in Vienna, and occasionally Slovakia would be on the agenda for something Meciar had done. The U.S. would have to determine what position it would take and how to coordinate that position with other members to be most effective. Sometimes OSCE discussions irritated the Meciar government, but I can't say it was a principal forum influencing our bilateral relations.

Q: Were we keeping a watching brief on Germany and its influence in the area particularly the matter of trade, but trade means lots of other things, because this has all been sort of the traditional partner and all of a sudden you have a new Germany which has united. Its natural hunting ground is right where you were.

RUSSELL: We were not looking at it through that optic. I had very close relations with the

German Ambassador. She was very effective. They were just about as concerned as we were about what was going on. We frequently exchanged information and views on what was likely to happen next and how our governments should react. We shared information on planned visits, as Meciar was anxious to get an invitation to Bonn and to Washington. We thought it was healthy that they were developing a strong economic influence in the area, because we thought that would be good for the Slovak economy. Now if it came to a German company versus an American company, and I don't remember that issue arising while I was there, we would obviously lobby for the U.S. firm. However, the German businessmen were closer geographically, spent more time developing contacts, invited Slovak labor and management people to Germany and generally did better than we did in cultivating business ties.

Q: This may have been early days, but were we seeing a leakage out of the EU which is developing this whole mess of regulations often sort of with a socialist tinge which yeah build up the social net and build up the price of everything. Hell you get the same work done that you would be doing in France or Germany and get it done in Slovakia at a third of the price.

RUSSELL: Yes. That's why Whirlpool went in there.

Q: Were you seeing, was that beginning to happen?

RUSSELL: It was. It wasn't happening quickly enough because Meciar scared away foreign investors. However, a number of firms had come into post Communist Czechoslovakia and set up plants or offices in Slovakia and they were doing well because Slovak workers are generally well educated and hard working and salary levels and social overhead are a lot less onerous than in France or Germany.

Q: You don't have that horrible social cost.

RUSSELL: You don't have the very high wages, the short work weeks, the long vacations and all the other factors that make the unemployment rate in Germany about double the U.S. rate.

Q: How about did you find once you had gotten your administrative side straightened out, did you find you were pretty much in accord with Washington? Did we have a pretty strong direction on how to deal with Central Europe or not?

RUSSELL: I think we were very much on the same wavelength. When I would go back on consultations, I would talk with people at the NSC and 7th floor in the Department about the situation in Slovakia and find no differences in our political approach. I didn't see any daylight there. I never found myself at variance with what Washington was suggesting and Washington typically would accept what the Embassy recommended in terms of tactics to implement the President's overall strategy of support to Slovak democracy. We would submit our Mission Program Plan and would eventually get it approved with little change to the substantive content but little help on the resources side. Now, of course, one of the things that was going on was that everyone then was focused on Bosnia, so the foreign policy relationship between the United States and Slovakia was handled day to day by a very competent desk officer who agreed with the Embassy on what we ought to be doing. The NSC had some very sharp folks like Dan Fried who

were following this and had been to Slovakia and were helping keep our policy on a strongly pro-democracy track.

Q: Were you getting any sense of frustration or maybe some other type of emotion or feelings about how the Bosnia thing was going on because you know, there were a couple of years where you had the UN in there and then you had a European force, and it was abysmal. They were just prolonging the agony rather than acting. How did that hit you all and maybe your colleagues you were talking to, Slovak foreign Ambassadors?

RUSSELL: It did not hit us that much. Yes, we were following it, but we weren't getting all the telegraph traffic. We were involved sometimes because Meciar had his own ideas on the subject which he would occasionally communicate to us, but I am not aware that they had any particular impact on our planning. In terms of our relations with Slovakia, it did not have a major direct impact on our relations. However, as I mentioned, there were particular issues, like the convoy movements into Hungary in December 1995 that were a big deal for us. Also, the issue of trying to keep Slovak-Hungarian relations from deteriorating was of particular importance because of the Bosnian situation and the desire to prevent the spread of tension in the region. I spent a lot of time lobbying the Slovak government to improve relations with Hungary and to refrain from steps exacerbating relations with Slovakia's Hungarian minority. We spent most of the time trying to curb Meciar's authoritarian tendencies and strengthen Slovak civil society by working with NGOs, seeking Slovak support on joining a post-COCOM non-proliferation regime, helping U.S. businesses with various legal and administrative problems and generally conducting a vigorous public diplomacy campaign to convince Slovaks that the U.S. cared about their success. One business problem I recall was a proposed Slovak law adopting a French approach to limiting the import of foreign films into Slovakia.

Q: They had a quota system did they?

RUSSELL: I have forgotten all the details, but I remember we worked like hell to get it shot down and did. I got a nice letter from the head of the motion picture association. So it was that kind of issue we were very active on, but we weren't focused on Bosnia.

JOHN M. EVANS
Deputy Chief of Mission
Prague (1991-1994)

Ambassador Evans was born and raised in Virginia and educated at Yale University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and became a specialist in Soviet and Eastern European Affairs. His foreign posts were Teheran, Prague, Moscow, Brussels, St. Petersburg, Chisinau (Moldova) and Yerevan, Armenia, where he served as Ambassador from 2004 to 2006. In his assignments at the State Department in Washington, the Ambassador dealt primarily with Russian and former Soviet states' affairs. Ambassador Evans was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

EVANS: Prague again. My Czech was still serviceable; I did a little bit of brush-up and then I got to Prague for Fourth of July of 1991.

Q: And you did that until when?

EVANS: For three years, until '94, when I went to St. Petersburg as it by then was, as consul general.

Q: Okay. Well let's talk about- In the first place, what were relations like when you got there in '91, into Prague?

EVANS: Relations had just changed completely from what I remembered. We had an excellent rapport with the foreign ministry. We were ginning up assistance programs, we had an AID office by this time. Prague after the Velvet Revolution became something like the Left Bank in Paris during the '20s for young Americans, many of whom were writing poetry and novels.

Q: Which gave him also that extra clout, I think, in the U.S. as sort of- not to be dismissed.

How did you work around- or how did she and you work around the Luers? Were you able to- Did they leave and do time or-?

EVANS: Well, you know, I had also been quite close to the Luers and so my job was to try to cool things down and make sure that there weren't incidents. I was not there during the inauguration, I was still working on the CSCE, but eventually this sorted itself out and eventually Shirley Temple Black became very popular in Czechoslovakia.

The one difficulty that I had there was that it was clear already that the Czechs and the Slovaks were drifting apart. They had changed the name...they had inserted the word "Federal" or "Federative" was actually what it was into the name, the formal name of their country and this was a sign that there were some differences between the Slovaks and the Czechs. And Shirley Temple Black, Ambassador Black and the State Department did not want to see Czechoslovakia divide. That would be seen as a failure of American diplomacy. We had been involved in the birth of Czechoslovakia under Woodrow Wilson. Tomáš Masaryk was the founder of the first Czechoslovak Republic and so there was a deep bias against any splitting up of Czechoslovakia.

One of my political officers, Eric Terzuolo, and I saw very clearly that we somehow had to get the word back to Washington that the split was coming. Now, this would have been in 1992, and I remember we did a little bit of a tricky thing. We waited until Ambassador Black was out of town on a trip, I think to the United States, and we had to wait also for the political counselor at the time to be in Germany, and then with the acting political counselor we sent the cable that needed to be sent, entitling it "Thinking the Unthinkable: If Czechoslovakia Splits." And in that cable, which would have been, I think it was in September, late August or September of 1992, Eric Terzuolo was the political officer who mostly wrote it and I authorized it, we got the word back to Washington that they should expect this to happen, and why it was not the Balkans and why we should not overreact to it, that this was something that could be accommodated, that it was not

going to be a violent event, we should brace ourselves for it and not get in the way of it.

EVANS: Well, strictly speaking the velvet divorce was probably unconstitutional. But the politicians wanted it; the political classes of both parts wanted this split. There were some who got caught. For example, after the Prague Spring in 1968 a number of Slovaks had been brought by Gustav Husak, the Slovak party chief of communist Czechoslovakia, he brought a number of Slovaks to Prague and they were called "federal Slovaks." And so they had their homes in Prague, their families in Prague; many of them had married Czechs and they were really Czechoslovak and for them it was very difficult because the country they had served, Czechoslovakia, no longer existed. At the same time there were new people coming up in Slovakia who didn't have this affinity for the Czechoslovak experiment and really felt themselves Slovak. There are also religious differences involved and you can trace the differences back into history. Slovakia was always under the Hungarian crown in the dual monarchy, whereas Bohemia and Moravia were under the Austrian crown. So there were differences that emanated also from that.

Q: Well what about the personalities? Havel, I remember he came to the- he addressed Congress and they were applauding the most incomprehensible thing. I mean, he was working on a different, almost intellectual plane. I mean, I would think he would be a difficult person, not that he wasn't a nice guy but just he thought differently here. Or not?

EVANS: Yes. Václav Havel was a playwright, of course. He came from a, what the Soviets would call a bourgeois family, a fairly well-to-do family, and therefore was under a black cloud from the beginning in communist Czechoslovakia, had a very hard time of it, and was repeatedly in and out of prison. I had a couple of encounters with him back in the mid '70s during the height of the neo-Stalinist regime there and he was one of the signers of spokesmen of Charter 77, which was the premier human rights document and movement of those years. But he was very popular with the Czech populace and of course he was elected by a landslide and yet he had some...as a manager and as a statesman he did have some shortcomings. I have always found him more anti-Russian than the facts warranted, although for a Czech that's pretty understandable. I mean, I can well appreciate the origins of that anti-Russianism. But also, as you say, he was an intellectual, he had very strongly held moral and philosophical views which he was not terribly willing to compromise or see compromised, whereas Václav Klaus, his nemesis, was of a very different cut. He was a conservative economist, market economist of the Milton Friedman school and you could see at every step their different approaches to things.

Q: Well what about on the Slovak side?

And coming back to the Czech-Slovak split, Ambassador Basora took very poorly to Mr. Mečiar. I don't know exactly whether there was something personal, but he did not like Mečiar and although Basora went many times to Slovakia to see if there was any way to prevent the split from happening it was too far gone by then and on New Year's, between '93 and '94 it would have been, the countries split.

Q: Was there a- What sort of a component did the communists have within the political class? Were they there or-?

EVANS: Yes, and that's a good question too. There had been a Czechoslovak Communist Party and a Slovak Communist Party but no Czech Communist Party, so there was a little bit of asymmetry there. Communism was far less popular in Bohemia and Moravia, the components of the Czech lands, than it was in the more backward, more rural and agrarian Slovak part of the country. And it was no surprise that the Prague Spring was in Prague and the Charter 77 was written and designed primarily in Prague with only a few Slovaks adhering to it. It was a pretty easy thing for the Czechs to get communism pretty much out of their systems; they very quickly took to business. After all, private business had existed in Czechoslovakia until after World War II and people actually remembered how things used to work; they remembered that the Czech crown was a strong currency in Europe and that Czech goods enjoyed a very high reputation and so on. So the transition...the preconditions for returning to a market based economy and also a democratic political system, the memories of the first Czech Republic were not that as far removed as they were in, say, Russia.

In Slovakia it was a bit of a different approach. Slovakia is primarily Catholic, the political system is more corporatist and based on personal loyalties. So the two parts of the country clearly were on different tracks and there was no real violence. There might have been a fight or two in a pub and some words issued in different directions. But there was no major clash or violence.

Q: Was there any residue of a Sudetenland at all?

EVANS: Well, this question of the expulsion of the Germans after World War II...I mean, first of all there was a question of Hitler's having occupied the Sudetenland and people forget that Poland at that same moment in 1939 seized a bit of Czech territory in Tešín in the north. But after the war it was by the Beneš Decrees that the German population of what was then post-war Czechoslovakia was expelled and every summer down around Munich the organizations of the Sudeten Germans had their rallies, and there would be news reports of their singing old German drinking songs and talking about the day when they would come back to Karlsbad and other places that had been in their possession for generations.

Just this year, recently, in the last few weeks this issue has been back on the agenda because Václav Klaus was the last holdout on signing the new European treaty. After the Irish approved it it was the Czechs who didn't want to do it because they are apparently fearful that the Beneš Decrees, which basically made those lands permanently Czech and dealt with the property claims also, that those decrees might be challenged under the new European order and that settlement unraveled.

Q: Well then, with Ambassador Black were you able to get, I mean had she- she found out by- what, she called Washington, I guess, and what the hell's this all about?

EVANS: Yes, she did find out and she didn't hold it against me, that I had been the bearer of the bad news. We continued on working very closely together. One of the things we did, we... the Czechs were looking to finish a nuclear plant at Temelin in south Bohemia. It was originally a Soviet-designed nuclear plant but the Czechs actually, being very good at nuclear engineering, had improved it in several ways and the two bidders to take the work to completion were Westinghouse and Siemens. And so together, Ambassador Black bearing the main burden, we lobbied hard for

Westinghouse to get this contract. And then one day, to our horror, we discovered that Siemens was actually Siemens of New Jersey which was bidding on this work! It was an American company with as much a right to our representation as Westinghouse.

Q: Absolutely.

EVANS: So we had to drop that like a hot potato.

Q: Were you there when the split came?

EVANS: Yes, and I must say it was a very strange feeling to be watching the equivalent of the ball coming down in Times Square in Prague and to realize that one minute you were in Czechoslovakia and the next minute, right after midnight, you were in the Czech Republic. And of course it was a very happy night for many and a sad night for others.

I should also mention something going back to 1991: right after I arrived in Prague in August of 1991, there was the attempt to unseat Gorbachev. I remember getting up on that day, it must have been, I think it was August 16, getting up that day, turning on the BBC at 6:00 in the morning and the news of the coup against Gorbachev was just coming over the airwaves. And I remember calling Ambassador Black at her residence at about 6:15, which was early. She was up and we both agreed that we had to go straight to the chancery, and I remember as I went out the door of my house our Czech house manager came in grinning from ear to ear and she said “now you’ll see, everything will get back to normal.” Now, this Czech house-manager -- we were under no illusions -- this Jarmila, our house manager, was definitely a secret police operative but she ran the house well, so we appreciated that at least. And the Czechs did something eventually; they had what they called a process of “lustration,” in which they went to the files of the old secret police, found the names of all the secret agents and published them in the press. And, sure enough, the name of our housekeeper appeared in that list under her code name, which was “Madam,” and that rang true to us because that’s the way she addressed my wife, always as “Madam.”

Q: Well then, how did relations go with the new Czech Republic?

EVANS: They went swimmingly. They went from strength to strength with new Czech ambassadors named here. One of the first was a close collaborator of Vaclav Havel’s, Rita Klímová, who’d also had her troubles with the secret police, and there was really kind of a love fest for quite some time which in many respects continues.

Q: What about the Left Bank Americans? You know, I kept running across- I was at Georgetown at the time and all the kids were talking about, well let’s all go to Czechoslovakia and get a job there and live easily and teach English and all. I would think that they would- as a good professional consular officer I would think oh my God, all these young people having their moment.

EVANS: Well, it was a moment like that. There was very quickly...there were two English language newspapers established, and one was called “Prague-nosis,” the other was “The Prague Post,” and there was a lively nightlife. Of course beer has never been in short supply in the last six or seven centuries in Bohemia and the young people were in the beer gardens and beer halls,

having a fine old time. Yes, teaching English, and there were also quite a few American companies that came to Prague in those days. My wife, at the suggestion of Ambassador Black, became the first executive director of the American Chamber of Commerce in Prague, and they set up an office and had a number of big companies, Citibank and Procter and Gamble and various other American companies were there and so buildings were being refurbished and companies were opening and it was a very exciting and vibrant time and a lot of fun for the young people, including our daughter, who was living with us at the time and had a wonderful experience mixing in the half Czech and half American social life of those days.

Q: Yes, that was way off.

EVANS: And so certainly there- those memories faded, I think, fairly quickly. It was clear that it was a Warsaw Pact thing and the impetus was coming from Moscow, so I don't think there was lasting damage done. But the stereotypes in Eastern Europe are still there, I mean, Poles make fun of Czechs and Czechs make fun of East Germans and everybody makes fun of Slovaks and so on.

Q: That's Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany-?

EVANS: I don't believe it included the East Germans because already the reunification process had started to work there. But it was the first three that came into NATO: Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic; Slovakia came in on a slightly later schedule because of political problems there. But that was the grouping...

But back to my main story: the White House was insisting that this was a visit to all of those leaders and they were resisting the idea that there was a bilateral component, but Havel was equally strongly insisting that this was also a bilateral visit to the Czech Republic and he wanted to receive President Clinton at the Prague Castle. And at one point I had a real set-to with Havel in his office with a press release in front of us which we were working on and fighting over individual words. In the end Havel said "you are opposing the will of the Czech nation," and I said "well, those are my instructions." And in the end the Czechs did capture Clinton for a short bilateral component, and of course Clinton had no problems with it at all.

JENONNE WALKER
Ambassador
Czech Republic (1995-1998)

Ambassador Jenonne Walker was raised in Oklahoma and educated at the University of Oklahoma and Columbia. She began working for the State department in 1983. Her career included a post in Stockholm and an ambassadorship to the Czech Republic. She was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 2004.

Q: What happened after that?

WALKER: After that I was extraordinarily lucky to be nominated to go to be the ambassador in Prague. While hanging around hoping the Senate would confirm me, I came out here and studied Czech for a while. I went to Prague in the summer of 1995.

Q: Okay and you were what, nominated in early '95.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: And so you had already left the NSC?

WALKER: Yes.

Q: Okay.

WALKER: Officially nominated in early '95—

Q: And then you had to wait for?

WALKER: Long procedure before you get officially nominated.

Q: Yes, and then some times there's a long procedure after you're nominated too.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: Before you're confirmed.

WALKER: Yes, I was very lucky. I got in just under the wire on one of Jesse Helm's holds on all nominees. He was trying to get the department to accept his proposal. I think it was, I think this hold was to get the department to accept his proposal to put ACDA (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) and AID (Agency for International Development) in the State Department.

Q: Not yet the U.S. Information Agency.

WALKER: No, you're right. It was the U.S. Information Agency and ACDA. So nothing to do with the individuals, but luckily I had my hearings just before that.

Q: And you reached Prague, when did you say in the summer of?

WALKER: Mid-July of '95.

Q: '95. And you were there three years.

WALKER: Yes, just a smidge over three years until the beginning of October '98.

Q: Okay, you want to talk maybe to start with a little bit about some of the issues were between the United States and Czech Republic and who your DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was and—

WALKER: I was very lucky to have two fabulous DCMs. I inherited Eric Edelman who's now our Ambassador in Turkey. After a year, I knew I couldn't have him more than two years before his tour would up, but after a year Strobe Talbot enticed him back to Washington to be his chief of staff and I got Mike Guest who has just finished being our Ambassador in Romania. So I was extremely lucky to have two really outstanding DCMs. Some issues were common with all of the Central and East European countries. Obviously we liked it if they supported us on Iran, Iraq, Libya, Cuba, et cetera. But it didn't matter critically because they're not major players in those issues. What we really cared about in all those countries was the development of democracy and a market economy. The Czech Republic was in very good shape on democracy. The basics of democracy had returned virtually over night. Free elections, free press, free speech, and there was never any problem, never any threat of backsliding. I think that's the only one of the Central or East European countries of which that was true.

What had been Czechoslovakia had been a strong democracy during the first republic, 1918-1939. It was the only democracy in Central Europe that didn't, in the broadest sense of the term Central Europe, that did not succumb to fascism. In fact there was less of a fascist movement than in France or Britain. And it had a very strong economy. In the late part of the Hapsburg empire something over about eighty percent of the industrial capacity of the entire Hapsburg-Austro-Hungarian empire was in what is now the Czech Republic. So there was a strong tradition of that, but on the democratic side, there was a strong belief among most Czechs that democracy meant you voted every four years and left things to governments in between, and this was understandable. For the first time in forty-five years people had a chance to build careers, make money for their families, travel, have a different kind of private life. The country was perceived not to be in trouble.

There were serious economic problems that were not obvious to the Czech man on the street. So people weren't worrying about government. They were doing their own thing. On the economic side it was clear as soon as I got there and really looked beneath the surface that the Czech economic miracle was partly a Potemkin accomplishment. Prime Minister Klaus liked to brag about the high percentage of the economy that had been privatized. But in fact the government still owned a controlling share in the big banks. The big banks owned a controlling share in the investment funds. The investment funds owned a controlling share in many companies and industries. And there was, I never saw any evidence of explicit collusion, but since the leaders of the banks and the businesses tended to be supporters of the center-right government, nobody wanted unemployment to go higher. So a lot of bad money was being thrown after good or good money being thrown after bad. Banks continuing to prop up companies instead of forcing them to restructure and become profitable or go out of business. The most important single thing that needed to be done was privatize the big banks. That began to happen just as I was leaving. So there was a lot of work still to be done on economic reform.

Also at the time everybody was praising the Czechs for having privatized so quickly and criticized the Poles for not having done so. But in fact the Poles put a legal framework in place before they privatized and in the long run they may have been better off for doing it because corruption was pervasive in the Czech economy when I was there. President Klaus and his center-right government, who had done some very good things in the early days, had become the barrier to

further reform. Klaus claimed to be a disciple of Margaret Thatcher and Milton Friedman. Margaret Thatcher when she was still sane would never have gone as far as he did in saying there should be no requirement for transparency in the economy, no regulation to protect a private investor from being taken advantage of. We worked very hard on those issues. I probably spent more time on the broad issue of corruption in the economy than any other single issue. Helping the Czechs prepare for joining NATO was critically important, but it didn't take a lot of my time. The defense department, I'll come to what they were doing, which was really very important, other parts of the embassy. But as soon as I arrived there I told the American Chamber of Commerce that I would never suggest that the Czechs buy American or take an American investment bid to please Washington. I thought it would be counterproductive. But if there were any suggestion that a non-American competitor was using bribery, to be blunt about it, the Embassy was absolutely there to work with them, and we never did anything unless the American company in question wanted us to. It almost always was a problem of corruption, and the American company almost always, not always but almost always, wanted us involved. I learned so much. I'd never been in the private sector. But working with the American companies on specific issues was a fantastic education for me. And it was fun and gratifying. Our success record was not a hundred percent in keeping competitions honest but it was in the high nineties I think, and that was very – sometimes it was very easy. All we'd have to do was let the relevant Czech minister or municipality or whatever know that the American Embassy was paying attention, and at the time they had the United States on this unrealistic pedestal. They really cared what we thought. So just knowing we were paying attention was sometimes was enough to do the trick. Other times it was a lot harder and we would have to threaten to go public.

There were always important Czechs we could work with, and we would never have been successful without them. But there were people in Czech political party positions or government positions or the governor of the National Bank who was a key ally of mine. It wasn't always just individual company issues. One time the Governor of the National Bank whom I liked enormously phoned me deeply worried. He was quite certain that organized crime was buying controlling shares of some mid-sized Czech banks. He knew he didn't have the investigative tools or the regulatory tools to do anything about it. He wanted our help. He said, "Don't leave any messages for me about this not even with my secretary. I don't know who I can trust." But I went to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) who sent over some Czech speaking FBI agents. Some of the Czech American agents in Texas had been very involved in investigating failed savings and loans in the United States and had experience in this kind of thing. They made several trips and I can talk about it now because the circle of those they were working with expanded. Finally they were briefing parliamentary committees and the Governor of the National Bank talked publicly about it. They worked on this particular issue, but they were training Czech security people and bank regulatory people and finally parliamentary committees by working with them on the concrete issue. So there were always important Czechs we could work with.

Q: You mentioned the Chamber of Commerce. Were those mostly American representatives or a lot Czech?

WALKER: Almost all and many of the same companies now have Czech leaders. There were some Czech leaders already when I was there. But the American companies went into the Czech Republic and elsewhere with their own top people but with the intent to bring in natives as soon as

possible.

Q: On the, come back to the political side again. One person you haven't mentioned yet I don't think is Havel. And I wonder to what extent was the Czech experience during the Communist period also a contributing factor to the maybe easier transition to democracy than maybe some other countries. I'm thinking of '68, the Prague Spring, some other things that where Communism in Czechoslovakia seemed somewhat different than elsewhere.

WALKER: Yes. It's hard to say because after '68 Czechoslovakia had the most repressive Soviet domination of all of the three North Central Europeans. They didn't have goulash communism as Hungary had. They didn't have Solidarity as the Poles had. The Czechs are quite passive. Thirty-eight, '48, '68, by 1968 the Poles or Hungarians would have put their bodies in front of the Soviet tanks and would've been crushed. The Czechs haven't done that since 1620. It's hard for American to understand how history looms. Since the last time the locals rose up against Hapsburg domination and were executed or exiled, the Czechs haven't really stuck their necks out. They didn't go on the streets in November of 1989 until the jig was up for Communism. But the memory of democracy seemed to be somehow in the bones. The basics of democracy, the broad aspects as I say returned virtually overnight. It always frustrated me that the Czechs weren't angrier that they were being ripped off by crooked businessmen with the connivance of the government. And some government leaders were certainly on the take and were feathering their own nest because of the corrupt economic system. But the Czechs don't tend to get as outraged as I think they ought to.

On the political system as you know there are some things every ambassador needs to do. There's also a lot of range for any ambassador to choose things he or she also wants to do. And because the basics of democracy were so firm I spent a lot of time on what President Havel called civil society. Working with Czech NGOs, encouraging them to use my house. It's I'm told one of the three or four most grandiose, ostentatious ambassadorial residences we have. If they have a party at my house, they can get potential donors to come and they'd also get publicity points. So they used the house, and I went to all their events and that kind of thing. I also encouraged any American or Czech company that was doing anything philanthropic to use the house to kick it off or have a party celebrating it. I spent a lot of time with Czech non-profits, a lot of what might have been my private time and never regretted it. That was just enormous fun. I really enjoyed doing it. That's something President Havel of course was very involved in.

Q: And the government certainly knew what you were doing and was quite comfortable with it and probably appreciated it.

WALKER: Different government members felt differently about it. Prime Minister Klaus didn't really want any other centers of authority. He didn't see any point in civic organizations or regional governments for that matter. His wife was very outspoken on the issue of the Roma, the gypsies, a human rights issue in the Czech Republic. It wasn't a social or political issue because they're too small and too disorganized to roil the waters, but it was a serious human rights issue. She was very active in that and there were others in Klaus's government and out who were very active in helping civil society and would come to the parties at my house and that kind of thing. So there was a mixed feeling in governmental circles, but certainly there was no secret about what I was doing.

Q: At the time you were there Klaus was the...?

WALKER: Prime minister.

Q: Prime minister and Havel was the president.

WALKER: President. And Havel found it very, very frustrating that the Czech constitution, like almost all parliamentary democracies, gives the president, the head of state, so little power. When he spoke as the conscience of the country, he did a wonderful job for the Czech Republic and the whole region. But too often he would publicly say what the defense budget ought to be, who ought to have which ministerial post et cetera, and that was none of his business. His reputation among Czechs by the end of his tenure as president was not as high as his reputation in the outside world because he'd become too overtly partisan. Klaus fell, the Klaus government fell about midway through my time there. It became clear about midway through my time there that the Czechs had serious economic problems that they were papering over with an artificially low unemployment rate. Exports weren't growing. The only companies that were having a growth in exports were the ones owned by foreigners like Americans. Wonderful Czech workers, but they needed Americans or West Europeans to come and restructure the company, bring more advanced financial techniques, equipment of course, obviously technology. So Klaus tried just to change some personalities in the government, and that didn't work. So at any rate finally he was overthrown by members of his own government.

Q: Overthrown. Error! Bookmark not defined.

WALKER: As prime minister.

Q: Lost confidence in the parliament.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: Okay.

WALKER: There was a move not from the opposition but from reformers in his own government. The good guys on the center right. So for six months while they prepared for early elections which they've never had to have before, the Governor of the Central Bank took a leave of absence and became prime minister and a government of experts, which was primarily people from, the good people from Klaus' government. Serious reformers from Klaus' government. And then there was an election and the Social Democrats took power, not long before I left the country.

Q: And the governor of the national bank, central bank was the one that you had worked very closely with.

WALKER: Very closely with, and his interim government in six months did more for serious economic reform than the Klaus government had done in the previous two years. The governor knew that he couldn't move things all the way, but he, as he told me when he took the prime

minister's job, he wanted to push things as far as he could, making it harder for whoever took office to backslide including bank privatization.

The embassy, of course, was very involved in a lot of things. Those were the major issues that took up my time. The embassy was involved in helping the Czechs prepare for NATO obviously. One of the great things, and I think this was true of all the transition countries, the United States was on such a pedestal at the time. They really wanted us to interfere in their internal affairs, to give advice on their domestic, political and economic reforms. They didn't always take our advice, which is fine. It's their country. But they seriously listened to it, and every member of the embassy, not just the ambassador, could see a concrete difference he had made, and as you know in Washington you fight fiercely on policy issues, and sometimes the president himself checks your option box. But that doesn't guarantee that's going to make any difference in the real world. I think every member of the embassy staff could see a concrete difference he had made. The Defense Attaché was obviously working with the Czechs, organizing various training programs to help them learn how to work with NATO and eventually be a NATO member. But he was also working with the defense department. How the hell do you prepare a defense budget and present it to parliament? He and the political section and the press section would work with the relevant parliamentary committees, here are the questions you ought to ask about what the defense department tells you about its budget. The Czechs had had to get rid of their whole security service of course. They were very worried about organized crime, drug running, weapons trade. They knew they couldn't protect their borders, and they needed help. So our security people would work with the brand new and inexperienced Czech security service on specific cases, sort of teaching by running cases together on working with those issues. The Press Attaché constantly working with members of the Czech press which when I arrived was so deferential. They'd do an interview with me and then send me a transcript for me to correct before they'd print it, and we would say no—

Q: That's like this interview.

WALKER: No, you shouldn't do that. Warren Christopher came to town, and I said to him as we were driving in from the airport. You'll be offered transcripts of press conference - what the press is going to—not transcripts but be offered articles in draft of what the press says about you. And bless his heart, he said, "Why I hope they would know they mustn't do that." So in a lot of little ways as well as organizing training programs and things. The Czech press became more assertive during the time I was there. This was not just because of our efforts, but I hope we contributed to it. They got the idea that they should be investigative journalists. They weren't very good at it. They were rather naive about it, but they got the idea that they shouldn't just print whatever senior government officials or the American ambassador told them. They should think for themselves about it. So all of these things were really very gratifying.

Q: Did you find that your Czech language was good enough to conduct business in the language, but did you need a lot of, need some help at first?

WALKER: It was never as good as I wanted it to be. Virtually all the Czechs I, all the Czechs in Prague, the government people and opposition politicians with whom I dealt spoke much better English than I spoke Czech. There was one defense minister, there were three defense ministers in my time. One of them spoke no foreign language and if I was sitting next to him at lunch or dinner,

obviously we would be talking substance, and we'd do it in Czech and I could manage it. But if there were a serious problem, I'd take an interpreter to his office in case I needed him. President Havel speaks excellent English. He chooses to deal in Czech, which is appropriate. It's his country. But he could speak Czech and I could speak English, and we didn't need an interpreter. When my Czech really came in handy was in smaller towns and cities talking to a mayor or the editor of a newspaper or chamber of commerce. I could manage in Czech, but it was hard for me, and I'm sure painful for the listening Czech to hear me mangle his language. I could manage if I had to, but it was never good as it should've been.

Q: You were able to do quite a bit of travel around the Czech Republic.

WALKER: Yes, it's a small country.

Q: You could always get back to Prague for the night.

WALKER: Yes, I didn't always but I always could. Whenever there was a whole day, when I did not need to do something at my desk in Prague, I would be some place around the country, sometimes just for fun, taking the smallest embassy car on the weekends and going. It's a beautiful country, wonderful things to see. But often visiting municipalities, and whenever I traveled around the country, I would invite the local Peace Corps volunteers, the Peace Corps volunteers from that region, for lunch, dinner or breakfast. They obviously did not work for me. They were not part of the embassy. Sometimes it was the closest thing to a good meal they got. They live on really starvation wages. And when I mentioned this to the Peace Corps director who passed through town, he said, "But they shouldn't be reporting to you." They weren't reporting to me. They were telling me their funny stories. I had gone, even before I presented my credentials, I had gone down to the town in which the last of our Peace Corps groups in the Czech Republic was doing its language training, had a wonderful day with them, just terrific group of, not always young people. Young people, older retired people, some mid-career people who were taking two or three years off to do this. And then I swore this group in at the residence in Prague, so I felt particular relationship with these Peace Corps volunteers.

Q: Of that group.

WALKER: With this group. And they would tell me their funny stories. I learned so much about the Czech Republic because they live in a different country. I was carried around on a silken pillow in Prague living in this palace, being treated with incredible deference, which was sometimes a problem breaking through the deference. They were living I think it was on sixty, I think it was the equivalent of sixty dollars a month for room, board, et cetera. They were working in some of the rust belt parts of the country, working on environmental issues, on small businesses and teaching English as a foreign language. So they were seeing a different country than I saw, and just hearing them talk about what life was like was such an education for me. So I traveled around the country as much as I could.

Q: Roughly how many Peace Corps volunteers were in the Czech Republic at that time, a hundred or so or less?

WALKER: I would guess about a hundred. Not more than that.

Q: And they'd come at different times?

WALKER: No, no. This was the last batch.

Q: Oh I see.

WALKER: And they were there only my first two years because the Czech Republic was very proud of being the first former Communist country to be graduated out of our economic assistance program when their per capita GNP became too high for bilateral economic assistance. That includes the Peace Corps.

Q: I'm a great lover and believer in the Peace Corps from my experience particularly in Ghana.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: Which is the very first country to receive the Peace Corps in 1961.

WALKER: And that's what I thought the Peace Corps was all about in some terribly poverty stricken third world country.

Q: Well, I know they were in East Central and Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union, but I don't remember that some times.

WALKER: Oh they were doing just a wonderful job.

Q: I suspect they appreciated your interest and the attitude that you took in going around to see some of their sites and their activities.

WALKER: They seemed to. It was fun for me, but it was also seriously educational. I don't think it was just goofing off to go see them as often as possible.

Q: You mentioned that the secretary of state came while you were there. The president had been there after the NATO summit in early—

WALKER: Yes. I was on his traveling party, January '94.

Q: '94. So you went there but you weren't ambassador.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: At that time.

WALKER: No.

Q: He didn't come back again while you were there.

WALKER: He did not. Hilary Clinton came for four days. That's a long visit, a real strain on a small embassy. Prague was the flavor of the month in those years, and one reason I didn't feel any need to come back to Washington was that everybody came to Prague. Chris invited all the Central and East European foreign ministers to meet him in Prague. Thirteen foreign ministers around my lunch table. I was a nervous wreck, but it went very well. The first meeting I had with the Czech foreign minister to talk about this Christopher trip, he said, "We're thrilled he's chosen Prague. Isn't it wonderful? We're so glad he's coming here, and when he leaves, you and I will be the happiest people in town." You had trips like this. So you know what it's like for a small embassy. But he came. The first September I was there, I had just presented my credentials on the 31st of August because all the Czechs were on vacation over the summer when I arrived, we had the secretary of defense one week, the chairman—no, first we had the chairman, no first we had the secretary of defense. The next week we had the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. The next week we had the secretary of the air force. The Czechs loved having all three of them. But frankly it was the same discussion, the same topics with the same Czech officials in the same offices three consecutive weeks. I'm not sure that was the best use of the Czech officials' time. Madeleine Albright came with Hilary Clinton. Madeleine was still our Ambassador to the UN. She came back as Secretary of State and then she came with two of her daughters and their husbands and her sister for a week's holiday while I was there. But we had Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of the Environment, various senior people from the Defense and State Departments and from Treasury. Just a non-stop flow of very senior visitors.

Q: Did you have to track down some of Secretary Albright's relatives that were still in the Czech Republic?

WALKER: I didn't do that personally. When the story broke about her Jewish heritage she called me and said, she's an old friend, and said she wanted to send her brother and sister in law and her sister over to see what they can find out. And she had already put them in touch—I don't know on whose excellent recommendation—with Thomas Kraus the executive director of the Czech Jewish Association, fabulous man. He did a lot of the tracking down and accompanied Madeleine's relatives on visits to not just relatives but people who had known their parents. Her brother John found the ninety year old man who'd held them in his arms when John was six months old and christened as a Roman Catholic. John and his wife came back the next summer with their two teenage sons to visit some of the same people. He wanted his sons to hear these stories before the people died. When they were there the initial time tracking down relatives and friends, they'd come back to the residence at night just worn out because so many of the stories they'd heard were tragic. But also so pleased with how much they were learning about their family, which is why John wanted to bring his teenage sons back to learn this. So I was happy to be a bystander and a B and B for them. But it was Thomas Kraus who did it. Thomas told me that he was spending about a third of his time with mostly Czech Americans but sometimes Czech Canadians or Brits or what have you who had just discovered they had Jewish roots and wanted to learn more about their families.

Q: You mentioned a couple of times it was a small embassy, and I'm sure it was. But it obviously was doing a lot of things. Did you feel like it was too small?

WALKER: For some things, yes. We had about a hundred Americans and about a hundred Czechs, that includes switchboard operators, drivers, carpenters, everybody. We probably had a larger visitor load than any of the other similar sized embassies in that part of the world because everybody wanted to go to Prague. Obviously when senior Americans were traveling through the region, they'd have to spend the weekend somewhere and not being fools, they'd choose to spend the weekend in Prague. So, yes, this was a burden, not so much on me. It was a wonderful opportunity for me because it was, instead of just Czechs talking to the same old people at my dinner table, there would be an interesting visitor from Washington, and I'd exploit the visitors, including from the private sector. We also had a lot of private sector visitors, business people, cultural people, and I'd get, I had a wonderful dining room that would seat thirty-four, and the acoustics were such that everybody could be part of the same conversation. So we would have the visitor lead a general conversation about economic reform, the banking world, press freedom, whether it was true that the level and quality of culture was declining under commercialism et cetera as well as government issues. So for me it was an opportunity. For the embassy, the people who had to do the logistics of the trips it could be a real burden.

Q: You had a number of CODELs, senators, congressmen.

WALKER: Did we ever have a number of them. And one CODEL we did not have, this is something I must brag about. It was going to be a CODEL from the House of Representatives coming to Prague over Easter weekend. They didn't want any appointments except with the President and the Prime Minister. It had to be Easter weekend. They obviously wanted somebody from the Embassy to accompany those visits, and they also wanted an Embassy officer to accompany the wives on sight seeing and shopping. I never deliberately leaked anything, but we sent an unclassified cable with the longest distribution list we could think of saying we'd do our best on the official meetings although Czechs didn't work weekends, but we'd do our best.

Q: Especially Easter.

WALKER: Obviously the Ambassador would accompany them on any official meetings they had. We would not provide an Embassy officer for the wives to do shopping and sight seeing, but if they would provide a cite designation, the numbers for their expense account—

Q: Oh, cite, C-I-T-E.

WALKER: Yes, cite.

Q: Fiscal data.

WALKER: Fiscal citation, their fiscal data, we'd be happy to hire a minibus and a Czech speaking guide at their expense. About noon one day in the office, minding my own business, I got a phone call. It was Walt Slocum at his breakfast table at home in Washington saying, "I hope I'm the first to congratulate you. That entire cable is in the Washington Post." The visit was canceled.

Where we could've used more people: when Czechoslovakia split apart, the State Department in

its wisdom staffed the Slovak embassy with the numbers that had been allotted to Czechoslovakia. We'd had a consulate of course in Slovakia. So we were now trying to do two embassies with the numbers that had been allotted to Czechoslovakia at a time when the political and economic system had burst open. We had fewer than half, Poland's a bigger country. Of course it was right that Poland had more political and economic officers. Hungary is virtually the same population, about ten million people and very close in its situation in its political and economic evolution. The political and economic offices in Hungary were more than twice the number in Prague. So we could've used another pol—and we did finally get another political officer just as I was leaving.

Q: The population of the Czech Republic?

WALKER: And Hungary.

Q: Was about ten million at the time.

WALKER: Yes.

Q: Do you want to say something about the region in terms of your involvement in the period you were there? Did you get much involved in issues between Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic? Dayton happened while you were, not too long after you got there in terms of Bosnia were you and the embassy in Prague involved in these things much?

WALKER: No, no. Very, very little. Occasional things would happen. When we needed to send the very first American troops to Bosnia, it was a matter of getting equipment to them by rail. We wanted, of course, we asked the Czechs at the last minute. Tell us in the next thirty minutes we have permission to do this. The Czech constitution says the parliament has to approve any deployment of military force.

Q: Through the territory.

WALKER: Yes, on its territory. There was no way the parliament could act that quickly. With the best will in the world there was no question the parliament would agree to it. There was no way it could be done in the time Washington wanted. I went to the deputy foreign minister who was a very close colleague and to the man who ran President Havel's foreign policy office, international relations office and said, "I hesitate to use the word sealed trains in this part of the world, but I promise you these people will not get off the train. Can you say that this doesn't qualify as a deployment on your territory?" And they did it. There were small things like that. But in big policy issues, no.

Q: That was true also of the relation?

WALKER: Regional issues.

Q: With the Slovaks.

WALKER: With the Slovaks. There was no need really for me to get involved. The Czech and

Slovak velvet divorce was almost complete when I got there. They had done a superb job of dividing up, not just the countries, and it wasn't automatically clear because sometimes there was a town in Slovakia that could only be reached by a road in the Czech Republic or vice versa. So they'd do a bit of land swaps, but dividing up stacks of paper and typewriters and filing cabinets in embassies all over the world. That was mostly done except for a question of some gold reserves that were primarily in the Czech National Bank. Some of that was believed by some of the international Jewish communities to be Jewish gold. So the question of how much of the Jewish gold Slovakia would be responsible for and how much the Czech Republic would be responsible was still an issue. There was no need for us to be engaged in negotiation between the Czechs and the Slovaks on that. Obviously we were very engaged on the issue of Jewish restitution. Stu Eisenstadt was in the country as our special envoy on that issue. We followed up on it after his departure.

Q: You had sort of normal relations with the embassy in Bratislava?

WALKER: Not more than the embassy in Warsaw or Budapest.

Q: Budapest.

WALKER: And I had expected frankly that we'd be comparing notes more often than we did. We visited each other for the fun of it and obviously told stories over drinks and dinner. The Commerce Department sent the four ambassadors, American ambassadors from those four countries to London, Brussels and Frankfurt to talk about to American businesses in those three countries about investment and trade opportunities. For me the most rewarding part of the trip was having several days to compare notes with my colleagues from the other countries. But our situations just weren't conducive to that much cooperation.

Q: How about other ambassadors in Prague? Did you, I mean I know you went to their receptions and you, but was there any one that you were particularly close to in terms of exchanging information or I know in some parts of the world a country has a particular unique position that is I don't know if that was true in Prague at all.

WALKER: I saw a lot of them. In all of the NATO candidate countries there's a NATO ambassadorial group. We met once a month and would usually have a Czech speaker, sometimes just have a business meeting. But if we had a Czech speaker, we would also have a business meeting following it. Compare notes about issues of the day. When I'd had one of my senior visitors, I knew they'd all be on the phone to me because they'd have to write their reporting telegram. So usually I would suggest that we all collect around my dining table or somebody's dining table in the middle of the afternoon, not necessarily for a meal. I would give them all a dump on what had happened in the meeting so they could do their reporting telegrams. So I saw more of them than I might have done in Western Europe because of the NATO angle and because we had so many visitors. We had better access than any of them did. So they were more eager to learn from me, not because I was me, but because I was the American ambassador, than I had to learn from them. But some of them at certain times were particularly good allies on some of the economic issues. There was a Canadian, a terrific Canadian ambassador, and on one of the economic issues I was working most intensely where there was a real problem of corruption. There

was an American company buying a Czech company, but the bank doing the financing was Canadian. So I worked very closely with the Canadian ambassador on that. One of the big issues during my time there was not a Czech - American issue. It was the Czechs and the Germans trying to arrive at a declaration to put to rest the Sudeten-German issue. That was extraordinarily difficult to do. The Germans had a fabulous ambassador in town who obviously was arguing the German case but understood Czech sensitivities and never lost his sense of humor. Washington cared about this even though we were bystanders, and I talked a lot to the Czech, again the same deputy foreign minister I mentioned earlier who was the Czech negotiator on this, and to the German ambassador about it. So I got both sides of what was going on there. The French ambassador was particularly good in terms of being plugged in to Czech society and understanding what was going on, and the same, he and the same German ambassador I mentioned shared my, on a personal basis, shared my concern about corruption. For instance the OECD had adopted an agreement that all of its member countries would do what the United States long ago did and make it a criminal offense, foreign bribery a criminal offense. The German ambassador said there is no way Germany is going to do that before our next election. It's just too sensitive, but if you hear things about German companies, let me know on a private basis and I'll see what I can do. I'm not sure that was the view of his government or certainly wasn't the view of the French government at the time. But these two ambassadors were willing to work with me on it.

One quickly learned, I don't know if this is a common habit, but in Prague I would get invitations to what were called diplomatic dinner parties that meant only other diplomats. I was delighted to have that cue because I would say how sorry I was that I was already busy that evening. But I quickly learned which few ambassadors would have really interesting Czechs at their dinner tables, and so I would go to those. I would go to the Russian ambassador's and the German ambassador's because while I was treated like some kind of goddess, they had particularly difficult times because of their countries' unfortunate roles in Czech history. They were both very good guys who didn't deserve it. So I would go to their dinner parties to be supportive.

Q: Okay, anything else that we should cover in your time in Prague.

WALKER: Not that I can think of.

Q: Eventually it came to an end.

WALKER: Sadly.

Q: You left in '98.

WALKER: Yes, I left in the autumn of '98.

Q: Before the election.

WALKER: Well, just before—

Q: Before the congressional, well it was not a presidential election that year.

WALKER: Not presidential, no. I came back to Washington for President Havel's state visit in mid-September and I officially stopped being ambassador on the 3rd of October.

LEONARDO M. WILLIAMS
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Prague (1995-1998)

Mr. Williams was born in Alabama. He was raised in Alabama, Washington, D.C and Minnesota and was educated at St. John's College (MN), University of Wisconsin and Georgetown University. After joining the Foreign Service in 1968, he served as USIA Public Affairs and Information Officer in India, Pakistan, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Yugoslavia. His Washington assignments dealt primarily with operations of USIA. Mr. Williams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Today is January 27, 2003. The last time you were in Prague was from when to when?

WILLIAMS: From '95 until the summer of '98.

Q: You were PAO (Public Affairs Officer).

WILLIAMS: Yes.

Q: What was the political-economic situation in the Czech Republic at this point?

WILLIAMS: At that point, it was seven years after the communist government had fallen. It was a burgeoning capitalist democracy. It was still somewhat in the transitional phase. I think they often refer to it as that. But the free market was alive and well. It still had a bit of the boomtown flavor that it had in 1990. I had gone back there to work on a presidential visit in 1990 just for a couple of weeks. Then it really did have a boomtown flavor.

Q: I don't think you've mentioned the presidential visit before. Could you talk about that?

WILLIAMS: I was relegated to working with the press primarily during that one. It was 1990. President Bush had gone there for a presidential visit. It was obviously a big event. It drew large crowds in the famous square, Wenceslas Square, where Jan Palach had burned himself to death and there was a statue of one of the Czech majors, historical and also symbolic in terms of the Czech nation. Beyond that, there isn't much I can say about the visit.

Q: Did you deal with the Czech press or were you pretty well trying to keep the American press happy?

WILLIAMS: I was working with the American press primarily in the Press Center. It was as usual a busy time, but nothing unusual or exceptional happened.

Q: Who was our ambassador in the Czech Republic in '95?

WILLIAMS: Adrian Basora was the ambassador when I arrived there. He is a State Department career officer.

Q: How did he operate?

WILLIAMS: He was very well organized, very meticulous. He had very good relations with the Czech officials. He was very much involved in the cultural life particularly, the arts, and really enjoyed working with those groups, entertained a lot, had a really wide circle of friends and contacts. Mrs. Basora was also very active in the arts area. They hosted all kinds of events at the residence, which during the Cold War had become a very special venue. That was the one place where Czechs felt that they could go to... It was almost a symbolic presence equal to the embassy.

Q: In the Czech Republic, the arts were quite important, weren't they?

WILLIAMS: Yes, especially during the years of communism, they sustained a sense of whatever independence people felt or harbored, feelings and their hopes, by and large, the intellectual community, particularly the writers, provided leadership during the Prague Spring and during the subsequent period when that was aborted by the Russian invasion. But because of their influential role in leading the dissident movement, Czech writers and other artists, musicians, etc., had a very special role to play when Czechoslovakia's communist government left. It left the intellectuals in a leading position in the political life of the country. That was starting to change. You could already see the influence that it was becoming more and more professional politicians who were rising to the leadership roles in the Party. But the writers were still there, primarily Vaclav Havel, who is probably the last major literary figure involved in Czech politics at the national level. He was himself a playwright before becoming a dissident and eventually becoming president of the country. The esteem in which he was held reflected a general esteem that the public in general had for the intellectual class. Czechs were very proud people and very proud of their historical heritage and the intellectual part is an important component of that. One of the interesting things that happened during this period was, because of budget cuts and technology developments, there was in our public affairs posture worldwide a move to deemphasize the kind of general cultural programs just because we didn't have the resources. There were no longer the big touring groups, etc. One of the things it was suggested that we do to conserve it was to not pay as much attention to those segments of society and focus more on the political/media types. But Czechoslovakia or the Czech Republic at that time was one of those places that you could make the case that this was not the place to make those kind of changes just because the intellectual class, the writers, most people, even if they weren't dominating the political scene the way they had at the time that the communist government felt still were very much a part of the psychic of the Czech people. This was something that they had always admired. They were very proud of their culture and these people as the standard-bearers of their culture exercised influence that was out of proportion perhaps to their numbers or in comparison with other societies. That certainly was a major consideration in our working with the Czechs.

Q: Another society where the intellectuals have quite a bit of influence is the French society and to

a lesser extent the British society. There, the intellectuals almost all come out of the left-wing and they're having a heyday in these days knocking the United States. But I would think that the Czech intellectuals had fought essentially the communist movement and would be a different breed of cat. Were they?

WILLIAMS: they were probably less left-wing than a lot of other intellectuals if you take them as a group in other societies. But they were still, by American standards, to the left of center in their thinking. They did come out of a strong tradition of government involvement and social democratic movement. Looking at Czech history, they almost instinctively since their independence have been a social democratic country and gravitated toward that velocity and outlook. I did a paper once for that academic program that I did at Georgetown on the Czech Communist Party between World War I and World War II. One of the things that I read was that when the Czech Communist Party went to the various international congresses about what they were writing and saying publicly, Otto Enner was quoted in one of the readings as saying that the Czech Communist Party was the best Social Democratic Party in Europe. So, right now, they have an obvious mix of parties, but in general they still favor a strong government involvement in maintaining social welfare and setting standards in that.

Q: Was there a significant support of the arts - plays, music - by the government?

WILLIAMS: Yes. That continued, although by the time I left, they were having financial difficulties as part of this restructuring process and it was becoming more difficult. But they were still very heavily involved and people expected them to be.

Q: With the Ambassador's and his wife's involvement in cultural things, was there much interest in the American cultural side?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. There had always been a strong interest in the United States when I was there during communist years. Then it was the attraction of forbidden fruit. But also once the society was liberated, people had an opportunity to see more things American and experience them by traveling more and having more things flown into the country. That interest didn't seem to wane, but it did generate conflict because of the fact that people felt that American culture and Western European culture to some extent was so attractive that it was threatening to swamp their own culture, that it was out-competing their culture. The Estée Lauder family had become part of a joint venture with some Europeans and they had started a TV station that carried a lot of American programming, and not the best. And they became famous or in some cases infamous for that. They did some rather risqué things, things that wouldn't even make it on American TV, with the weather.

Q: As I recall, if it was going to be a hot day, the weather woman would arrive with no clothes on.

WILLIAMS: Yes. That was one of the extremes. They tended to do that. They went for a jazzier "American" format.

Q: Was there any attraction to the German, French, or Russian culture?

WILLIAMS: Russian culture wasn't... People who had known the Soviets didn't... At one time, it was required to have it in school. The languages are close enough that one native speaker of a Slavic language can relatively easily pick up at least the essentials and maintain them. But no one spoke Russian anymore. They would admit to knowing it maybe, but...

Q: How about the French and German cultures? Were they able to have flourishing programs there?

WILLIAMS: I think they did well. I didn't go to a lot of them. One of the advantages they had was, they spent a lot of money and had more resources than us. So they were constantly doing things. I guess they were reasonably well attended. The Czechs still had feelings about the Germans. They respect and admire them but there is still a lot of residual feeling because of the war and also the fact that the Germans when they came into a free Czechoslovakia were very aggressive in establishing their business positions. Also, in the borderlands, the Sudeten region, those claims came back. Germans started demanding some kind of restitution either for property or some kind of compensation. On the other hand, you had Germans bringing in lots of money and hiring Czechs to work in businesses.

Q: One of the concerns was that Germany would move into Central Europe as the dominant power. Was that a concern at that time?

WILLIAMS: No. That wasn't part of our discourse. Maybe at the strategic level somewhere they were concerned about that. But the Czechs had their eye on everyone. They didn't want to be bought out. Any group of businesses or whatever trying to come in. They wanted the investment and the expertise and they knew that that came with accepting the businesspeople. But at the same time, they didn't want it at any cost. They wanted it to enrich the Czech Republic financially or culturally. But they didn't want to do it at the expense of the Czech Republic becoming something other than the Czech Republic.

Interesting note on the cultural thing. When you travel around the Czech Republic, there are several interesting things to note. One is the signage. In the center of Prague, the signs generally tend to be in English and German. As you go down to the south near the Austrian border, the English disappears and it's all German. Then there are certain parts like around Karlovy Vary, which during the Soviet Union time was a big center for Soviet high officials to travel to to take advantage of the spas that were there. Even after the Soviet Union passed away, it still remained a center for Russians to visit. You go to Karlovy Vary and the signs are in Czech, German, and Russian. You kind of know where they're making their money.

Q: You were a public affairs officer. You dealt with the media a lot. Where was the Czech media coming from?

WILLIAMS: There was a blossoming of the media, but they didn't have the traditions that we had in the West. So, for them, at least in the time I was there, their focus was on building their professional standards. They had outside help from American NGOs and other foreign NGOs that were coming in to train journalists in how to do research, reporting standards, journalistic ethics, and so forth. They tended to write stories from a particular point of view. The papers have political

profiles. Often, it's not reflected just in the editorials but in the stories that are selected and the way they're written. But what they wanted to do was establish that objectivity and the research so that you got the three sources before you go with any kind of controversial reporting. I felt all the papers were committed to that. They had different niches. They had tabloids like everyone else and they tended to be tabloid in format and the way they were written. But they had several serious newspapers, including Rudi Pravda, the Communist Party organ and one of two or three newspapers in Czechoslovakia when I was there in the '70s. That had expanded out so that they had six or seven dailies that were considered serious. They had different levels of resources. The two leading papers at the time were Mladá Fronta, the Youth Front's old newspaper, which blossomed into a full-fledged one; DNES today, and then Rudi Pravda, which still had a left of center slant. That meant "Red Truth." But it was a private newspaper and no longer belonged to the Party. It was actually owned by some of the employees. DNES and Rudi Pravda were the two top papers. DNES was further to the right. Rudi Pravda was center-left. One of the interesting things that happened in the '90s was that foreign companies came in and bought a lot of newspapers so that Austrians came in... Around the time that I left, Rudi Pravda was still the only Czech-owned paper.

Q: I would think this would cause some disquiet. If we were living in the United States and all of a sudden the Washington papers were run by the Nicaraguans or something like that, we wouldn't be very happy.

WILLIAMS: Yes. There was note made of it, but it was never a major issue. It was discussed publicly, is this a good idea? There may have been a couple of editorials. But in talking with the Germans, they said that in no case had they been given editorial direction by the foreign owners. They made those decisions.

Q: How did you find the residue of the communist rule? In many countries now, including Poland, the professional politicians were communists because you couldn't be anything else but. And they have begun to come to the fore again as people, not necessarily advocating their communist theology. What was happening during this period to the old Party types?

WILLIAMS: They were in the Party still. They still had a Communist Party. At one point, before the Prague Spring, a lot of people joined the Communist Party because it was what you did, not necessarily be a Party worker, but you got into the Party and that gave you certain avenues. That was one of the problems that the Russians had with the Czech party, that it was too large. As a result of '68, they purged it to get rid of all those people who were just kind of coasting with their cards. So, there was no great stigma at having been a member of the Party. It was more what your role was that followed you. There was a certain term for this process of going back and looking at people's records to see what they had been in the Party or had been doing with an eye to perhaps punish those who were in positions that had been detrimental to the welfare of the people.

Q: In our embassy and American policy in particular, did we have any things we were pushing or did we feel that Czechoslovakia was a solid democracy and it was normal state to state relations or was there more still a teacher-pupil type relationship?

WILLIAMS: I don't know if I'd call it a "teacher-pupil" relationship. It was more an established

democracy-young democracy relationship. It was acknowledged the Czechs were going to be the ones to build their democracy, but one of the things America wanted to do was to help them strengthen it. There were lots of programs that were designed to develop civic consciousness and civic activities. We had a democracy program where we gave grants for people wanting to do grassroots projects that we felt would contribute to the development of civil society. There were things like setting up... There was one group that came in that wanted to set up an organization that would teach fund-raising techniques, how to generate money. Another one to organize groups to address environmental issues in their community. Another felt it wanted to do a publication that would dispel the parliamentarians and get some information about them and the government decisions on a regular basis. These were relatively small grants, four or five people sometimes. There were lots of those kinds of small projects. Of course, we did programming that we felt would contribute to that. USIA had in 1995 put together a conference that they called "CIVITAS" that was to be an international conference in which participants from around the world who were involved in civil society would come and share ideas. They decided to hold it in Prague for symbolic reasons as well as because it was just a nice place to have a conference. The Czechs got very much involved in that. The government was very helpful to us. So, there was that element. Also, there was close economic development. By the time I left, AID was closing down by '98. There was nothing more for AID to do. Czechs obviously were going to need to go further in their development economically, but not at the levels that AID works.

Q: Did you find any concern at the Embassy of smart operators from the U.S. coming to make a quick buck in Czechoslovakia or organizations that were not of the greatest repute?

WILLIAMS: There was probably some of that. I don't recall that the Embassy found itself involved in that kind of thing. Maybe by the mid-'90s, the Czechs were leery and cautious about those things. Occasionally - but it happens in any country where you work - an enterprise comes in, sets up, and no one's really sure about them. They may not have much of a track record or you may not think it's a good idea. But they're not interested in what you think and taking advice. That would happen from time to time.

Q: Prague was one of the great student centers during the '90s. All the young people from the U.S. and I assume from other parts of Europe were heading towards Prague, where they were going to be teaching or just getting together.

WILLIAMS: There was still an element of that there, but the pioneers had moved on to Bucharest by then. We were left with those who were settling down. Some had gotten jobs and some had set up their own businesses. The raw edge was gone. I'm sure there weren't as many. Even the Czechs noted that there seemed to be fewer American students. Bucharest was the place to be by the time I got there.

Q: How did you see things and what were the ties with Slovakia?

WILLIAMS: It was like brothers and sisters bickering. There was a certain tension there. The Czechs felt that the Slovaks had forced the breakup. The Slovaks felt the Czechs were too quick to take them up on the offer. But there was a lot of back and forth. Mečiar was the Prime Minister during the time that I was there. He was an old fashioned leftist. But they had kind of the hangover

of the breakup. Certain things hadn't been resolved, although it had been peaceful and went relatively smoothly.

Q: It happened with no referendum or anything like that.

WILLIAMS: It happened quickly and people were of mixed minds about whether or not it was good. Those that thought it was a good idea felt that the Slovaks were a drain on the Czech Republic's development. The Czech lands had been an industrial center. When the communists came in, Slovakia was still agricultural, primarily rural. The Slovak communists had such a dominant place in the Czechoslovak Communist Party that they started building up industries down in Slovakia. Those were munitions industries, which in a post-Cold War world were hard-pressed to maintain themselves. That was one of the issues. There were others like the large number of Romani gypsies that lived in Slovakia and wanted to become Czechs by virtue of having moved there at some point. That was a point of tension. The asymmetry in the economies where the Slovak economy was much weaker. All that contributed. But one interesting thing happened. I visited Bratislava. That was not as prosperous or big as Prague, but it was doing reasonably well. We went to this one dance festival in a small town near the Slovak border. It was an international dance festival, so there were groups from different places in the world. Everybody was very enthusiastic, but the biggest reception was for the Slovaks. It was like welcoming your long lost brother. There are still those feelings that are very positive. Whatever negative things might go on residually, it's a close relationship.

Q: What was our policy towards joining the European Union and NATO?

WILLIAMS: NATO was one of our foreign policy goals, to help the Czechs achieve NATO membership. People were more enthusiastic about it earlier, but as time went on, the public opinion was relatively soft about coming into NATO. It hovered in the 40s and slightly above 50 on occasion. By now, it was the mid-'90s. The Soviet Union was gone. They were struggling with the economy and what to do with the resources. There were no enemies on the horizon. I think people felt that while they were glad NATO existed and saw the benefit of NATO, they weren't sure that the Czech Republic needed to be in it. The government worked on that, trying to explain to the people that NATO was a good idea. They invited Americans to come in and talk to people. So, we sponsored speakers.

Q: Were we pushing hard on coming into NATO or were we ambivalent?

WILLIAMS: Probably before I got there, it wasn't a foregone conclusion. It was part of a discussion. The Czechs, certainly President Havel, wanted it and I gather this was a topic of discussion when President Clinton was there. Then once we came to the conclusion that this was something that we were going to support... There was still the whole European political climate to take into account, the recently unified Germany. Russia was still evolving in its thinking about its relationship with the U.S. It was in the early stage of evolving. There were a lot of other things that had to be considered. Whether or not NATO was ready to take in another partner. Not all the NATO countries were convinced when it came around to it one by one. That was a major concern in those days.

Q: How about the European Union?

WILLIAMS: They were enthusiastic about that until they started getting an up-close picture of what was involved and then they became more ambivalent. But I think by the time it was time to get serious about the EU, people recognized that this was where they had to be.

Q: Were we pushing this?

WILLIAMS: I don't know if we were pushing it. I wouldn't say that. But we recognized the benefits to the Czechs. That was a decision that they made up their minds on without looking for much input from outside.

Q: As PAO, how did you treat a major political issue in the U.S. of Monica Lewinski and the whole Whitewater business? This had been a very difficult time under President Clinton. It was both embarrassing and hard to explain. Whitewater was sort of nothing which went on for four years.

WILLIAMS: Yes. Actually, it was pretty easy. The Czechs really liked President Clinton. They have a different way of looking at these things than the American press or at least some large segments of the American public. They just thought it was kind of silly.

Q: Were there any issues that were major issues you had to deal with?

WILLIAMS: The issues that we were dealing with were promoting civic society and democracy, the entrance into NATO. The last year that I was there, there was a focus derived from the civic society theme. That was the condition of the Romani, the gypsy population, and how the Czechs were managing that social issue. We helped them sponsor a big conference where they brought together people from all over the government and a lot of the NGOs to talk about how to improve the relationship and better integrate them into society. We also on our IV program brought to the U.S. a group of people who were in key positions in different ministries to see how we dealt with minority issues in our country. They came back and formed an association and started doing projects in the country. Economics was always one topic.

Q: With the Romani, was there work with France and other places, Spain? There is this gypsy minority in so many of these countries because they are associated by many people with minor criminal activities and all that, a population that goes through and it may be a minority but it gives that group a very bad name. We've never had to really deal with this. We've had small groups of gypsies but not many.

WILLIAMS: It's a difficult issue. It's kind of hard to come up with a simple answer. Even in our circumstances, because of hardline minority issues and in a lot of cases very different... We were dealing with minority populations that were disadvantaged and we took certain measures to alleviate those problems. One of the big differences with the Romani community is that it tends to be insular. So, they are living in a society with their own traditions and culture and the society is offering them certain things in terms of education and seeking to reach out. But a lot of them just don't want to be part of the education thing. They don't necessarily want their kids to go to school beyond a certain age.

Q: They've been doing this... This is how they've existed for 1,000 years or so.

WILLIAMS: Right. That's one aspect of it. Then you've got the standard residual prejudice on the part of a lot of people. They have a growing Skinhead movement in the country. That was not directed just to Romani but also foreigners, at least darker skinned foreigners. There was goodwill on the part of certain key officials, but I think they were baffled at finding a quick solution. One of the things that we emphasized is, there is no quick solution. We had been dealing with this for decades. What you look for are incremental means. When I left, they were at the stage of building confidence, where the Romani community felt confident of their interlocutor on the other side.

Q: You were there during some major parts of the Bosnian crisis, weren't you?

WILLIAMS: Yes. That was toward the end.

Q: Did that have much of an effect? It was a Slavic country that was coming apart.

WILLIAMS: Yes, but the Czechs were helpful to us in supporting us and supporting our efforts in Bosnia. But in terms of the discourse about it, they talked about it the way an Austrian or a German might talk about it, that this was terrible to be going on in the heart of Europe, that Europeans would be demonstrating this kind of behavior in this time in history. They were very anxious to help out in bringing it to some kind of peaceful resolution. But I don't think they identified with them. They contrasted.

Q: "Those Slavs down south are not us."

WILLIAMS: Yes, that starts at the southern Slovene border.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about? Any incidents or developments when you were there?

WILLIAMS: I can't think of anything.

End of reader