

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

**PHILIP J. GRIFFIN**

*Interviewed by: Raymond Ewing  
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[Note: This interview was not completed prior to Mr. Griffin's death.]

*Q: Good morning. It is good to be talking with you.*

GRIFFIN: Good morning Ray. It is nice to be here

*Q: You entered the Foreign Service a few months before I did in 1957. I see that you went to the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. Is that what led you to the Foreign Service or was there something else that pushed you in that direction?*

GRIFFIN: Well phrased question. There was one indicator event that pushed me initially in that direction, or I should say pushed me in the direction to go to the Foreign Service school. And that was a son of a friend of the family, in the period immediately after the war. He had come out of the military. We knew this young man quite well. He chose Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. I was a teenager and this was something I had not heard of and most of the people in my family hadn't heard of. I grew up here in Washington. We of course knew about Georgetown. He chose the School of Foreign Service. I saw him from time to time from 1945 to 1950 and he got me interested in that particular part of the university. I went to a Jesuit high school in DC and for academic, professional and financial reasons it was clear I was not going away to school but I wanted to go to a good school. I was able to get a half scholarship from Gonzaga High School here in town to go to Georgetown. I chose the Foreign Service school mainly because of what I had heard from this young man, who did not go on to enter the Foreign Service but ended going into business.

*Q: So you went Georgetown. You took the Foreign Service Exam while you were there or a little bit later?*

GRIFFIN: I finished in 1954. I was in ROTC and went into the military. While I was in the military, I served with a gentleman who I had gone to ROTC summer camp with in Kansas. We had become good buddies over this two/three month period. We met again when we were on active duty. He had told me back at summer training about the Foreign Service as a career. I had more or less decided initially to do something different than that and interviewed with a number of companies in my senior year. I was offered a couple of opportunities. Particularly one was offered by General Electric's international division, connected to NY. I had more or less signed up with them. They said they would consider me after military service.

I had in mind to eventually do the Foreign Service. But I thought it would probably be necessary for me to go to graduate school. That isn't necessary but in any case I thought that at the time. Anyway, I met up with this gentleman in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They were giving exams every six months then. We were talking about it. He said, "I had taken this Foreign Service Exam. It is given nationally. You can take it while you are here. You can take it while you are assigned to this base." I asked, "Where do you take that?" He said, "You fill out this ...to Washington to Department of State. They will decide for you to take it in Raleigh, NC. Which is what I did. In my last few months of active duty, I took the exam. Like most of us, I was certain I failed it. I was surprised that I didn't fail it. I got a few points. Then they set up the oral examination. Which was not the type that was given now... The same time I had applied to take the exam, I applied to the CIA. Turns out, I passed the initial screening with them. When the Foreign Service...was set, the date, I took that date, their oral exam at the same time. That was within 6-8 weeks of leaving the military.

*Q: All of your army service was in the United States? At Fort Bragg, North Carolina?*

GRIFFIN: Georgia, Fort Benning and Bragg, North Carolina. I didn't get overseas, unfortunately.

*Q: So you passed the oral exam. Then entered the Foreign Service shortly after you left the Army.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, I got out of the army at the end of January 1957. Entered the Foreign Service end of March or early April as I recall.

*Q: Same here.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, it was convenient. Once I had passed the oral examination...I was offered a job in what I thought I really wanted to do. I informed the General Electric Corporation that I would not be...It was nice to have two job opportunities coming out of the military. It was, of course, as you know, it was a time that the Department was recruiting. After the McCarthy era.

*Q: Yes, as a prospect of new embassies in Africa was on the horizon and the integration of the rest of the program Civil Foreign Service. So you came into the Department, you did your initial training at the Foreign Service Institute. What happened after that?*

GRIFFIN: At that time newly minted officers had the option to stay in Washington or go in the field for their first assignment. I had married just before I graduated and before I went into the military. We decided that we would like to stay here a couple years. So I was assigned to a function that I knew nothing about. I had never been outside the United States except for briefly Canada and Mexico. I felt totally unprepared for being a personnel placement officer. I guess they called it POD at that time. The assignments officer as opposed to the counseling function. I was assigned to do placement for the Benelux countries including the remaining Dutch dependencies in the Western hemisphere.

*Q: Suriname.*

GRIFFIN: Suriname and Curacao.

*Q: Did you get some language training while you were here?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, I came in as a language probationer. I just missed the written German test by a few points. So I needed some time then before I went to the Washington assignment or afterwards. They did it afterwards. I needed to get off of language probation. I took sixteen weeks. It was intensive German training at Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: And that turned out to be followed by an assignment to Germany.*

GRIFFIN: I was able to get first assignment in the consular section in Frankfurt.

*Q: Then Frankfurt to do visas, the usual consular work. Was that pretty much it or did you do some other things too?*

GRIFFIN: Frankfurt, along with several other European posts such as Genoa, maybe Cologne and maybe Munich, were the guinea pig, so to speak, for rotational assignments for junior officers. There was a lot of flexibility. It was left basically to the Consulate General. These were all at large Consulates General. I was sort of told when I came in to vie for one of two substantive junior officer positions. It was a very large consulate general, I believe it still is. There were two-person, political and economic sections handling the three German provinces in that consular district. There was a senior economic officer, a junior economic officer and the same on the political side. I did non-immigrant visas for about a year. Then for another 4-6 months I did passports and citizenship, mainly registering children of American GIs. And then I was chosen to take the junior political position. I worked for Paul Kattenburg, a Far Eastern Specialist. In some of the Vietnam books, he certainly was involved, it was after that period. He had a European family background. He spoke every known language. Anyway, I went to work for him.

*Q: And in Frankfurt you and Paul Kattenburg basically were in touch with the political leadership in not only Frankfurt itself but neighboring lender.... You were negotiating did you do much with the foreign ministry or with the government authority or were you involved with military issues?*

GRIFFIN: A little bit on military issues on behalf of the embassy, and otherwise doing the embassy bidding but also we had quite a bit of luck to develop important political programs. It was an enormously beneficial assignment. It was some years after that I had as much responsibility or as much flexibility in the reporting position or any other position for that matter.

Helmut Kohl, later the German Chancellor, was a rising politician in Rhineland-Pfalz on the west side of the Rhine River, a conservative catholic area. He was a rising politician and we were trying to get to know him. Paul said, "Why don't we have introductory social events? Host a male only group for Kohl and some of his associates. We did, rather I did. He was in my home

and I was a very junior officer. He wasn't as stout as he is now. Shortly thereafter he started to shine very brightly. He wanted go on. He eventually became chancellor.

*Q: You were in Frankfurt from 1959-61. So he was probably in his 40s, 30s.*

GRIFFIN: He was in his late 30s, early 40's.

*Q: How you did you size him up, or how did you remember him?*

GRIFFIN: I remember him as a careless fellow, politically skewed. Compared to some other politicians across the board in that district, at the time I remember thinking about it, or later thinking about it. There were three or four that I would have thought would go much further than Kohl. We just never thought of Kohl as more than a light politician. Not doing any big splash on the national scene. We didn't play him down or anything, we just didn't build him up in terms of prestige or recommendations or anything.

*Q: He never really has mastered English. I'm not sure how hard he tried. Your German was...?*

GRIFFIN: My German was...in fact I recall I spoke a little bit that evening and on other occasions we always spoke in German. He tested my German. He never made any effort to speak English except for maybe a few words.

*Q: Did he have any particular attitude towards the United States?*

GRIFFIN: He was very friendly. The CDU, in general was somewhat right wing. They were a throwback to an earlier German nationalism. There was an enormous investment of US military all over the place. It had been heavily bombed and it received a fair amount of aid after the war. He was very friendly and very on the moderate side of the CDU, the moderate to liberal side I would say.

*Q: Konrad Adenauer was still the Chancellor in those days?*

GRIFFIN: Konrad was still the Chancellor.

*Q: Did you have much contact?*

GRIFFIN: We were a two man political section. We encouraged the embassy to come down on occasion so they knew what was going on and we could share some of our own views. They were a good political section in Bonn, they gave us a lot of leeway. They gave us a program to work with the embassy to track pre-electioneering. Adenauer would come down usually for one event and then back to Bonn. Trying to make himself look like a US or German Kennedy at that time. Very popular and a lot of media exposure. He would use swings through Hesse and with the Saar. They would do all of them over a 3 or 4 day period. We had good enough contacts with the party, with the administration and the press. You can find out a lot with the press. So, we would tag along usually like a pressman along the swings. We went into small hamlets and out of

the way places that you would never normally get to. I did that I think three times during that election.

*Q: You Americans were probably the only...*

GRIFFIN: We and the Brits. The Brits did it too but not as much as we did. The French did it a little bit usually only in Rheinland-Pfalz or with the Saar which had been in their occupation zone. You never saw them.

The Saar at that time was a neglected land mainly because the French had taken everything out of the Saar that was worth moving, probably as much as the Russians did from the eastern states. The French occupation in one form or another lasted longer in the Saar than it did elsewhere in the FRG. The French didn't do much. They got a central services working but that was about all. They did nothing much of construction or soliciting private sector assistance to do new construction. So that the Saarbrücken, looked very much like Frankfurt and Berlin did at the end of the war when I first went there. In the course of the time that I was there a great deal happened.

*Q: This was also the early period of the Coal and Steel community*

GRIFFIN: That is correct.

*Q: Was the Saar in that area...?*

GRIFFIN: The Saar was a factor. That helped to boost things up. In fact I think it was the main element.

*Q: Frankfurt was the largest city in the then Federal Republic, other than Berlin perhaps? Certainly a very important city outside the capital.*

GRIFFIN: Certainly Munich was the...Berlin is the largest any way you looked at it. Munich, and Frankfurt is about third. I think at that time population was about like Washington about 500,000/600,000.

*Q: But Frankfurt was certainly the banking, financial and commercial capital.*

GRIFFIN: Correct and one of the media capitals, along with Munich, more so than Berlin.

*Q: Ok, anything else we should talk about in this first assignment in Frankfurt?*

GRIFFIN: I was nearing the end of my assignment in Frankfurt when the Wall went up in Berlin. We had planned a holiday trip, a driving trip over the autobahn before the Wall went up. So we thought that when that happened that it would take away that trip but that was not the case. They decided after the initial response when we kept the travel ways open, that we should exercise our right of usage in any normal way. So they encouraged anyone who had trips planned to take

them. They did not think there was a great security risk as long as people did what they were supposed to, adhering to the agreed upon rules of exchange and use of the facilities.

So we went to Berlin, I guess it was about 5 days after the wall went up. There was one street that was well known in the press, Behrenstraße. The wall went up right on the other side of the apartments where people lived and people were still, at that point, jumping out of the windows. People from the East could enter the building and there was some way to get up to the second floor or third floor from their side and then jump over with somebody there to catch you with a net or something and come out with a rope. We saw one of those escapes that Sunday while we were in Berlin.

*Q: So, you were able to circulate quite freely in West Berlin.*

GRIFFIN: Circulate quite freely. One gentleman I had served with in personnel was doing labor work and other difficult tasks. He was watching the periphery, not only within the city and the border between Berlin and GDR, watching closely for any changes. There was a program for the political officers on a rotational basis to go on one of the military helicopters around the whole city which was something like 26 miles all the way around. He invited us to go along with him. That was a nice story to come back with.

*Q: That was your whole family?*

GRIFFIN: My wife and I at that time. We got military permission for her to come along.

*Q: I remember a similar helicopter trip over West Berlin that I took many years later. One of the things I recall was looking down at Spandau prison from the air and literally seeing Rudolf Hess walking in the garden. Did you have that experience?*

GRIFFIN: We flew over the prison. I don't recall noticing him. He may not have been outside.

*Q: Did you actually go across to East Berlin?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, went across at Checkpoint Charlie, did a driving tour with this friend of ours in the East over a good part of East Berlin. Later when I served in Berlin, I saw a lot more of it. Its very sad, very tragic.

*Q: While you were serving in Frankfurt did you ever have any occasion to do much other travel?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, we did a lot of travel. More travel in that assignment than any other assignment we ever had mainly because I got very good leave and took it. In addition to Berlin, we went to Paris once, we took a very interesting trip one summer by car to Yugoslavia and, and I forgot the name of it, maybe it's Split. What's the capitol of Slovenia?

*Q: Ljubljana, Zagreb*

GRIFFIN: South of Zagreb, on the coast. There was a road which dated back to the Turkish period. It was unpaved, they were in the process of beginning to paving it. We went down as far south as Dubrovnik.

*Q: There is also a place called Zadar.*

GRIFFIN: Zadar. That was great. We found that any Yugoslav we talked to had a relative in the United States.

*Q: They were glad that you talked German. Were you?*

GRIFFIN: Yes. Talked German along the coast, German tourists probably got to talk.

*Q: Exactly. Do you remember who the consul general was in Frankfurt?*

GRIFFIN: W. Wendell Blancké. He was a character. He was a business man who had worked extensively in Latin America. He was one of those people hired by the Department of State during the war to keep track of German business activities in Argentina. He was in Buenos Aires as I recall. He was brought into the governmental service and stayed in after the war and came in at a fairly high level.

*Q: Did he take quite a bit of interest political affairs as well as other parts?*

GRIFFIN: He had more of an interest in economics. He could hold his liquor very well and enjoyed going to the Marine House. He was sort of a roly-poly guy and when he had a few drinks under his belt he used to like to draw or paint on the walls, something serious or something humorous but well done. He did a lot of art on the Marine Corps wall there.

*Q: Left something there...*

GRIFFIN: He was a very good consul general. Not the typical Foreign Service type at all, if you could find what that is.

*Q: Ok, anything else about Frankfurt?*

GRIFFIN: No, I think that was it.

*Q: Good first assignment?*

GRIFFIN: Good first assignment. Having done personnel in the Department at the end of two tours, I had some exposure to the three functions of the Foreign Service.

*Q: Where did you go next?*

GRIFFIN: In Frankfurt, there was an ex-FSN who had served at our embassy in Baghdad and had come out during the 1958 revolution and eventually given a job in the main Foreign Service as an FSL, as an FSS.

*Q: Did he become an American citizen?*

GRIFFIN: He had become a citizen. He was sort of a special assistant. He was terribly well-qualified and experienced in consular work. He was a great aid to the head of the visa section. We got to know them. They were Iraqi Christians, he and his wife. He started talking “what are you going to do after Frankfurt?” He said, “Why don’t you get involved in the Middle East?” I had some interest in the Middle East at Georgetown Graduate School which I attended briefly while I was assigned to Washington.

*Q: While you were working in personnel?*

GRIFFIN: I had taken a Middle East political science course and got kind of interested in it. Anyway, he told me this is a good time at your age to take one of the hard languages. There was an Arabic Language school in Beirut. He sold me on the idea. I was interested in some kind of specialization. I was more interested in Russian area language but we had too many people who subscribed at that time for that training. It was temporarily closed. They came back strongly about this Arabic program. If anyone expressed any interest at all they were ready to grab onto them. So I put this down as second choice and they came back and said are you really interested? So I applied for Arabic language training, not knowing a lot about what I’m getting into.

*Q: Its interesting how you were encouraged by this friendship*

GRIFFIN: Yes.

*Q: You obviously enjoyed this person as well as the course you took at Georgetown? Now did you start the Arabic in Washington at Foreign Service Institute or did you go directly to Beirut.*

GRIFFIN: They were doing it both ways. I took the entire two years, or 1 year and 9 months in Beirut.

*Q: At that time Beirut was a great place.*

GRIFFIN: It was a great place. It depended how you looked at Beirut or how you remembered it or where you came from. Coming from the West it was clearly an Eastern city. As I found out later, coming later to Beirut from points further West, even in the Arab World, it looks very Westernized, very Europeanized.

*Q: Points further East.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, points further East, excuse me. It was a great place to be. It was on the way up. There was still a lot of poverty among the Shi’ites and the lower employment positions but the

entrepreneurial spirit of Lebanon would have caught your eye. It was not a good place, however, to study Arabic, unfortunately.

*Q: Why was that?*

GRIFFIN: English was taking hold very rapidly. French still had a hold at least on the educated classes.

*Q: Especially the Christians?*

GRIFFIN: Especially the Christians but the older Muslim society as well. Wherever they went to school, they may have gone to Islamic high school or Islamic university. French was always the number one foreign language. Christians, of course, usually took their training, their education in French. So when you came out of six hours of FSI, had a short period to relax a little bit, maybe walk around the souk or whatever, forget about it until you got back to it with the recorder in the evening. You would go and try for a long time in my experience for all of the first year and into the second year, you try your phrases out. Increasingly you had phrases you could use but the reply would always come back in either French or English.

*Q: And of course, even in those days, there was a large American community in addition to the Embassy, you could connect with the American University in Beirut.*

GRIFFIN: Correct. American businesses were beginning to take hold as regional sections.

*Q: Your instructor was Lebanese?*

GRIFFIN: Instructors, the course was too full. On the colloquial side it was a combination of Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian. Which is essentially the same dialect and then that was one facet. The other is what they call the Modern Standard Arabic, which was the literary Arabic, not classical, not Quranic Arabic which is an updated Quranic Arabic. We started off with colloquial then added the modern standard in segments until towards the end it was about half and half in terms of time. We made great use of the tape recorder. That was relatively new at FSI at that time. The instructors were a combination of the colloquial sub dialects. We had a number of Lebanese, a number of Palestinians. Mainly for Modern Standard, we had an Iraqi and one or two Syrians.

*Q: And as part of this two year program, you also did area studies? Did that involve travel?*

GRIFFIN: We had a period in the second year, somewhere around 18 months, where we were given a couple weeks to do an area trip. We could more or less put it together ourselves as long it made sense with money to do it. The area studies was somewhat neglected but what we had was pretty good. Once every week or two, we had a professor from AUB come to the old building on the corniche in Beirut. We would have area studies from 8-10, once a week or once every two weeks. They were good lectures and each of them gave us our reading list. But no one had any time to do the reading. There wasn't much follow up so we had a lot of somewhat uncoordinated lectures.

*Q: Part of this was the case, because the emphasis was on the language and that's what brought the Director of the program and had to be your primary...*

GRIFFIN: Exactly. They decided that if any more time to be given to area study, which they could have worked out of program with AUB. I could have gone up there and spent a few hours a week, they could have put together the course, but it would have been time taken away from the language. The linguist must have realized that as much as that was, it was an inadequate amount of Arabic.

Later, when I was in Kuwait, I had an interesting conversation with a Chinese political officer and a Russian political officer. Both of them were Arabists. The Chinese had essentially copied the Russian course. Anyway, each of their courses were basically five years. How did you learn enough Arabic in 2 years to be functional? I had a chance to use it over several assignments and I was an average student in Arabic. I said, "Well, there are great limitations," and I said, "You don't realize those until you get out and use the language you know what your limitations are?"

The British did it somewhat differently. They said, "Why couldn't you have done five years?" I said, "I couldn't get someone to commit to five years in our system." I said, "In your system you can," and I said, "If you do it for five years, essentially you will not be serving anywhere else in order to get the work out of it". They understood.

The British did it somewhat differently. They had about a 15 month course given in a town above the airport in Beirut. They concentrated on the Modern Standard Arabic. In the division of time, they spend a year on MSA and three months in colloquial. The colloquial was sort of an afterthought to help the students get around Lebanon, the Lebanese dialect. The British, still at the time in the 50s, had political agents in the Gulf and in the Sudan and these guys were like county officers. The British didn't really care that they didn't sound like Arabs when they spoke. The main thing was could they communicate when they had to in a certain framework of substantive subjects, which they could because they stressed a 3,000 or 3,500 word vocabulary. British graduates of their school could walk into the kitchen and instruct the cook how to cook eggs or put the frying pan away or something but he could talk about the political situation at that time. Each of the major powers did it a little bit different. The Russians and the Chinese followed the same pattern and came out of it with better Arabists. Primakov, for example, I don't know if he did five years but I think he at least did three years.

*Q: The problem with Arabic, in contrast to Chinese, Japanese, Russian, which are probably equally difficult, hard languages is that there is such a variation in dialect and nobody really speaks Modern Standard Arabic. You really have some tough choices to make.*

GRIFFIN: You do. You can get by with Modern Standard Arabic, but you sound stilted. And if you talk with educated people if you use the right verb, noun-verb, syntax, they'll understand you. Then if you stand around talking they will switch into Palestinian or Egyptian and you won't necessarily know what they are talking about. It's an extraordinary difficult language. The difficulty is with the verb. The verb has so many difficult parts to it, the nouns, the vocabulary.

Most of the vocabulary is new vocabulary, it has been brought in from another language. It is the complexity of the verb that makes it so difficult.

*Q: What about the writing system? The reading?*

GRIFFIN: The writing system itself, everybody thinks that right to left, we took 10 days or 2 work weeks to learn the writing system at about the 5 month period, after we had been at it for 5 months. The colloquial has prepared you to starting the modern standard. Once you learn the writing system, you don't forget it. It's very easy. Reading is, even if you read well, even an Arab reads generally slower in Arabic than with a similar degree of knowledge in a Western language.

*Q: So you don't have to learn characters.*

GRIFFIN: No, but each of the letters, depending on its location in the sentence has a slightly differently form...

*Q: The Arabic Language training, language school in Beirut from the period of roughly '61- '63, at one point you mentioned that the AUB area studies lectures came from the American University campus to the old building on the corniche. When you say the old building what do you mean? The old chancery?*

GRIFFIN: Well, the chancery that was blown up.

*Q: Is that where the language school was?*

GRIFFIN: That's where the language school was.

*Q: That must have challenged the students too because every time they came out for a coffee break or whatever, they would see American colleagues.*

GRIFFIN: It was similar to your arrangement here. The school was located at one end of one floor so that except when people left to go to lunch or go home, they didn't have much contact. There were people on the same floor. The ambassador took a great interest in the school and made sure that one or more substantive officers had regular contact with the school. While I was there, it was Dick Parker. He was a rising middle grade political officer. He was the political officer. He used to come down and get to know all of us. He had a couple talks that he gave of his previous experiences. Then the ambassador would include all of the members of the class in certain representational activities, particularly Fourth of July. We would be meeters and greeters to make sure everyone got around, socialized, had a drink. So we had good contact with the embassy.

*Q: But you didn't live at an embassy building or ...?*

GRIFFIN: We lived in the community, had to go find our own housing in Beirut.

*Q: You, I think said before that as part of the area studies portion, you were able to plan your own trip. I'm not sure you told us where you went?*

GRIFFIN: My two other colleagues, whom you may know, retired within the last three years. Tom Carolan and Gordon Brown. Tom was in the same class as I was and Gordon was in the class that had begun their training in Washington. They did their first six months or first year then came out. Yes, I did the driving. We took a trip to Northern Syria, it would still be an adventure today I guess. Went north of Beirut and into Syria along the coast and up to Latakia, and over to Aleppo, which was marvelous, and back to Homs, to Damascus and then back to Beirut. Ten days or so, as I recall.

*Q: It's an important part of Syria. It's well-known.*

GRIFFIN: It wasn't well known then and still isn't well-known.

*Q: Did we have a consulate in those days in Aleppo?*

GRIFFIN: We had closed it in the late 50s.

*Q: As a former dean of the School of Language Studies at the Foreign Service Institute, one of the questions that we debated off and on and I am curious to your reaction. Is it better to start a difficult language like Arabic in Beirut or at the field school or whether it is better to start in Washington where you can concentrate just on the fundamentals for 6 months or a year then go into the language environment where you have an opportunity to use the language?*

GRIFFIN: I'm solidly in favor in starting in the field, in doing the whole thing in the field, because depending on the aptitude of the student and the initiative and all of that, even at the lowest common denominator a certain amount of the local environment rubs off of you.

*Q: From day one?*

GRIFFIN: From day one. And then you know when you are here, you concentrate on fundamentals yes, but you still are commuting, you have the commuting problem, you've got mowing the lawn on the weekend problem which doesn't go away.

*Q: You may have to watch the Redskins.*

GRIFFIN: Exactly.

*Q: Anything else about your period of Arabic language training in Beirut?*

GRIFFIN: No.

*Q: Where did you go? With this mastery of Arabic?*

GRIFFIN: Assigned to the consulate general in Jerusalem which was a two office, one consul general post, offices on the Jordanian and Israeli sides. The main office was on the Israeli side. There had been a consulate general in Jerusalem going back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. I'm not sure if it had been in the same location. Anyway, the main office was in a location where it had been for a long time prior to the 1948 war. When the city was divided, armistice was signed, we opened, as did some of the other consulates, major European countries. They kept wherever in the city their main office was, that remained the main office and created an auxiliary office on the other side, on whatever side that was.

*Q: In our case?*

GRIFFIN: In our case, our main office fell in what turned out to be Israeli Jerusalem. The French on the other hand had a very large consulate that turned out to be on the Jordanian side.

*Q: So at the time you arrived there which was 1963, there was one consulate general and two offices, one on the Jordanian side. Can we call that East Jerusalem?*

GRIFFIN: East Jerusalem.

*Q: Were you in affect assigned to that office?*

GRIFFIN: I was assigned to the East Jerusalem office but I was accredited on both sides. I guess it really hasn't changed until now although the rhetoric is a little different now. At that time we went out of our way to say that we considered Jerusalem an international city. We had not recognized the sovereignty of either Israel or Jordan and their respective parts or the other person's parts. So, we were accredited as far as consular work was concerned, we were accredited to the municipal authorities on each side, not to the national government, to the respective mayors.

*Q: You were an Arabic speaker, an Arabic language officer. Did you essentially spend all your time on the East side of the city or was there a conscious effort made to do both sides?*

GRIFFIN: We lived on the eastern side and I was the consular officer on the eastern side. I wasn't crazy about the assignment. The place was fine but I wasn't so anxious to do anymore consular work but it was a dual job. It had 25-35% political functions connected with it or commercial or any other substantive work, excuse me not any other substantive work, there was a certain amount of economic or commercial. A little bit of political and consular. An effort was made to familiarize me with the work on the other side. The senior consular officer of the consulate general was on the Israeli side and when she went on leave I had to go over and spell her. I didn't move over there. I had to go there over in the course of the day. The so-called Mandelbaum Gate was closed by the Jordanians at night. After 8 o'clock, the Jordanian police disappeared and the Jordanian army came up and strung up barbed wire. The Israelis were quite ready to leave it open 24 hours but for roughly 12 hours it was closed.

*Q: In the daytime was, was it easy to move back and forth?*

GRIFFIN: Relatively easy.

*Q: How was, about 10 minutes to go over to...?*

GRIFFIN: Well, our location, the East Jerusalem office was located immediately at the point where you crossed so it took about one minute.

*Q: Once you were across, you still had some distance to go?*

GRIFFIN: No. The consulate was here, and this is the Israeli checkpoint and this is the Jordanian checkpoint. You just came out and went here, very very short area here (using props to display). When you went by the Jordanian check point you were at the midpoint between the two sectors.

*Q: They really were close together.*

GRIFFIN: They were very close together. From time to time the Jordanian police and the Israeli police, when there were difficult problems they had to resolve, would walk out and meet each other in the middle.

*Q: Was the United Nations in evidence?*

GRIFFIN: The UN, the consulates that had offices on both sides passed freely as well as UN people, various UN functions which was the military and some civilian agencies. It was necessary for me to be familiar with consular work on the Israeli side, which was quite different consular work. We didn't do immigrant visa work. We referred the case to Tel Aviv or Amman. When I had to do interviews I often did them with elderly Israeli citizens with German or Yiddish background where you can use German. I used a lot of German in that assignment.

*Q: But on the East Jerusalem side you used a lot of Arabic?*

GRIFFIN: Arabic, yes. In Jerusalem most people spoke a fair amount of English, either good English or a fair amount. We had a community in Ramallah, still there I guess, of Arab Americans. They had come to the U.S. as push cart vendors and saved their money and lived 4 to a room and gone back, and got married and maybe brought a wife. Then usually come back and marry and go back and work until they're 50 or 60 and retire and build a home like nobody else could have at that time. We had a lot of those people in Ramallah. Although they may not have learned grammatical English, they spoke English, in one stripe or another.

*Q: They were American citizens?*

GRIFFIN: They were American citizens or green card holders, come back those periods and then return.

*Q: I think we are going to stop here, and pick up on another occasion.*

*This is oral history interview with Philip J. Griffin. It is March 30, 1999. This is the second tape series being conducted under the Foreign Affairs oral history program. My name is Raymond Ewing. We were talking several months ago about your assignment to Jerusalem as consular officer from I believe it was, 1963-65. We talked particularly about some of the consular responsibilities with Palestinian-Americans in Ramallah and elsewhere. What other main responsibilities, main events transpired through the period which you were there?*

GRIFFIN: The position I held there as a relatively junior middle-grade or senior/junior officer position had a dual function: primarily consular which I spoke about last time working on West Bank consular matters. It also had a political dimension which wasn't so prescribed in terms of duties, it was really whoever was in the office position made up the duties. One of the things which was suggested, which I did and worked out rather well, was keep in touch with the ecclesiastics in Jerusalem. Practically every known Christian sect was represented and I got to know and report about Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Episcopal Church representatives.

*Q: Would you do that by meeting periodically with them for a meal or otherwise did they come together as a group?*

GRIFFIN: Both. But basically because consulate personnel changed frequently they didn't know me so I had to make myself known to them. And I called on various representatives of the churches, some at the middle level and some at a higher level and then followed up from time to time and they called on me. We saw each other at gatherings, visitors going through or various religious holidays or assemblies.

The thing that I remember specifically was that the Russian Orthodox Church, which was an immigrant church with its headquarters in New York, had responsibility for a group of nuns who lived on the Mount of Olives. Some of these were newer nuns recruited from the United States or the Washington Bureau. Goodly number of them had been there, got caught there at the end of World War I as young nuns. Representing the Russian Orthodox and they were in a never-never land for a long time until this immigrant church was set up in the 20s or 30s in New York and took over the responsibilities for them. When I was there, the Soviets had full diplomatic relations with Israel. I'm sure they knew all along that the nuns were up there. They began to make visits to the mother superior complaining that they still had consular responsibilities. They reached for the older nuns. There was one nun, American, who was Russian Orthodox. She was an American but she was in opposition to the immigrant church and she was in support of the patriarchate in Moscow. It was kind of interesting. She was very politically motivated.

I met the Soviet officer who was responsible for these kinds of affairs in the Embassy. Most of the activities brought him to Jerusalem. So I got to know him fairly well. The patriarchate in Moscow had a representative after 1948 who was Soviet recognized. They replaced the representative of the immigrant church. That was one of the conditions of their recognizing Israel. That they would insert a representative of the patriarchate of Moscow in West Jerusalem. That did not apply in East Jerusalem which was still questionable in terms of sovereignty. The Israelis certainly couldn't do that in the Eastern sector but they could in the Western sector. I got to know this guy and I saw him several times. He used to invite patriarchate to drink. I got so

god-dammed drunk. Excuse me. My experience of drinking with the Russians, I lost each time. We had a senior officer in the eastern sector who was the number 2 in the overall consulate. His job was predominantly political and I backed him up on the West Bank keeping track of talking to Palestinian leaders, and so forth, which was always a function of that consulate after 1948. It allowed sort of a welcome respite.

*Q: Let me go back to one question I had about the Russian Orthodox establishment on the Mount of Olives. That was a convent?*

GRIFFIN: That was a convent.

*Q: And the older nuns have been there since World War I in the Soviet Union, tried to take the interest in. What did they consider their nationality? Did they have passports?*

GRIFFIN: That's a good question. I think it was dependent on an ad hoc basis, on the individual nuns. But they still considered themselves Russian. I don't know this for a fact but it is entirely possible that the Soviet embassy in Tel Aviv might have documented them at some point if they needed to travel. Essentially, they didn't need to ever travel but I suppose if they got ill or something like that. They were very aged.

*Q: They may have been stateless.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, they could have been. That's the other point. It's also possible the Jordanians documented them.

*Q: Sort of coming to your East Jerusalem responsibilities, I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more about your relationship, the consulate relationship with the Jordanian authorities before the 67 war as it related to West Bank, East Jerusalem and so on.*

GRIFFIN: When I got to Jerusalem in 1963, the Jordanian government relationship with the population was very iffy. After the 1948 war the Jordanian militarily moved into East Jerusalem and stayed there afterwards. The Jordanian state had not become stabilized yet. King Hussein was a very young monarch, still very much dependent on British and older Arab military people, some of whom had fought after World War I in the establishment of other states in the Middle East, like Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. Anyway, it was a rather or somewhat repressive regime in the '50s. There was fear at one point that the Palestinians were going to rise up and not hook up with Israel but might even try to establish their own state. They would have had no liability and they had no leadership. They were very unhappy with the Hashemite rule out of Amman. That had more or less been overcome, it was being overcome by the time I got there. So rather than Palestinian resentment, we were more interested in the relationship between Hussein and his East Bank and West Bank subjects. While I was there, in order to solidify his rule over the West Bank, East Jerusalem area, Hussein started spending more time in the West Bank, very close to where we lived. He rented a large house on the road to Ramallah. And very frequently he was there. It is interesting that recent events, with the king dying, not the brother who was deposed Crown Prince Hassan, but the other brother, I think it was Ibrahim or Abdullah. He was the

youngest brother of the three. [Ed note: Muhammad bin Talal is the younger brother of King Hussein.]

*Q: Not the one who is...*

GRIFFIN: Not the one who is king but another full brother. He was a wild man, super playboy but even worse than that he would carry guns with him everywhere he went. He would keep an automatic weapon in his trunk, not that he ever used it. He was an embarrassment to the king. He was more good fishing with the ladies in the West Bank than the more traditional Amman, a very tribal society. So this brother used to spend most of his time on the West Bank. He eventually married a Palestinian and he calmed down a little bit. Thank god he never became king.

That was one of the focuses that we had and then keeping in touch with the traditional Palestinian leadership and this was a group of people who were related to leadership in the '20s and '30s from the leading family of Jerusalem. Husseini. He very prominent to negotiate and so forth. He was young guy back from university if I recall. He used to keep in touch with his father. So that was the main focus.

And then the border. Major incidents took place there after I left in '66 which was a prelude to the '67 War. It went a long way to explaining something that caused the '67 War, this incident in the south of Jerusalem. I can't remember the name of the town now, it's about 20 miles south of Jerusalem. The Israelis claimed there had been a couple of villagers who had perpetrated terrorists acts on their side and they chased them across the armistice line. It wasn't a border, it was something they had done times before. They blew up the village and they have never done that before. That left a bad taste in the Jordanian military which wanted to reciprocate. So when Egypt asked Jordan to be in the 1967 war on their side, the military was quite ready to do that. They knew they wouldn't fare very well. We were always looking for possible problem areas or incidents across the border.

The diplomats in Jerusalem and the UN people established there who went back and forth across the border. Once I was working on a consular case that the consulate general was interested in and said it was an urgent matter. Eight times I had to go back.

One interesting aspect is the border, the armistice line was open for business during the day but the Jordanians closed it down at night. The Jordanian police turned over their responsibility every night at 7:30/8 o'clock to the army. The army took up positions especially at the Mandelbaum Gate they strung barbed wire and they had a platoon, platoon and a half at that particular crossing point in hard hats, hard helmets, automatic weapons. And if you were on the Israeli side, for a social event or whatever or shopping, unless you wanted to get stuck on that side all night you had to get back across before 8 o'clock. I got stuck one night. I'll very quickly tell the story: me, my wife and our son. We hit it too close and we got stuck in the middle and it already closed. We had to negotiate with the Jordanian lieutenant who was in charge and all the lights were out. The Israeli office was wide open 24 hours a day but nobody could cross it at night. And our office on the Jordanian side was just a bit beyond the crossing point.

*Q: Yes I've seen it.*

GRIFFIN: The Consul General at that time was a gentleman by the name of Bill Hamilton. Not one of my favorite consul generals but he did a good job. Anyway, he was there in that building. He had a little apartment in that office building. He was playing cards with some Palestinian friends. He gets a call from the Commander in Chief of the West Bank, the Jordanian Commander in Chief who channeled that one of his vice consuls was stuck about five hundred feet away maybe five hundred yards away. It was cold and raining and I was stuck out there with my car with my wife and baby. I guess they were asking for his verification that I belonged to him. I thought my career was finished right there.

*Q: He did confirm?*

GRIFFIN: He did confirm. He didn't leave me out there.

*Q: And he didn't finish his poker game?*

GRIFFIN: I don't know if he finished his poker game.

*Q: So you lived on the East?*

GRIFFIN: I lived on the East side, spent most of my working and most of my leisure time on that side as well. But I did acquire a few Israeli friends and colleagues

*Q: The Palestinian Liberation Organization started or came later?*

GRIFFIN: It started in 1966. The PLO was formed in a meeting in East Jerusalem.

*Q: That was after you had left?*

GRIFFIN: No, that was while I was still there, but we didn't see the significance of it. Arafat was someone that most of us didn't know. In fact, in retrospect, he was not the chairman. The initial chairman was the Palestinian who had been Saudi representative at the UN (Ahmad Shukeiri). He was an elderly man at that time, and Arafat fairly quickly moved. It was within a year. But 1966 was the year it really took place in the Hilton Hotel on the Mount of Olives.

*Q: And the United Nations was an important element in Jerusalem. These were people who had been there since armistice at the end of 1948 War, not a great number there?*

GRIFFIN: The number I would say probably 50 to 60 at least.

*Q: They were essentially observers?*

GRIFFIN: They were observers. They operated out of a residence complex work building on the hill south of Jerusalem, on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem overlooking Bethlehem. And this was where the British High Commissioner lived and worked. They had a big mansion and there was compound around it, UN territory, but that's where the headquarters of this group was and

they went all up and down the line. Most of them were in the Jerusalem area, north of Jerusalem up to the Syrian border.

*Q: And they were American?*

GRIFFIN: Most of them were. There were some political types, member of countries. Most of them were military.

*Q: Were some of them American?*

GRIFFIN: There were some Americans. My colleague, did you know Bob Munn? He was the deputy to the consul general and the head senior political officer on the Jordanian side. His main job was to keep in touch with the senior American who was UN.

*Q: UN troops?*

GRIFFIN: UN troops supervised the organization. The chief of staff was traditionally an American Marine Colonel. His job was to keep in touch and find out what really was going on. The general in charge was normally a Scandinavian.

*Q: Even in the period that you were, Jerusalem was a unique consulate, a unique Foreign Service post. I guess I should ask you, how you saw, as a vice consul, the special character of the post also the relationship with the Embassy in Tel Aviv. I think already most of the Israeli government offices were in Jerusalem.*

GRIFFIN: Yes, the Israelis, as you undoubtedly know, did not like the setup of the consulate which was, for policy purposes, an independent supported post but by necessity fell under the aegis of the embassy of Tel Aviv for administrative support. The embassy was always trying to expand that administrative support to having a dominant say in policy matters. One of the toughest jobs of the consul general, whoever that might be at any given time, was to forge that relationship and then you had some very notable people over the years who had done that very successfully, at least from their standpoint, I don't know from the embassy standpoint. While I was there both consul generals Hamilton, as I mentioned, and Evan Wilson, seemed to do it very well balancing both the parts. It's always a tricky thing with personal relationships between the consul general and the ambassador. In fact the ambassador knew the consul general had his independent reporting requirement and responsibility. He didn't like it; no ambassador in Tel Aviv liked it, but I don't recall any very difficult period.

*Q: And the other unique aspect is the two offices, one in West Jerusalem and the other on the East side which could be seen as separate posts, separate operations related to the Palestinians or not so much as part of one unit. Was that a problem?*

GRIFFIN: That was an issue internally. Generally between the consul general and whoever the ranking officer was in West Jerusalem. In that instance, the consul general was someone who lived and worked on the Israeli side irrespective of his relationship with the embassy and was looked upon as the Israeli type who was always trying to hold down... we had some pretty

aggressive people in the political job. We had politically savvy political officers, mid grade, some of whom were Arabists. So there was a certain amount of tension in reporting, in the outlook of reporting. But administratively and logistically, it was a problem administering these two officers, just scheduling your time so that if you had to go to one side and had other duties on the other side because it was a relatively small post in terms of staffing. If the senior consular office on the Israeli side was on leave, either I or my political colleague we had to do that. And then we had to get up in the morning and pass the whole day on the Israeli side. They would have to do likewise with one or more officers who would take my place while I was away or something. Logistically, I would say it was a nightmare, difficult to administer.

*Q: Except for filling in for vacations, and gaps, illness, your main focus, both as a consular officer and a junior assistant political officer was on the East Side.*

GRIFFIN: All of us were accredited to; this is a point I have to make. We were accredited not to the Israeli government or the Jordanian government, but to the mission authority. We were accredited from the beginning so we were technically qualified to work on either side depending on what the requirements were. On the Israeli side, in terms of consular work it was helpful to me, I had to do it, a necessity but very useful, to have a language. Most of the clientele on the Israeli side were older Jews from Eastern Europe that had relatives in the States or whatever. In the Eastern sector, as I have mentioned last time, most of the clientele were Arab-Americans who had emigrated to the United States and came back to live and build houses in Ramallah and that area. Totally different clientele on the Israeli side in terms of consular work. Since none of us spoke Hebrew and these people didn't know Arabic we had to use another language, either French or German. I had German at that time. German was very useful, they all spoke Yiddish.

*Q: On the East Jerusalem side, did you have an opportunity to use the Arabic that you studied in Beirut?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, especially in visiting the towns and villages north and south of Jerusalem where we had to go to do consular investigations. In Jerusalem not as much since there were erudite, very articulate, very educated people. Trained by the British so most of them spoke English quite well.

*Q: As a result of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, there were a lot of refugees at that time. Were quite a few of them on the West Bank? Did you have an interest in those?*

GRIFFIN: I didn't deal with refugee matters very often except on a substantive basis. Political officers did that, that was another one of their main duties. There were, if I recollect, three or four main groupings of refugees on the West Bank or the Eastern part of Palestine. There was a really big camp in Jericho, there was a medium-sized camp just south Ramallah and north of Jerusalem. It was an airport. During the mandate, there was an airport, north of Jerusalem which fell in the Jordanian side with the division of the country. They improved it a little bit and made it into a modest small city airport. Which had no connection with the airport in Tel Aviv. Anyway there was a small grouping of refugees right at that airport. There was another grouping in the Nablus area refugee camp. I don't recall one south of Jerusalem, there were three or four.

*Q: Did you and the other Arabic speaking language officers at the consulate in Jerusalem get involved in any way with Israeli Arabs or not particularly?*

GRIFFIN: Only on an informal basis if you travel, as most of us tried to do while we were there, to Galilee. To visit some of the towns that became historically well known, in the 1948 War.

And then a number of the Arab villages had been ethnically cleansed, or whatever the term was at that point. They were still Arab villages with a few number of Arabs in them but not officially. Unless we were working with them on a substantive basis. But on matters like that the consul general would keep the people from the East office, try to keep them away from things that the Israelis would be suspicious of.

*Q: Was American tourism a significant factor in this period?*

GRIFFIN: It was becoming a significant factor. One of the consular chores that we had frequently were VIP Americans: government and private sector, who didn't really know anything about East Jerusalem except from a religious standpoint. They came to visit Israel and then of course when they found Jerusalem was a divided city they wanted to see the whole city. They would have to come across Mandelbaum Gate and that required special permission from the Israeli authorities. But they were influential to the United States and they weren't hard to get. We had to go to Jordanian authorities. They had to come over for a short visit for several hours or overnight and they didn't want... basically, they didn't want to go out to Amman, the airport was there. They'd come over and then want to go back to Israel. Since they weren't diplomats and they weren't UN people with special permission.

*Q: From both sides?*

GRIFFIN: From both sides. I remember when it was a real American VIP, one of us would usually meet him or her at the Mandelbaum Gate, the Israeli gate. One of our colleagues would take the individual and escort them around all day in the West Bank. Very frequent visitors were the Reuthers, Walter and his brother Victor.

*Q: Was crossing over the River Jordan, going into Jordan proper, difficult in those days?*

GRIFFIN: There may have been occasional military checkpoints but there were no police checkpoints. Once you crossed into East Jerusalem you had free reign of Palestine and the East Bank of Jordan. So you could go right to Amman. There were no consular checks or police checks unless there was something going on.

*Q: Coming the other direction it was just as easy, up until the Mandelbaum Gate then you needed permission from the Israeli authorities?*

GRIFFIN: Exactly.

*Q: Ok, anything else we should talk about with your period in Jerusalem?*

GRIFFIN: Only that our daughter was born in Jerusalem. That was a great event. We were suspicious about whether my wife would want to have a baby in Jerusalem. We found a very respected French doctor who had been there for several years, and at least one quite good hospital. So she had really good care.

*Q: Since we're talking about Jerusalem, I have to ask, West Jerusalem or East Jerusalem? Where she was born?*

GRIFFIN: Jerusalem, that's enough, that's all we put in those days. Consular Report of Birth, which was done by us. The Jordanian birth certificate said Jerusalem, Jordan, but we didn't recognize the sovereignty of either of them. It was in Jerusalem so it says Jerusalem. She's had questions about that on her birth certificate

*Q: What does her passport indicate for her place of birth?*

GRIFFIN: At that time, Jerusalem.

*Q: Anything else about Jerusalem?*

GRIFFIN: No, that's probably it. That was an interesting assignment.

*Q: I'm sure that's an interesting assignment. And it was fairly a quiet period compared to what came later.*

GRIFFIN: It was a quiet period.

*Q: And the political identity, cohesion and energetic effort of the Palestinians in the PLO were just beginning or just about to begin.*

GRIFFIN: Just beginning. There were two focuses. One that I mentioned earlier: stability of the West Bank and solidification of it with the East Bank as a result of the problems that took place after the war and the tensions between the Palestinians and the East Bankers, and that solidified it at that point. They're trying to raise the economic level through tourism. American Tourism, well there was a significant amount of European tourism before American tourism but the American tourism was coming.

*Q: The old city of Jerusalem was obviously what many people wanted to visit. Was it divided or was it all under the Jordanian authority, well the local mayor?*

GRIFFIN: Most of the old city, except for some of the walled areas or some other adjacent areas, fell in the Jordanian sector. But some of the walled areas and outside the wall to the West fell in No Man's Land, whereas practically all of West Jerusalem was urban area built up in this century, was not considered part of the Old City. When the war came in '67 the Israeli forces attacked the Old City. They attacked through the No Man's Land into some of the walled areas where there were gates that had been blocked and closed up and they tore them down. They had an immediate entrée into the Old City.

*Q: In the period you were there before the '67 War, you had mentioned that the Jordanian army controlling the Mandelbaum Gate at night. Were the relations generally orderly, calm, between the Jordanians and the Israelis? Or were there frequent incidents where they did come together?*

GRIFFIN: The time I was there, there were infrequent incidents. Most of them were not near the Mandelbaum Gate, but a little bit north or south because the No Man's Land was adjacent to the armistice line.

*Q: Between?*

GRIFFIN: Between the armistice line. It was very narrow and at some places much larger. There were infrequent incidents. The relations between the Jordanian police and the Israeli police were fairly good, quite professional, but when the military took over the Israelis were very happy to deal with the Jordanian military in a casual, professional way. Since often the Jordanian officer, who was in charge 8pm-8am, was a different officer every day or maybe only repeated the duty for 3 days or 5 days, there was no way to have a relationship. Just the opposite, when they deployed, you crossed the Mandelbaum Gate. You know the building had been bombed out.

*Q: In '48?*

GRIFFIN: In '48. The buildings that were on the East Jerusalem side. They deployed troops up into the second or third story of these burned out buildings with automatic weapons. The Israelis didn't try to push that relationship. Occasionally there was need for the Jordanian officer to contact the Israeli at the time when the army didn't have any relationship; it was left to the police.

*Q: You say there were infrequent incidents. That would be rock throwing?*

GRIFFIN: Rock throwing or tourists meandering into one of the armistice areas, the No Man's Land areas. These areas that became part of No Man's Land also became depositories of a lot of trash from both sides.

*Q: Nobody to clean it up?*

GRIFFIN: With nobody to clean it up, correct.

*Q: The areas between the line, the No Man's Land, was it mined?*

GRIFFIN: Jordanians mined it. They weren't supposed to but they did.

*Q: Well, that should pretty much wrap up Jerusalem. Where did you go from there?*

GRIFFIN: I had a requested a non-consular assignment next time. I had done two consular assignments back-to-back. I got a lot out of it but was interested in doing some other things. A

vacancy came up in Dhahran, economic/commercial officer position. It came open a little earlier than anticipated. I had finished two years, they talked about me staying a third.

*Q: So you were assigned to the Consulate General in Dhahran, so that would've that been when would that have been that you arrived there?*

GRIFFIN: That would have been 1965, from '65 to '68. And the job had two principal dimensions; it was an economic/commercial position, primarily economic, and oversight of commercial, there was another officer and someone you might know very well, Tom Carolan.

*Q: Yes.*

GRIFFIN: We were in the same Arabic class together. I went to Jerusalem, he went to Dhahran. So he was finishing up in Dhahran, he was a commercial officer. And then I was assigned to the economic/commercial section that had two commercial officers. And that had two main dimensions: reporting on oil petroleum developments in the Kingdom as a whole. That responsibility had been sublet to Dhahran by the embassy not because they really wanted to do it but because they didn't have any sources. Aramco was in the east province, there was no road at that time, no roadway across the country to take it to the Gulf.

*Q: And the Embassy was where?*

GRIFFIN: In Jeddah, at that time. And the Saudi ministerial responsibility for petroleum and energy was in Riyadh. And it was easier to get from Dhahran to Riyadh, quicker by plane and there was a road. There was no road at that time between Jeddah and Riyadh, so transportation was difficult. So that was one dimension. The other dimension, which made it an extraordinary interesting job, was the consulate in Dhahran had responsibility for political and economic/commercial reporting and consular operations in the Gulf. All the Gulf States that fell in our area of responsibility were still under British protection. Kuwait had already become independent. So they were out of the focus. And to do those responsibilities around the sheikhdoms, around the Gulf, required travel. Everybody from the consul general calling on the rulers or the political/economic offices in their spheres of responsibilities. So management of time became an important element of trying to balance these two responsibilities. But we all were accredited to the British. We were accredited to the political residency in Bahrain, which was sort of the senior British position for all the Gulf States, and then they vetted us with London, for the residency in Bahrain. And we had to provide the British at that time with a quarterly travel schedule, which was changeable but you had to look ahead and plan your travel from the consul general on down, where they were going to visit. So the British wanted to know where we were going to be at all times.

*Q: Were the British suspicious that the Americans were taking too much interest in the Gulf States?*

GRIFFIN: Oh yes. Oh yes. It was a good relationship but they were suspicious. They treated us well on the whole, they were helpful. They gave us a fair amount of leeway, but what they didn't like to find was that myself or the consul general, or a political officer, to show up in Abu Dhabi

for instance on an unannounced trip. Now that happened. In Consular Affairs you sometimes had to plug somebody in to make a trip, an oil derrick type death or something down the Gulf. But for regular reporting responsibilities they liked us to adhere to the travel schedule that we gave them. And what we normally did was if we were going on a major trip, a weeklong trip down to the Gulf, we checked in with the British Residency in Bahrain before we went. We didn't have to, but we found it was just courteous to say, "We're making this trip that we told you about earlier." And then to find out from them what had happened since the last time we were there. It was a good source of information. But they kept a good eye on us. Those were the two main responsibilities.

*Q: How often would you as the economic officer go down the Gulf? Quarterly?*

GRIFFIN: Basically about quarterly. We would go over to Bahrain which had an internal dynamic itself, but also the British had the full focus. We'd go over there more often, make a one day trip to Bahrain and talk to the Bahraini merchants and business people and then talk to the British. But we would combine, go to Qatar, it wasn't UAE it was Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and the other Emirates, which didn't have much importance. We kept in touch with the rulers; they all had their economic schemes that they were interested in. So quarterly was about right.

*Q: Were most of them oil producing areas already?*

GRIFFIN: No, only one was when I arrived, Abu Dhabi. Dubai had good prospects for oil offshore, but hadn't hit yet. They did hit while I was there and came into production in that period, between 1966-67. And two other sheikhdoms: Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah had production from time to time had explorations going on but without much success.

*Q: And defense matters...both internal or local and broader in the Gulf were really not issues? Or to the extent that they were, they were entirely British responsibility?*

GRIFFIN: They didn't become an issue until the end of my tour, which was a seminal period year in '68, which is when the British announced they were pulling out east of Suez. The main focus of that announcement was Singapore and Malaysia; so East Asia. But it also affected the Gulf. They didn't have large forces in the Gulf. They had small contingents in Bahrain, in Sharjah. They had police types in all the key internal security positions, in the major Sheikhdoms: Bahrain, Qatar, Dubai, Abu Dhabi. Dubai sort of handled all the poorer states in the south and east. But military was not a concern. I think the announcement was made in '68, and by '71 they were out. In that period then defense matters became very important. They made the announcement as I was about to get on a plane to go on to my onward assignment.

*Q: Internal security?*

GRIFFIN: Internal security, that's a good question. The British had responsibility under their various protective treaties with the Sheikhdoms -- two elements for security in general -- external security -- and issues of sovereignty. Yeah, security and defense. Internal security was left to the individual states.

*Q: So they would have police or...*

GRIFFIN: Even beginning before World War II, but certainly after World War II by tacit agreement, unwritten agreement between Brits and the individual rulers -- the individual rulers had no capacity for security, security became a greater problem after World War II and maybe they realized that. So the British took over tacitly internal security. In most cases they trained locals to eventually take over themselves. But that was very much a British concern. We didn't talk to the rulers about security. If we wanted to talk security we talked to the Brits.

*Q: When you would travel to Bahrain, and Qatar and so on, you'd obviously be interested in matters related to oil -- to the extent they were exploring, prospecting or actually producing. What other things as an economic officer did you take a particular interest in the Gulf, as opposed to Saudi Arabia?*

GRIFFIN: We were interested in how they were going to use their money, those who had oil -- Abu Dhabi was beginning to earn significant amounts -- this was before nationalization, the amount of money is sort of paltry now, they were getting royalty money, a certain amount of money per barrel and much more later. We were interested in the use of those revenues. American banks were beginning to open up in the Gulf. So we were interested in close contact with them, hoping they'd get some of the money. We were interested in how they were going to develop the local infrastructure projects.

The Brits set up in about 1963 a small development organization for basic infrastructure, very low budget there but it didn't need to be high budget. Through this they were building some roads, an electric grid, and a number of things. By the time they pulled out in '71 a lot had been accomplished, and that became the forerunner of a number of ministries in the Emirates, particularly in the Emirates but in Qatar and Bahrain as well. We were interested in oil as you mentioned. There were cooperative agreements among the oil companies beginning in that period for environmental purposes. Aramco took the lead, but Kuwait oil company and Kuwait, the Bahrain petroleum company, which was Caltex in Bahrain and the concessionaires in Qatar and Abu Dhabi onshore were part of the IPC, Iraq Petroleum, they were spinoffs from IPC. And then offshore the British BP had its concession. Anyway there was a fair amount of cooperation in the Gulf. They started having these talks about security, and specifically labor matters. They were all interested in any benefits -- Aramco was considered the culprit, giving too many benefits. Essentially British companies were not very happy about that, but then these talks took place periodically throughout the year. They spread into internal security matters of their facilities, how they interacted with security forces in a particular state, and other areas of mutual interest.

*Q: Were there many Americans in the Gulf in those days?*

GRIFFIN: There weren't a great number, but they were increasing. In all of the Gulf, mainly the oil companies, there were several hundred.

*Q: Ok. Maybe we should move to Saudi Arabia. We've been talking mainly about the Gulf.*

*There your main responsibility, of course, was related to oil, Aramco. How often would you go to Riyadh?*

GRIFFIN: Two to three times a year.

*Q: Was that in the Dhahran consular district?*

GRIFFIN: No, no. It was technically in the Jeddah consular district, but since it was easier to get to from Dhahran we divided it. And consular officers from Dhahran would go one time, consular officers from Jeddah would go another, we arranged it like that. We had the responsibility for an annual petroleum report and that was a big thing. We had a very close relationship as you can imagine with Aramco; from the consul general on down. My level of contact was the middle level, government relations and economic people in Ras Tanura which was the uptake point, the export port for oil. There were three main Aramco camps, the Dhahran main headquarters camp, Ras Tanura and one somewhat inland that was in the middle of the biggest oilfield in the world. Place called Abqaiq. I used to visit. Dhahran, I was constantly there, that facility, headquarters. But in Ras Tanura and Abqaiq I used to visit several times a year. We had Dhahran, the number two in the consulate, the political officer when I was there, Dick Adams, and another fellow named Colbert Held who came in to the Service as a regional geographic officer, when we used to have geographic officers. Anyway their principal job was a weekly meeting with Aramco, government relations side. Aramco at that time, well until the 70s, was a government within a government of the eastern province. They manufactured, constructed most of the infrastructure in the area. The electrical grid was 110/220 whereas in Jeddah and Riyadh to the extent there was any system at all it was 220 later converted on a national grid to 110. They established an agricultural area. One of the greatest thing an oil company or an American company could've done in Saudi Arabia, or anywhere else for that matter, for their employees they had the most remarkable home ownership program. They encouraged people to build houses and they loaned them the full value of the house, and they only had to repay about 70% of it, no interest, over 20, 25 years.

*Q: This was for the Saudi employees?*

GRIFFIN: This was for the Saudi employees.

*Q: Of course there was a large expatriate workforce*

GRIFFIN: There was a large expatriate workforce, which was necessary. They lived in temporary quarters, most of them.

*Q: Where did you live? What sort of housing?*

GRIFFIN: When our first consul general, his first Saudi assignment, first of three actually, Pete Hart.

*Q: This is while you were there? Or much earlier?*

GRIFFIN: Much earlier, in 1946, right after WWII, he was assigned by the Embassy in Jeddah, due to a growing number of Americans during the war in the Eastern province he was assigned as a resident consular officer. Aramco gave him a house, small house, and he worked out of that. But after the war, I guess it was an area that was recently part of the Aramco compound, it was quite close, adjacent to the Aramco compound, I don't know if it was a part of it or not. Anyways, it was given to us as not in perpetuity until, I don't know, 1991-92 as a lease with almost no payment of rent by the Saudi government. We built some houses on that compound and we still have that compound today.

*Q: The office was there too?*

GRIFFIN: The office was there too. It was built out of stone, locally available stones, from the quarry not too far away. The better Aramco houses were built of the same material. The office, there were seven or eight of these stone buildings and then some wooden buildings for lower staff. Because housing was such a premium, we generally had to provide housing from the beginning for our local employees on the compound.

*Q: They were still living there when you were there?*

GRIFFIN: Yes, there were some living all throughout the compound while I was there.

*Q: Who was the consul general when you were there?*

GRIFFIN: Gentleman by the name of Arthur B. Alan. You know him?

*Q: No*

GRIFFIN: Well, quite a character. He had come into the Foreign Service through the Navy as a management specialists at a time when we didn't have very many management specialists. He was a substantive officer but he had management background. He ran a very tight ship, administratively, allocation of time, logistics.

*Q: Did the ambassador or the embassy officers come over fairly often?*

GRIFFIN: Not too often, just about right. But one who did come, one of the highlights of my tour there was Hermann Eilts. He loved to drive, it was relaxation for him. He especially loved to drive in desert environment. National Geographic had been out there in '64-65 period. In fact they did an article in 1965 on Saudi Arabia, one of the first ones in many, many years. They had some Land Rovers that they had bought to use for that expedition. In fact, they got beat up quite a bit and they had written it off, in terms of their budget. They left them with the embassy in Jeddah. That was all Herman needed. You're familiar with the Tap Line across northern Syria and into Lebanon which was built after the Second World War before Ras Tanura was developed very much. There were no stations up there. There were Saudi villages that had grown up near the Tap Line when it was being built, some predated the building of the Tap Line. Tap Line was a separate company at one time, but it all became part of the Aramco. There was a little oil station in each one of these towns, the pumping stations. He had not been up that tap line. It was

one of the few things he had not seen. He decided he was going to drive across, with no hard service roads between Jeddah and Riyadh, an oil slick road between Riyadh and Dhahran. He decided he was going to go drive it. With his driver, but he did most of the driving. I guess we knew he was coming but since the roadway was so bad we didn't know how long it was going to take him to cross. He showed up one day and decided the next morning he would go the next morning and start at Ras Tanura and go up the Tap Line. He took one of the consular officers to accompany him, and I was chosen. I knew a little more about the oil patch than anybody else and that was an experience. We drove one day usually from one station to another. Oh, I missed the important part, he was doing all this in August. Aramco thought he was absolutely crazy.

*Q: Without air conditioning?*

GRIFFIN: Without air conditioning. So, up we go, we spent usually a day between each station. He would get up at 4 o'clock each morning. Be on the road by 5 and drive on the road until about 10. Then he would spend time during the day to look at the facilities, look at the stations, meet with the Americans who were assigned there and have little bull sessions with them. With a glass of scotch from dinner time on, always in front of him, usually empty up until 12 or 1 o'clock then up again at 4 again. When I got back I went on leave.

*Q: How long a trip was that?*

GRIFFIN: It was a full week. He was never sure that I would be up at four so he would usually be knocking at my door at 3:50.

*Q: Made sure you were ready to go.*

GRIFFIN: Ready to go. Great, great officer.

*Q: Now Saudi Arabia was a pretty closed society in this period. Was that difficult for you and your family? Or being in Dhahran with international community with Aramco?*

GRIFFIN: No, because of the Aramco influence it was not difficult. We did not have a great deal of contact with the local Saudis. Although we had a fair amount with the business community. There was one preexisting town which had become a small city, north of the Aramco compound, which was called Dammam. Then south of the Aramco compound, on the other side of the consulate compound was the airport and a place called al-Khobar. Al-Khobar was created by Aramco in older days in order to get supplies from Bahrain and in those days it had to go through Bahrain. So they created a little port. And a lot of Aramco employees later built houses there. Those were two small urban centers, really the only two when I was there. There were few Saudi villages. We tried to get around to the places where Saudis lived, it was not a great problem. We kept track of what was happening in the Eastern province, particularly with Aramco, through the meetings that I mentioned that we had weekly with the government relations people.

*Q: You were there when the '67 war took place. Was that difficult for the Americans in Dhahran?*

GRIFFIN: It was difficult.

My wife was not very well. She gets bothered by very severe headaches, which was a neural condition as it turned out. We had come on direct transfer from Jerusalem. She was bothered by these headaches, which were exasperated by these hot winds that blew in Dhahran. We went on home leave in '66 and returned to the post but she had to stay in the States for medical reasons. I had manageable accommodations, we had a very good Palestinian lady. So I came back to the post with two of our children, and Jean kept one in Washington, the youngest one. I was there with two children for several months. It wasn't clear when she was going to be medically cleared, she was making progress.

So, the Six-Day War came, the news filtered out that we were assisting Israel with an airlift. Aramco had sponsored and supported a college, which is now a full scale technical university, in the Eastern province. It was in its infancy at that point. It was known as the petroleum college, that was the name of it. Most of the initial students, since there weren't many Saudis who would qualify, it was a very American type of education with interest on petroleum studies. Most of the initial students were Arabs or from Islamic countries other than Saudi Arabia. One of the most advanced Arab countries in terms of petroleum training is Algeria. So there were a number of Algerian students that came on Saudi scholarship to get the school going. There were many others from around the Arab world but not very many Saudis.

Turns out these Algerian students had experience in fomenting riots and when the news got out concerning the airlift, I guess they had been following this on the radio. There wasn't much TV at this time. They organized a riot, or a march, and we were just down the road from the college. It's the college between ourselves and the Aramco compound. A fairly short distance, almost right across the road. All of a sudden a couple of hundred people came onto our compound. We had a local guy that had barrier that he let up, but no real security. Anyway, to make a long story short, they weren't trying to hurt people, but they were throwing rocks. We were barricaded in the office building and one point if I hadn't gotten up and gone to the other side of the room, I was sitting at a desk, this sharp angled rock, big rock, came through the window. If I hadn't gotten up I would not be here today. It stuck in the wall. On top of the building was an apartment. We used the apartment for visitors or single woman or something.

They say there weren't trying to hurt anybody but they did a lot of damage around the compound and scared the hell out of everybody. They got up on the roof of the consulate and tore the flag down and got into this apartment, which was sitting atop this office building. They found the stairs and were able to get in the consulate building. We heard them up there. We weren't sure, we could keep them from doing any major damage but we weren't going to bodily hurt them. We were just hoping they were going to cease and desist. They hadn't planned on coming into the office building. Eventually we had to call the Saudi security, which was inept. Finally the rioters turned and decided they would go to the airbase where there were a lot Americans, military mission, at that time. And they did more damage to the housing there, again they didn't try to hurt anybody physically, personally. They had started out very early in the morning around 9 o'clock when they came to us, then went down to the airbase, and there was a new terminal building which had just opened. Designed by a noted American-Japanese architect.

*Q: Lots of glass.*

GRIFFIN: Lots of glass. They were about to do that building in until one of the Saudis in the group said, "No, no that belongs to us." We don't shatter that. By that time it was around noon, they were getting tired, these guys. One of the Saudis, who knew something about Aramco said, "We will call Aramco for buses." Which they did. They got their second wind on the bus. Aramco thought that it would diffuse this thing so they sent the buses. Instead of taking them back to the college, they went up to the Aramco compound and they had another spree up there, wrecking houses and doing property damage, but didn't really hurt anybody. When that news got over to Jeddah, there was other disquieting news about the Saudi reaction. We weren't sure if the Saudis could contain it. Eventually the Saudis had to call in the National Guard, which at that point was a paramilitary force, not very well trained. Bedouin tribesmen who were fiercely loyal to the royal family. The nearest encampment force was right in this area. The Saudis came in the next day. Didn't have any shoes, they defecated wherever they needed to defecate. They were a wild bunch. You didn't cross them though. The ambassador was getting concerned, but he had assurances from King Faisal that they could control the situation. But Washington was not so sure and ordered Eilts to evacuate. He didn't want to evacuate at that point. I think he got another order to evacuate. I was responsible for getting all the family members over to the air base. We had military aircraft. All of our people, except for the few who remained, were on the aircraft. This was in June of '67. It was hot and we didn't take off because Eilts had made an appeal to the Department not to evacuate. To give the Saudis another 24 hours. That's what eventually happened. We were on the airplane for almost three hours on the tarmac waiting to take off. We would have evacuated at that time to Ethiopia, to Addis Ababa, the evacuation point.

*Q: And the war ended?*

GRIFFIN: The war ended soon thereafter and the Saudis reestablished control. There were no problems at Jeddah and Riyadh. Only a focus on the American presence in the Eastern province.

*Q: And the particular problem there, to a considerable extent, was the Algerian students.*

GRIFFIN: Right it wasn't entirely clear. The Saudi security people wanted to find who the instigators of this were. But it took a while. By elimination they realized it was not their own citizens just by asking around. They found out it was about half a dozen Algerians whose education was summarily finished at that point.

*Q: They were sent home?*

GRIFFIN: They were sent home.

*Q: Did you have any marines at the consulate in those days?*

GRIFFIN: We did have Marines. We were all huddled when they were throwing these rocks besieging the office building. We weren't sure that they weren't going to hurt us. We had a general services officer, who was a fairly newly recruited ex-military individual and he fomented a revolution practically inside the consulate. Everybody was on edge. We had people in our

homes but we couldn't get to them. He was telling the consul general to tell the marines, don't fire on these guys. That was the last thing in the world anyone was going to do. Later when we had some after action, going over the whole thing. How did we react? What did we do good? What do we have to improve operations? This guy and I got into fisticuffs. I was arguing strongly at that point for the consul general. I didn't have to argue for him. Taking sides to diffuse this guy. In the debriefing, he accused me of being soft on the perpetrators. One word led to another. We both had to be dragged out of the meeting.

*Q: (Laughter) Staff meetings sometimes come to that.*

GRIFFIN: Right, right, at that time it did.

*Q: You mentioned the military mission at the airport, were you very much involve with them? Were they considered under the general responsibility of the consul general?*

GRIFFIN: No, quite separate. At that time, I didn't have any real duty. Occasionally I interacted with them sitting in for number two in the consulate. In the consulate we didn't have much to do. The contacts were mainly at the embassy in Jeddah, the defense attaché, but they were really quite separate. I wouldn't say they predated the embassy but they would certainly came at the same time, their presence was a late WWII presence. Never very effective, not because they weren't qualified but the Saudis wanted a military mission. They've always wanted hardware. But at that time they didn't really want to be trained and essentially they weren't trained very much, except the Air force.

*Q: The mission again was primarily U.S. Air Force or other services?*

GRIFFIN: Army. The Air Force principally. The army not very effective at all. And Navy on a small scale. We helped train them and helped them divide things they needed. Directed them in our direction to buy stuff from us.

*Q: You were not really involved with that?*

GRIFFIN: I was not involved with that.

*End of interview*