

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

WESLEY PEDERSEN

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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[Note: This interview was not edited prior to Mr. Pedersen's death.]

Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

PEDERSEN: I was born in South Sioux City, Nebraska, July 10th, 1922 and my parents were immigrants from Denmark. They really did not have very much at all. My father had started a house, and it was a basement so far. He intended to do more, but this was covered over, so we had no heat except for a pot-bellied stove.

Q: So you lived like settlers, almost like a sod house, didn't you?

PEDERSEN: Well, it was pretty rough. We had an outdoor facility -- one with a little half-moon on it.

Q: Moon on it.... Well, yes, an outhouse.

PEDERSEN: Yes, and no telephones. It was a while before the electricity came to that area and this was on the outskirts of South Sioux which wasn't an awfully big area at that time. And South Sioux is right across the river from Sioux City, Iowa. My parents both worked. My sister was two years older and we were in the house a considerable period of time because when I was young I was there alone because my sister had started school. So it was pretty much being out there alone as a kid.

Q: Let's talk a bit about what your parents had they come right from Denmark? What brought them to the States?

PEDERSEN: Well...

Q: Did both of them come together?

PEDERSEN: They wanted a better life -- he had essentially been a farmer in Denmark. He came over here and he wanted a job here in town and what he got was driving a milk truck and the milk truck happened to be a horse-drawn wagon.

Q: Hmm Huh.

PEDERSEN: There's a big bridge over the Missouri River that connects South Sioux and Sioux City. Out on that bridge a drunken driver managed to plow into my dad and his back was injured. He had worked for 3-4 years and mother supported the family by being a seamstress and by taking me across the river on the street car to Sioux City where she served as a maid and a cook. Then she'd bring me back and that's when I got my fear of heights and water because the bridge from a street car...I'd look down and I'd see that water down there and it occurred to me if I got into that I'd be in some serious trouble. Bear in mind, I was a little kid, and...so I got a couple of hang-ups out of that. But both my parents were enormously hard-working.

Q: I take it neither of them had had much education.

PEDERSEN: No...well, my mother had more education than my dad. My dad is a very smart guy, but she had taken a lot of courses in clothing design. She wanted to be a genuine designer. She came over here to study that. Unfortunately, she got waylaid. She was very good...she was very good with a sewing machine, designed her own clothes and my sister's clothes. My dad had the back trouble for quite a while, and he wasn't able to work. So my mother was carrying the load. After a while my father began working in a restaurant, doing about anything there is to do in a restaurant. By the time I was a teenager he had graduated into becoming a bartender. That's where the money was for him at that time. There were a hell of a lot of bars in Sioux City, Iowa.

Q: I was going to say, yeah, by the time you were a teenager, prohibition was over and so you could have bars back in Sioux City.

PEDERSEN: Well, Sioux City was a wide-open town, but it was all illegal by State Law. They'd bring liquor down from Canada and my dad took me in the back of the bar one time and showed me this very large truck. The back was covered with a tarpaulin and he tossed the tarpaulin aside and there were a lot of crates of liquor and sitting in front in a chair was this guard with a sub-machine gun. [Laughs] That's when it occurred to me that my dad might not be in the exactly the most...the safest.....

Q: Now, let's talk a bit about schooling. What sort of schooling did you have?

PEDERSEN: Elementary. At a distance. Most schools were at a distance to walk. We moved from South Sioux when I was about seven years old. That's when we got into our first apartment with running water and a toilet. That really fascinated the hell out of me. Then I was in Sioux City. I went to elementary there and to Junior High and graduated from Central High School. I was the editor of the Central High School Paper, The Record. I still have copies of every issue that was done while I was there.

Q: I'd like to go back and talk about elementary school. What was the school like?

PEDERSEN: Pretty much like they are today, I suppose. It was all white. It took a while before any blacks came to Sioux City.

Q: How about Indians, Native Americans?

PEDERSEN: We didn't have too many of them. This is Sioux City, Iowa -- named after the tribe and we had very few Indians living there, and the reservation -- Winnebago Reservation was round about.....

Mrs. PEDERSEN: 20-25 miles -- something like that....

PEDERSEN: ...and that's always been a total disgrace. All the reservations in this country are a disgrace to America. We have treated the Indians shabbily. Well, my wife and I just a...a few years ago out in Nevada, we went to a reservation, to a casino and in the Men's room on the wall there, were little boxes that were reserved for needles.

Q: Wow.

PEDERSEN: There is so much drug use on the reservation.

Q: I know. This is very sad. Well, in elementary school, were you a good student? Were there any courses you liked there or teachers you liked or courses you didn't like?

PEDERSEN: I don't really remember any of the specific teachers in the elementary -- I was pretty good with words, with English, didn't like math very much [laughs], but they were all good, they all took what I judged to be a sincere interest in me and all of the other kids that they had.

Q: Did you and your sister grow up knowing Danish at all?

PEDERSEN: Well, my parents did not speak much Danish to me. They had the idea that, very mistaken and I do wish that they had pushed it, but they had the idea that I might wind up speaking with an accent.

Q: This is the same with my mother and my mother's family. They spoke German at home and I didn't speak it. Later, when I was assigned to Germany, I was very unhappy that I hadn't learned it. [Laughs]

PEDERSEN: About the only Danish that I remember is "Tak fer maden", thanks for the dinner, thanks for the meal.

Q: When you went to High School, were you in Iowa at that time?

PEDERSEN: Oh, yea.

Q: So, you went to Sioux City, Iowa High School. What was the name of the high school?

PEDERSEN: Central High School.

Q: Central High. Did you get involved in extracurricular activities or were there any courses that you particularly liked?

PEDERSEN: Well, I liked debate, and I liked the course I had in English. When I was in the grade school, the secretary, the Junior School, I'd been on that School Paper. I started writing editorials one, and oddly enough, in later years, there were some kids that could quote from those editorials that I wrote. I liked that. I got into that. I went to the school paper. I thought that was quite an accomplishment because there were a lot of kids competing for that.

Q: By the time you were in high school, the Depression was going full blast.

PEDERSEN: Oh, yeah.

Q: How did the Depression hit both Sioux City and your family?

PEDERSEN: Well, it was a real hard time. My dad was out of work off and on. He and my mother would line up cleaning offices and ...it was tough. They had come over here looking for better lives. I thought that was...must be pretty depressing. They went at it; they provided good lives for myself and my sister; but I do remember various things that we had to do or the things that you would do then. At the rate that the economy is going now we may be doing them again. Bacon grease became a topping for your bread. You'd get out and pick the dandelions; you ate those. A lot of things like that.

Q: How about when you were in high school? Did you have any jobs after school?

PEDERSEN: No. No. As far as clothing was concerned, that was a problem. I had one jacket, a suit coat jacket that my father had acquired somehow, and I wore that. That's when kids did wear jackets to school. And I wore that; I graduated in that. It wasn't big time but by golly, it served its purpose.

Q: I think it might have been in the middle of the Depression, but a lot of young kids didn't feel it as much, but everybody else -- that was another matter. I am six years younger than you, and we didn't. I remember the Depression. We knew we were poor.

PEDERSEN: Everybody was in the same boat. If you had a patch somewhere, you know -- women darned men's socks. Who could do that these days?

Q: I used to darn my own socks in college. This is no big deal. When you were in high school, where did your family fall politically and also in their religion?

PEDERSEN: They were dyed in the wool Democrats. Democrats were the saviors of the country then. No doubt about that. My dad was so rabid. I mean that in a nice way, but he was so anti-Republican, that he wouldn't let a magazine in the house that had a picture of the leading candidate of the Republican nomination.

Q: Well, how about around you? Where was Sioux City in the political spectrum? Was Sioux City mainly Democratic or Republican or something else?

PEDERSEN: Well, the welfare people were the Republicans and everybody else was a Democrat?

Q: Any business or manufacturing in Sioux City that you remember?

PEDERSEN: Well, Sioux City was the biggest truck to market or truck to town meat packing center in the country: Swifts, Cudahys, and other companies that nobody today will remember. And, then they had the bars. That was a thriving industry. Sioux City was quite corrupt on occasion. The police were forever being cited for one thing or another. There were literally 'red-light' houses there for a while. The ladies - if you saw a red light out front, you knew what it was, and they had protection from the police. There were good cops. But, oddly enough, people sort of expected it. They had detectives. I remember them well. Some of them would go around very well dressed, and the kind of clothing that I sort of looked up to. These were guys who had a maid, and you knew how they did it. I wound up as a police reporter; one of my first jobs.

Q: Was this after you got out of high school?

PEDERSEN: Yes.

Q: Well, you graduated from high school when?

PEDERSEN: In 1940.

Q: What were you planning to do? Was university in your...?

PEDERSEN: I was going to go to college as soon as I could scrape up the money. I figured that was a couple of years down the pike, and, oddly enough, the Sioux City Tribune hired me. Bear in mind that I'd been the editor of the school paper and I did badger some of the real life professionals. So some of them knew me, and I got a job as a reporter for the Sioux City Tribune, the number two paper in the town. And, I got a stupendous salary of \$17 a week, which was pretty damn good in those days. No sooner had I gotten that job than the two papers merged. Fortunately for me, the two papers were unionized. I was a young kid there, and two people from the Tribune that the new management decided they could do without -- the other was Roy Jutsenson -- a really talented cartoonist -- but they figured that they could write boiler plate -- they didn't need him. He wound up in Minneapolis as a star cartoonist, published all over the country. When he left, it was their loss. But the newspaper guild said that "...if you let either of them go, we'll strike", and they meant it. So, I kept my job on the paper -- on the new paper, and within about a year I was, quite truthfully, the star reporter there.

Q: But, this puts you back into 1941, which was not a good year to be a young man.

PEDERSEN: No. It wasn't. Well, they drafted me in 1943. All my friends in high school were big, strapping athletes, and these were runners, these were basketball players, football players. And not one of them wound up in the service. I was the one guy with the big flat feet that they took, which surprised me because all through my life, when I went to a shoe store with my mother, the salesman would say: "Why, you're lucky. With those flat feet, the Army will never take you." Well, they grabbed me, right like that.

Q: [Laughs]

PEDERSEN: My vision of that era was standing in the recruiting place in the uniform, a big ginger hanging over me, and on a mirror hanging on the wall is a sign saying: "You are now looking at the best dressed soldier in the world."

Q: [Laughs] So you went into the Army when? It was the Army, wasn't it?

PEDERSEN: Yeah.

Q: When did you go in?

PEDERSEN: 1943.

Q: So, what happened, or what was your military experience?

PEDERSEN: Precious little, really. The recruiting was down in Des Moines, which is the big city in Iowa. No sooner had I arrived there, than I heard on the P.A. (Public Address) System: "Private Pedersen..." I figured "it can't be me". Well, it turned out that it was. "...report to Lt. (Lieutenant) Dean!" Well, I walked in and there was this gentleman with his feet up the desk reading a newspaper. I came in and did my best with my first salute. He lowered the newspaper and there was Lt. Hoadley Dean, who had worked on the newspaper on the day side and we were sort of rivals. Hoadley said: "Well, Wes, where do you want to go?" and I said: "Whatta (what have) you got?" He rolled off a bunch of cities that you went to to be trained and he came to Atlantic City and I said: "That's it!" Atlantic City had been taken over. Almost all of the hotels had been taken over during the war by General (Hap) Arnold

Q: The head of the Air Force, I mean the Air Corps.

PEDERSEN: The Air Corps. And, the hotels, instead of the big beds, had bunks. Two people on each bunk, which was fairly normal throughout all the camps. One of the GIs (General Issue -- referred to enlisted service men), came through the halls one night looking for someone who could type. I was the only one. He took me over, and lo and behold it, was the camp newspaper, Camp public affairs, which was in the big auditorium which they use for the Miss America competitions -- that had been taken over. And, we worked in an office there. And then they decided that they had better rotate some of the people. Well, ultimately, I wound up in a little air base in Watertown, South Dakota, which is up toward the northern part of South Dakota. Cold as hell, up there.

Q: I was going to say....it doesn't sound like a....

PEDERSEN: Tarpaper barracks. I was officially a public affairs person. I forget what the name of the newspaper was -- that was part of my job, but the other part was being acting First Sergeant. I had a lot of lip at that time. I wasn't particularly fond of officers [laughs], which is not a smart attitude to have. I never did get the First Sergeant rating official. It was stapled to my arm. It was sort of flexible. The reason I wound up in Watertown was that I had actually wound up in my home town. They had a big airbase there and the military decided it was a good idea since I was from there I could work on the newspaper. Well, I did. [Putting on a snooty accent] Lt. Col. Jimmy Stewart, the actor, was a pilot and he had become head of his unit, the 2nd Air Force, which was passing by the Sioux City Air Force Base. One of the reporters on the Journal dug around and got a story on him; I had nothing to do with it. But the story on Stewart appeared in the paper and people were talking there. The officer in charge of public affairs was very ecstatic that he had made a big coup there. And so, the reporter, I remember the name very well, Aldridge. The middle name was Amy, which struck me as being a little odd for a gentleman. Lewis Amy Aldridge. So, anyway, he asked me how it'd gone over. I said they liked it. So he ran back and told the paper: "Hey, they liked that story." Well, Jimmy Stewart did not like it. He had given orders, which I didn't know about, that there was to be no coverage. He was not to be publicized. He was mad. So, this event shook up the satellite airbase of Watertown of S. Dakota. That's how I wound up there.

Q: What was the airbase doing there?

PEDERSEN: There was no earthly reason for it except that the senators of South Dakota had pushed through something and they got an airbase up there and they had to use it. They would bring different outfits through there on their way to Europe. And, it wound up being quite a rich outfit by some ridiculous army method and I got transferred on paper more damn times than you can imagine, but.... they would come and they would be there for two, three or four weeks. That was the extent of my military duty. That's how I spent my exalted military career. I had it pretty good. The fact is, they could have utilized me a little better.

Q: Well, I think this is true of so many of us. I spent four years in the Air Force as an Enlisted Man, and I can't really say that I advanced the cause at all, any cause. Well, when were you discharged?

PEDERSEN: 1945/46. I have to check that out.

Q: By this time, there was a GI. Bill, wasn't it?

PEDERSEN: No.

Q: So, what did you do in 1945/46?

PEDERSEN: I went back to work for the Journal, which at that time was paying pretty well, and got married, foolishly, to this young lady.

Q: Mrs. Pedersen is sitting in on this interview. Well, tell me -- where did you meet her? Well, I can ask you (addressing Mrs. Pedersen). What is your background?

Mrs. PEDERSEN: Well, I was born and raised in Binghamton, New York, and I have four siblings -- a brother and three sisters, so that there were five of us in the family. One of my sisters married an officer, and he was from Sioux City, Iowa.

PEDERSEN: Your sister was....

Mrs. PEDERSEN:she was in the WAVES (Women's Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) and they actually met in Washington, here. As I said, I was born and raised in Binghamton, went to school in Binghamton, went to college in Syracuse and then when she was expecting her first child, she wanted me to come and stay with her for a while. Well, 'for a while' became longer and I decided I had better get myself a job because I was running out of my money and I wasn't going to ask my dad for any more money. So of all things, landed a job at the Sioux City Journal, where I met him and the rest is history.

Q: So, you're still in the Sioux City Journal. How long did you keep that job?

PEDERSEN: Well, that would be the end of '49. I just had a yen to become a lawyer. I had been accepted at Creighton Law at Omaha. My sister was from that area down there and my brother-in-law had graduated. We were going there on the G.I Bill. Well, the State Department opened up an International Information outfit -- had just created the Smith Fund Law. I had a pretty big interest and applied for that and got it. At the same time, I was offered a job by Associated Press down in Des Moines. That struck me as pretty good. But also, I had been doing work as a stringer for Time Life and they wanted me to come here to New York or Washington and. Then the Chairman of the rural bank, the Toy, Toy is a family name, the Toy National Bank in Sioux City, offered me a Vice Presidency. I thought that was a little crazy. I knew nothing at all about banking. Anyway, I had a choice of jobs all of a sudden and I debated which one should I take and I thought working for the Department of State would be pretty good, despite all the rumors about the rampant superficiality and the reds running riot.

Q: This was the height of the McCarthy...

PEDERSEN: I hated Joe McCarthy. Among other things, he was a louse. He was going after people and charging them with being a communist who knew nothing about communism -- not one damn thing. It was a farce; the press went along with it.

Q: Before we move into the USIA time, what sort of things were you doing on the newspaper? I mean, did you have sort of a specialty or a beat or an outlook?

PEDERSEN: I worked on my own. I was the byline reporter. I was also an editor. Sat at the City Desk, at the Sports Desk. Did a column for a while: "Let's look at Sports with Wes Pedersen". [Laughter all round]

Q: What were the politics there?

PEDERSEN: It was a Republican Newspaper.

Q: But how about in the city in all? Were there corruption problems?

PEDERSEN: Corruption problems like crazy. I had no problem with that. The cops were very nice. I got along well with that. I had a couple of interesting experiences that you might like to know about.

One evening (I used to get a lot of tips from around the area -- or calls) I got a call that there was a murder in the packing house district. I didn't drive at that time. I got a cab and I went down there, and the cab driver wasn't going to hang around. So I was sniffing around -- I got around the backyard of this house where the murder had allegedly occurred. It was awfully quiet. All of a sudden I had a hand on my back. It was a cop. He said: "What the hell are you doing here?" I was just goofy enough that I thought that I might get a bead on the murder or that I might find the guilty party. That was not the smartest thing I ever did.

Then we had a fire in a flour mill. Flour is explosive. I got out there. Nearby there were these enormous tanks of gasoline. Flames were going up like crazy. We didn't have any portable phones there for God's sakes. So, I went in the lobby of the Flour Mill, and I was calling the story in. I saw all of these firemen coming down the stairs, leaving the building. They looked at me a little oddly like "What is he doing here?" I thought that meant that the fire was under control at that point. What I didn't realize, and what the deputy told me, was that the place was burning down, that the fire was going like crazy. It did strike me, actually, that someone there could have said: "You need to get out of here now". There were a few incidents like that.

Q: Well, let's talk about coming into the State Department. You came in in 1950. And USIA -- how new was it at that time?

PEDERSEN: Brand new; it was just about a year old.

Q: So, what was your impression; I mean, how did they integrate you into the system?

PEDERSEN: Well, at first they put me into a wireless file. That was how the news was sent overseas. They had a guy doing the Morse Code, tapping it out. There were no transatlantic cables then or any telephones at all. So it was the wireless file for me. There was an operation of an International Press Service that produced news stories. I didn't catch onto this at first. It seemed very much like a regular news operation. I did not realize that a lot of the stories were just pick-ups from the Associated Press and the

United Press. They had a byline operation. Two gentlemen, one named John Carrigan, who was non-existent, which they stuck onto various reports. And my first job was editing regular copy, and actually I became the editor of the Middle East Wireless File. We were paying one of Murrow's boys -- I forget -- I think it was Charles Collingwood.

Q: Edward R. Murrow.

PEDERSEN: Yes, it was Edward R. Murrow. The Agency was paying him \$75 a week and at that time \$75 was awful damn good money. That is what the newspaper guild had gotten for journeymen reporters and it had become \$100 very shortly after that. I thought that was an outrageous waste of the taxpayer's money because he wasn't saying a damn thing. I suggested that: "Hey, let's get somebody here, of all the people we've got here, let's find somebody who could do it; we'll save some money, and we'll probably get a better piece out of it." So, they thought that was a good idea and they went out and hired a guy from CIA. He was going to be the roving reporter. Well, he came in and didn't produce anything that I know of. He spent two or four months walking around the world and then he came back and quit. By that time they decided on a byline: Paul L. Ford. I was writing columns out of the United Nations as John Carrigan; I was also writing as Paul L. Ford, and we had a gentleman who had been writing a Benjamin E. West column on communism. The column hadn't been going anywhere -- I don't know what happened to him, and I was also Benjamin E. West. So I was writing columns on communism.

Q: Were you getting any direction on how to do this? Was anyone looking over your shoulder and saying "let's hit a little harder here"?

PEDERSEN: Very little. Just "go ahead with the story." They did have a group of policy officers, and they were the people who were supposed to tell people how to handle a story. I never knew one of these bums who knew how to slant a story, in a positive way or a negative way. In effect, what they were saying was "don't do 'nothin' wrong". As a matter of fact, one of them actually said that to me. But, on communism, we had two. They were just about as phony as you could imagine. They didn't know what the hell was going on behind the Iron Curtain; and, I made it my business to find out what was going on behind the Iron curtain.

Q: Where would you go for your source?

PEDERSEN: CIA. Now you won't find that in a year. CIA was translating -- a wonderful organization for compiling intelligence. They were translating -- transcribing and translating broadcasts from every communist country going and this is all available in English.

Q: Is this FBIS?

PEDERSEN: Pardon?

Q: Did this become FBIS? (Foreign Broadcast Information Service)

PEDERSEN: Yeah. And, they were also wading through every communist publication they could get, including "Izvestia", "Pravda". This was made available to academics and to journalists, if they wanted it. So, I wanted it, and I got it, and I actually read the damn stuff. As a result, I came to the conclusion, in January, 1953, that Stalin, just reading between the lines of some of the things that they were putting out, I came to the conclusion that the guys that were on salary knew that he was ill and could go at any moment. I wanted to do a column to that effect, and ran it by CIA and CIA said that it couldn't possibly be. He couldn't possibly be sick without their knowing it, so naturally my idea was squashed. And he died in March and Washington was caught totally flat-footed and the White House hadn't a clue, and the State Department hadn't a clue that he was ailing. They should have known. They didn't. They could have. But, they said "no". And, I followed my radio and Izvestia, I could see Malenkov, who was the premier of Russia, and Khrushchev, the Head of the Communist Party, and I could see that there was a big difference in the policies they were advocating, and it occurred to me that, hell, there was something funny going on; there had to be a power struggle going on. And the CIA said "NO". As a matter of fact, on the day that Khrushchev managed to give the boot to Malenkov, CIA... I had done a series of columns at that point say there probably was a power struggle... now don't ask me how I got by with that, but I did -- mainly because I documented each of these things with pretty good evidence. And, the very morning that Khrushchev came to very real power, the CIA station chief in Moscow sent a cable to the State Department saying that all this stuff about a power struggle is rubbish -- no power struggle -- collective leadership is the order of the day. Just a few moments later, after that message came in, I was to go to a meeting to be summararily rebuked for violating policy guidance. I forgot about that.

Q: As you were doing these articles on Communism and all, were there people from Congress or elsewhere looking over this? I'm thinking that McCarthyism was still going strong in this period. Did you feel the agency was being closely observed, inspected?

PEDERSEN: The employees were being closely observed. As far as Congress paying very much attention to policy, I think that was pretty much of a lost cause.

Q: Did you feel, not you personally, but within the Agency and all, were the effects of McCarthyism with its witch trials being felt? I mean who is a communist, who isn't? Were you feeling the cold hand of this particular form of persecution?

PEDERSEN: Well, I was pretty well convinced at my own end of non-vulnerability. I figured I was another pretty straight arrow. Of course, this is a ridiculous feeling to have because he got some pretty good johnnies. But, I did at one point (I am not sure what the year was), where in that period, I could hear little clicks on my telephone. I was pretty vocal on what I thought of McCarthy. And, I went over to the head of security, USIA Head of Security, I walked into his office: "Are you tapping my phone?" The guy's name was Barnd, and, he said, "I don't know. I'll find out."; which is sort of a good clue, right there that they were tapping somebody. That afternoon, I got a call from a little wavery

voice, a gentleman, saying that they had been listening, but just to see if the telephone service was good.

[general laughter]

And, I told him: “Look, if you bums can’t tap a telephone and then admit it in a day, you’re in the wrong business.” Theoretically, I should have been quaking in my boots. But, I was just damn mad. I had written as a journalist, I had written quite a bit, about communism. I had studied up on it and I knew quite a bit. But, it was only after I had got into what the CIA had gathered, that I began to understand what the hell they were up to. I had a pretty good sense what these bums were up to. Nobody in USIA seemed to have any real clue as to what the other side was up to. Most of the stuff they were putting out were regurgitations on columns. At one point, one of the gentlemen who tried to be Paul L. Ford for a short time, picked up one of my famous correspondences with the Christian Monitor and put his byline on it and tried to slip it by me; and I, to his dismay, had actually written the piece. Essentially, what it was, was communists were a bunch of dirty bums, and we were the good guys and anything the communists did was totally wrong, which usually it was. But, they created a publication called “Problems of Communism”. A rather cocksure gentleman named Abe Blumberg was the editor. I used to go through that thing, and in one issue, when going through just two of the items, I found 14 errors of fact. Nobody cared.

Q: Let me stop here. We are going to stop at this point and I would like to pick up and not let this whole thing of the early period of communism go. Some of the names I’d like to run by you. The Alger Hiss case, Bobby Kennedy, Cohn and Schine.

PEDERSEN: Yeah. Ok.

Q: And, was there sort of an Eastern European Refugee Group, or German Refugee Group that came to the United States that sort of became the communist experts and others who developed this?

PEDERSEN: The trouble is these guys had been experts, alleged experts, on Nazism. That didn’t qualify them as experts on communism, one damn bit.

Q: Today is February 27, 2008. So, what was your impression of sort of the McCarthy crew? Talk about McCarthy coalition.

PEDERSEN: Let me clarify something. I think you went away with a very weird idea of Sioux City, Iowa, my home town was like back in the ‘50s, ‘40s. ‘30s. Sioux City was going to be the next Chicago. It was one of the boom towns of the times. It had an elevated railway.

Anyway, you want to know about Cohn and Schine. Cohn was a mover and....

Q: We are talking about Roy Cohn.

PEDERSEN: ...Schine was his accomplice. Neither one had any clue about communism -- not one damn bit. But, they rampaged through the libraries of USIA, looking for any little line in a book that might mean someone was backing Russia and was a communist. They knew nothing about communism. Schine had done a little book for use in the hotel owned by his family, but it was just...it was absolutely asinine.

Q: Did you come into any contact with them?

PEDERSEN: I did not come into any personal contact with them.

Q: You were in the information agency when we left off.

PEDERSEN: The International Information Administration, the Department of State.

Q: Your first job was what now?

PEDERSEN: On the news desk. They had a regular news desk. They even had a horseshoe effect desk, that was so favored at that time in newspapers. They produced news stories that were really recaps of what the wire services and the newspapers were putting out. Not much original work. Not too long after I started, I became editor of the Middle East Wireless file, which was dealing with a hot area of the world at that time. Not too long after that, I became a columnist.

Q: How did that come about?

PEDERSEN: Well, they'd been using phony bylines for sometime. It was an inheritance from the OSS, which inherited the idea from the CIA. I got the gig as a columnist. I got an exclusive interview in Rome with the Italian Premier, De Gasperi. in April, 1952. I was in Nevada covering an Atomic Bomb explosion, August 1952, covering the International Red Cross Conference in Toronto, that was a major event. I had a TASS reporter, I was informed was really KGB. He just stuck with me like glue. That was when I was Paul L. Ford.

Q: You used different names? Did they give a different ID card and all that?

PEDERSEN: No, nothing.

Q: You just told people that your name was Ford.

PEDERSEN: Well, we did get accredited, but not accredited as Paul L. Ford. I was doing a column in defense of peace. ID would say Bilk. In September 1952 I was over in Italy, as Ford, as young Francis Ford. In December, 1952, the IAA Reporter, at the UN, a "Special Events" columnist, wrote that Wes Pedersen produces regular columns carrying a byline Paul L. Ford. In October, 1952, I had an exclusive interview with Mayor Ernst Reuter in Berlin. There were several other meetings like this. In November, 1955, I was

in Geneva covering a Foreign Ministers' meeting. That December, I was in Belgrade, and also in Berlin that December getting an exclusive interview with Mayer Otto Suhr. It was a busy time.

Q: What were you and your organization trying to do with these articles?

PEDERSEN: We were trying to get them placed in the papers around the country. Now, I have got somewhere a report that came in that would have been about 1957 on the usage of the columns. The Wireless Bulletin was supposed to be the backbone of the Press Information. The column by Wes as Paul Ford was used more than the regular news items from the Wireless News Bulletins themselves. I do have an accounting of the number of newspapers around the world. It was very substantial.

Q: Was there a problem with American papers picking this up? Because, well, you know, our information agency could not propagandize the United States.

PEDERSEN: I was world famous under a couple of other names. Nobody in the United States knew who the hell I was. But, I did have a couple of problems. We had a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Summit Meeting in Copenhagen in the late '50s. I had done a column on the strength of the Soviet armed forces. That column was based on a report. I had come into Copenhagen and I had to do an instant column on the strength of the Soviet armed forces that USIA had put out. By coincidence, I had been bugging the CIA to come up with that information for me, for my own column. So, it was a natural. I did that. USIS, Copenhagen, printed up the Ford column, and distributed it to all the press. The next morning, the Washington Daily News had it as THE story on page 1. USIA had distributed material by a Paul L. Ford. It repeated the story that Ford had. Well, that didn't sit too well with the top brass of the Chicago Tribune, who sent their reporter a rocket saying "why the hell didn't you have this?" He walked up to the guy who was representing our press group, and asked: "Who is this Paul Ford?" Well, I was standing right there, a little bit away from him, and this guy said, and stuttered...he could have called me over....and said that it was a pseudonym. The Chicago Tribune filed a report that this report was being done by someone who wasn't even at the conference. So, that got a few headlines there. Then is when I started thinking that this isn't the most comfortable job I ought to be in, defending the use of fake bylines, for which there really was no defense. It was a stupid idea. It was one that was forced on the writers. The writers had no option on it. Part of that was because there was a great deal of jealousy within IPS (International Press Service). If anybody had been permitted to get that kind of attention, the whole place would have been down on him....anyway,

Q: The pseudonym was almost more of a bureaucratic thing so that somebody wouldn't get a celebrity status.

PEDERSEN: That's it.

Q: Trying to keep the source like "this isn't a government source" -- something like that.

PEDERSEN: Well, I don't think that there were very many editors who didn't know that the material being handed to them by USIS press officer overseas wasn't from the US Government. So, they knew. They didn't run the attribution. One of the things... Benjamin West... Paul Ford wrote it... got very popular in India. Blitz, which was their number one communist publication in the country at that time, ran a front-page article and it started: "On millions of commentaries of one Paul L. Ford, next to those of Walter Lippman on page 1 on the Times of India, I would assume Mr. Ford is a legitimate correspondent -- in reality, he is merely a USIA government hack." I thought that was a fine compliment. I treasured that. I thought that was pretty damn good. I got all of these... you know, this attention from you guys and I'm a hack. And I am up there with Walter Lippman... not too shabby.

Q: As you were writing these things, was there somebody saying: "I want a column on this...?"

PEDERSEN: No. I was working on my own.

Q: Well, somebody must have been kind of nervous about this? You know, in a government, where somebody is sailing off on their own....?

PEDERSEN: As long as I produced, they didn't have much argument... except when I happened to expose something such as the Malenkov-Khrushchev thing I predicted.

Q: At one point, they were a duo, supposedly running the Soviet Union together.

PEDERSEN: It was supposed to be a collective leadership. I was the first to discover that Bulganin's newspaper -- Malenkov's newspaper -- and Khrushchev's -- Pravda and Izvestia -- Pravda was Khrushchev's and Izvestia was Malenkov's -- they were going at it differently -- on policies and it didn't take much brain power to figure out there was a power struggle going on. I managed to get columns through until the day that Khrushchev took power and kicked Malenkov in the butt.

Q: I noticed you had some things about the CIA getting things wrong.

PEDERSEN: The CIA got everything wrong...

Q: Why? Looking at this, is this a bureaucratic thing?

PEDERSEN: ...as I said in one piece, which I assume you have read. What I was doing was using the same material, the very material that CIA distributed, made available to academics, to members of the press....

Q: We're talking about the Wireless file....

PEDERSEN: No, No. I am talking about the translated materials from Soviet and other communist broadcasts, from Yugoslavia, Albania, the whole thing. They were

broadcasts. They were translating almost any kind of communist publication they could. And that material was available, but nobody besides me, apparently, was reading it or at least could figure out what the hell it meant. CIA was wrong on every major development throughout the 1950s. I was right. Unfortunately, I got no credit for being right.

Q: I am trying to look at this thing as a system. Here you have the CIA, with people specially recruited, people working on a problem -- obviously the communist world, particularly the Soviet Union, but also China was where they were focused. Why were they getting it wrong?

PEDERSEN: Because they....[chuckle] they had no analytical ability at that time. They could gather the material, but they did not know what the hell to do with it, or what it meant. They couldn't put two and two together. That's the simple truth.

Q: Well, I'm sort of wondering whether there might be also this status quo? Suppose the CIA's prediction was that Malenkov and Khrushchev were clashing and nothing happens. It looks much worse than saying everything is fine and it'll stay the way it is always.

PEDERSEN: Well, if they had reported that there was a power struggle underway, then that would have been absolutely the fact. There would have been no question about that. It was there.

Q: But, when you were doing most of this writing, were you traveling from time to time and coming back and talking with you CIA colleagues?

PEDERSEN: I did not talk to CIA. I had no colleagues. That was all relayed through two people who I actually considered total phonies. These were two guys who were supposedly experts on communism, and they hadn't a clue. What they did was to take the line constantly from the CIA.

Q: You mentioned the death of Stalin, that this was something that was basically predictable. How did that come about?

PEDERSEN: It wasn't basically predictable. Nobody had a clue that he was ill. The people around Stalin knew he was ill, but nobody was saying that. What they were doing was trying to set up scapegoats that could be blamed for his death, so that they wouldn't be.

Q: This was the Jewish Doctors Plot, so called.

PEDERSEN: That's it. Well, there had been a lot of interpretations of the Doctors' Plot, but that is basically what it was all about. The academics have put all different kinds of spins on this, and its....

Q: wrong.....You suspected that Stalin was in serious.....

PEDERSEN: What I said was that the people around him knew that he was ill and were preparing for his death and were setting up scapegoats.

Q: Were you able to publish this?

PEDERSEN: No, as our policy guy in IPS ran it by CIA, and CIA said “Stalin can’t possibly be ill. And of course, he died two months later. On the power struggle, to give you an idea, for what it’s worth, I was the one who had been saying that there was a power struggle underway. Our two so-called ‘experts’ were saying no, it wasn’t. They were repeating the CIA line. When Khrushchev *was* successful, what these bastards did, they put out an advisory to USIA personnel: “As we have been saying for several months....” They hadn’t been saying a damn thing like that; but they were getting themselves off the hook. It was a total lie. They never said anything like that.

Q: What about the Hungarian Revolution, I guess in October, 1956.

PEDERSEN: Three weeks before that, I was going through the broadcasts that CIA had provided and you could just tell. There was hysteria there on the part of the Hungarians, and I gave them three weeks at most before the whole thing blew and it did. Again, based on what the CIA told our alleged communist expert, the Hungarians would never revolt, not since they were surrounded by Soviet horses -- they would not dare to do it. When it did, the CIA was wrong again.

Q: At the time of the Hungarian Revolt, what was the atmosphere about this? There had been this accusation that the place of America and of the Secretary of State Dulles talking about rolling back communism in all, that we gave encouragement to them.

PEDERSEN: They had been encouraged. You are right. They had been encouraging the Hungarians, and what was so bad about this whole thing was that when this broke out, it coincided with the French and the British seizure of the Suez Canal.

Q: It was called the Suez Crisis.

PEDERSEN: Yes. We were told that we could not comment on the Hungarian Uprising. I have a rider around on that somewhere...but...the US was very cowardly. Because of that ban on comment on the Hungarian situation, I fished around for something that I could write about instead. I came up with what I had been collecting on the evidence of a policy clash between Moscow and Peking. This, again, was a matter of reading what the two sides were saying and comparing them. I wrote to the effect that one of the events not now in the headlines which may prove to be more important than some of them was the drive by Communist China to establish itself on an ideological par with the Soviet Union. That was my column. That was in '57 or '58 -- I forget when it was. John Foster Dulles has this determination that the communist world was one solid monolithic bloc, and there were no deviations at all within it. It took State Department until 1959 (it was '57), it took them two years to announce the fact that there was a rift between the two countries.

Q: Were you able to write about this?

PEDERSEN: I wrote about this. I did a column.

Q: I was wondering whether there was any problem of writing the column?

PEDERSEN: Well, what I did was to document it by the arguments that the two sides were making. They assumed that there was enough background there for it to be used. However, I was interested in the struggle between Moscow and Beijing. What nobody at USIA could figure out was that it was Albania, the Communist Party there that was taking the Chinese side and advancing the arguments that China was not necessarily making. Yugoslavia was taking the argument that the Soviet Union supported. So the basic information was not only from Russia and China, but from these two other satellite regimes.

Q: You mean, Yugoslavia supporting the idea that Moscow was the center of Communist thought, whereas Albania was saying that....

PEDERSEN: Khrushchev had relented a bit and told Tito that they could be a little freer in their interpretation of the communist hierarchy. It was a matter of a different road to communism, that's what the two were arguing about.

Q: Well, speaking of China, you mentioned that a major famine was being disregarded by our intelligence sources.

PEDERSEN: That's when my wife and I were in Hong Kong in 1961. I did a long series of interviews about refugees who were just pouring across the border into the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong, and they were emaciated. All of them were talking about starvation. I sent Washington a report on this, and the report was titled: "Famine: Grim Specter Over China". USIA, the Far East Branch, ran that by the CIA which came back and were very critical. CIA said there were no famine in China. It took the CIA over a quarter of a century, almost a third of a century, to acknowledge the fact that there had been a famine in China and it had killed about 35 Million Chinese.

Q: We also had at the time you were there this unit that was doing nothing but interviewing people coming out of China, in joint with the British -- interviewing the same sort of people you were. I mean, this must have been very apparent.

PEDERSEN: It was very apparent. My point, again, is, how in the hell could they have missed this?

Q: How long were you in Hong Kong?

PEDERSEN: We were there almost four years.

Q: What were you doing there?

PEDERSEN: I was publishing books on China. These werewe are really switching away from the part that I like best, the 10 years that I was doing columns.

Q: All right. So, let's go back to the 10 years. The 10 years that you were doing columns were from when to when?

PEDERSEN: It was from 1951 to 1960.

Q: Well, who was the head of USIA at that time?

PEDERSEN: We had a whole series of them. A mix of academics. We had Carl Rowan. He was in there. There wasn't...

Q: I thought that he came later.

PEDERSEN: Probably, but he is the only one that I can remember. They came by pretty quickly.

Q: Well, did you find your position changing in the 10 years you were doing this, because you were challenging what you might call the "foreign policy establishment". Did this cause problems for you?

PEDERSEN: Well, it has always been my own theory...actually, people thought I was getting all that good information from the CIA. I wasn't. But, "one of our own do this....it was impossible".

Q: Well, did you have any connection to the State Department -- to the China Desk, to the Soviet Desk?

PEDERSEN: Well, basically, you had to go through these same two guys. They were funnels. USIA had policy officers. These were very frequently Foreign Service Officers who were...who came back and they couldn't find specific spots for them so they made them policy....they relayed policy from State, from the CIA. They did not actually originate policy.

Q: Well, did you sit down and talk to colleagues who were reading the stuff you were and all in the State Department?

PEDERSEN: I didn't bother. I was on a roll where I was doing pretty damn well on my own. Why should I get all the things bollixed? Why should I inform everybody else what I was working on? I would have been slapped down right then. They would have found a way to do it. So, this was not an employment that inspired creative or original writing.

Q: Also, in a way, you were acting as a good newspaper man.

PEDERSEN: That's exactly it.

Q: Rather than as a corporate publicist.

PEDERSEN: That's right.

Q: Did you ever have any real problems with this?

PEDERSEN: Well, as I said, they tried to rebuke me, which would have been a real black mark. They tried to rebuke me for being right about the power struggle; but, then the power struggle became a reality and they didn't have much...they were claiming credit for my work. I'd been the one who'd been saying that for several months. They said: "As we have been saying....".

Q: Did you travel extensively during this time?

PEDERSEN: Yes.

Q: Did you find that doors opened for you in Europe and in the Far East.

PEDERSEN: Oh, yeah. We had some good people overseas. In 1952 I got an exclusive interview with De Gasperi of Italy because we had a really good press officer there. I'd done exclusive interviews with the three governing mayors of West Berlin during that period, Ernst Reuter -- very famous at that time, and a stand-up guy; Otto Suhr -- less well-known, but still in there; and of all things an exclusive interview with Willy Brandt on the day in the late '50s that the communists had set for West Germany to sign a separate Peace Treaty -- the Allies to sign a separate Peace Treaty with East Germany, to get out of Berlin. The International Press Association, I believe it was, had 1200 reporters on hand, and all of them wanted interviews with Willy Brandt. I got the interview with Brandt because he knew of me; he knew of what I had done with Reuter and with Otto Suhr. That was an exclusive interview at a critical point; and, nobody knew exactly what was going to happen on that day. The 1200 guys, journalist, were there because they figured that the communists wouldn't dare attempt anything with that many people aboard. But that was a scoop for Paul L. Ford, not for Wes Pedersen.

Q: Well, how about France? Did you cover France?

PEDERSEN: There was Marty-Tillon, the two prominent communist leaders in Western Europe, in France. I came in there. I read the news and I talked to some reporters and I came to the conclusion that these two guys were not long for this world, and I did a...well you had mentioned a contact with CIA...I wrote a column predicting that something was going to happen with these two guys. I ran it by the CIA Station Chief and he said that these two guys are in solid; no way there'll be out. Well, the next week I got down to Rome and I picked up a newspaper and the headline was: Marty-Tillon Purge. So, again, another one down the chute because I listened to someone from CIA.

Q: Well, did you go to the Far East before you were assigned?

PEDERSEN: I never go over there. We were pretty well focused on Europe at the time.

Q: What about during the time of the Suez Crises. Britain and France pretty much cut us out of this operation. What were we reporting about it?

PEDERSEN: We weren't reporting anything. We had a freeze on commentary. News was coming in from the front from...I mentioned his name last week -- Lou Annual. He was an awfully good man. He was up there reporting on this. His reports were being funneled through Bob Delaney, one of the guys who had been one of the alleged experts on communism. They had an office there, where he was supposed to be collecting intelligence. Well, it was going through Delaney's office, and he would forward them. And guess who got credit for writing that report: Bob Delaney. People were talking about what a wonderful job, for getting information there in this crisis. Bob Delaney wasn't doing anything at all but rewriting the information. As a matter of fact, one of the things that annoyed the hell out of me, was that after-- these meetings tend to run together -- after the NATO Summit meeting in Denmark where this flak arose, where I had picked up this material on the strength of the Soviet armed forces, I went into Delaney's office and asked him what he had that was new on the Soviet armed forces in Western Europe. He said: "Wes, I am glad you asked me that, I have just finished a definitive report on that" and went over to his file and pulled out my column. Word for word. He was handing it to me. I couldn't believe it.

Q: Did you point it out to him?

PEDERSEN: I pointed it out to him.

Q: What did he have to say?

PEDERSEN: [Laughs] He stuttered and mumbled. This guy might have become, with all those wonderful credentials, became head of Thunderbird School in the South West.

Q: I think it is in New Mexico, Arizona -- one of those.

PEDERSEN: He became head of that school.

Q: That's wild.

PEDERSEN: One of the biggest phonies that I ever knew.

Q: Was this strictly your own operation, or did you find any groups...

PEDERSEN: You mean....reporters external

Q: Yes, external....

PEDERSEN: Hell, no.

Q: How about the academic world? What was your impression?

PEDERSEN: Well, I thought they had to be pretty thick if they couldn't do what I did -- obviously, there was a wealth of information from the CIA, not original, but material from the communist world that had been translated and they couldn't figure it out. Among other things in that era, back in the mid-'50s or a bit earlier, I spotted an article in the "Soviet Youth Magazine"

Q: Yeah...Pravda....Youth Pravda....

PEDERSEN:and it was on aboard an alleged Soviet atomic submarine. It was incredibly detailed. This isn't the type of material that you're going to put out for a youth group. And I thought what the hell is going on here with this? And, it occurred to me that there was a good possibility that they had one of the world's first atomic subs ready to launch. I did this one piece on stating that possibility and quoting from this, putting out that it was so detailed that it was impossible that it wasn't much more to this than somebody's imagination. I ran that through our policy experts and they said the Soviets were light years away from getting an atomic submarine. And, within a couple of months, of course, they launched a sub. You have to have a little imagination to be able to do this kind of thing. One of the problems is you have a robot mentality among a lot of government employees and we had a lot of people who could not write an original news story if their lives depended on it. They were knocking out a pretty good salary.

Q: Well, I would think that all this calling it right, when the others are calling it wrong and not seeing would not enhance your career.

PEDERSEN: It didn't. It absolutely didn't. I was right. Nobody wanted to acknowledge that. Hey, did I get coverage in the USIA Newsletter for scoring this or that? Oh, absolutely not.

Q: Well, then...

PEDERSEN: As I say, I'm sure that some of the people who were pontificating really thought that I was getting that information from the CIA.

Q: You say that about 1960, you moved from this position?

PEDERSEN: I wasn't moved. I decided that I wanted to get the hell out of this. The Chicago Tribune had both been nosing around about who Paul Ford was. I felt that before I knew I would be up beforetestifying before Congress defending a practice I did not believe in...the use of a phony byline. So, I decided that I would start looking around to see what else there was. CIA, believe it or not, offered me a job. They wanted me to go over to London, to set up a news service, which would cover Europe and Russia. The pay

was quite good. I thought twice about what I was getting into. I thought that sounded real good; except then, I got to thinking: "If I took that job, I'd be working with the same people, the same mentality that I'd been dealing with for the last ten years, and that was a no-no. Then, this Hong Kong job came up -- the job of publishing books on China. I thought that sounded quite challenging. We got there and I discovered that their operation there, that they had been bragging about, was actually very limited. There was really nothing there that you could imagine anybody really reading, or anything like that. Fortunately, the refugee situation offered an opportunity. I had a photographer, an Austrian, who was out taking pictures of the refugees and the sad state of repair they were in and I put out a photo book called Exodus from China -- a big thing, really big. That got a lot of attention around the different posts. Then I wrote up Pearl Buck. I got her to give me a collection of her short stories. I never got this thing about hitting the communist menace between the eyes, which was our standard practice. She had a couple of stories in there and I put that out in the book, called Escape At Midnight, and nice cover, the whole thing. And, she charged absolutely nothing. She was very good. I did a book called Children of China, which was done by an Irish lady who worked for USIA and I got Pearl Buck to do a forward to that, so we had a cache there of Pearl Buck in the forward of this book Children of China. I did another book on Macao, which was a Portuguese enclave right across the border. Wonderful, wonderful photographs by Harry Redals of the refugees. Pictures of the guards in the towers there, looking over with their binoculars. We got into China, across the border. Harry was very good at that sort of thing, and we could see these poor bastards out in the fields and they were toiling away. That went over quite a while. It was an interesting time.

Q: You did this for about four years. That would take you up to 1964. Did Vietnam intrude on your work, at all?

PEDERSEN: No, no.

Q: Then, about '64, where did you go?

PEDERSEN: Came back in '63. I was going to be the head of what you call the pamphlets and graphics section. We spent time with my wife's family up in Binghamton, New York. We drove back and on the car radio we heard the assignation of John. F. Kennedy.

Q: November 22, 1963.

PEDERSEN: Yeah. I hurried back. Discovered that for all intents and purposes that the staff was taking it as a sort of holiday. I spent a week working alone. I got in there and I tried to get some help but they decided not...They were all...IPS was focusing on the day, which is natural, but nobody had thought about, hey, people overseas would be really interested in Lyndon Baines Johnson. He hadn't had hell of a lot of coverage overseas. So, I put together...went down into the photolab and ransacked the photos showing Johnson over a period of time, illustrating parts of his career and did the first bio on Johnson that IPS sent up that Monday. I also did a chart, which showed the assassination

attempt, the year it took place, the window in the repository, the car and it showed in effect, how the assassination took place. This was a big chart. Then I started to work on a book on Kennedy: Legacy of a President. This was: The Memorable World of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. I wrote that, compiled that, did the research on it myself. I had a staff, but they were more hindrance than anything. That got the attention of the front office. They decided....I thought about doing it on my own, getting an agent and selling it.... a big mistake on my part. I wound up giving the rights to USIA and they sold the rights to a publisher overseas. One of the deputy administrators was a guy called Mike Nivesen. He brought down, without any consultation with me, a magazine designer, Bernie Quinn. Quinn was a very cocky guy who probably was as cocky as I was at the time. We didn't exactly strike mutual sparks. He did much of the design, but his artwork just wasn't appropriate at the time. For example, he had an image there that was like John F. Kennedy as the Christ holding out his hand to the people below. I didn't like that. Anyway, we got the thing done. They decided it would be published by the government printing office, which was probably the worst government bureaucracy at that time. I spent nights down on a sofa in USIA running back and forth to the government printing office. This was being done in hard cover, and lo and behold at the end they decided that compiled and commentary by Wesley Pedersen -- they couldn't do that. Nobody got credit on any of the books that they published. I thought that that sucks, and I finally got around to getting credit for myself. I could not get credit for any of the people that had helped research the pictures. Bernie Quinn said he wanted to be called an editor. Well, that rankled me to no end, because he was no editor by any stretch of the imagination. They said it had to be done. I had to go up and argue with this top guy at the Government Printing Office to include Bernie Quinn in there, although the idea nauseated me. Finally, we got a little credit for the back of the book and he was design editor and I was the editor. No credit to me for researching. I had done a forward for signature by Lyndon Johnson, which they approved, and an epilogue by the Secretary of State at the time....

Q: Dean Rusk

PEDERSEN: Yep. He signed it, but I had a line in there about the eloquence of John F. Kennedy: "the eloquence I shall always remember" -- he struck out "the eloquence I shall always remember". I thought that was enormously petty of the guy. I think he was supposed to be such a friend of Kennedy's -- that he would take that out. Anyway, the book got published, but it could not be distributed here, under law. I kept telling these guys and they'd say we had a best seller and I'd say you can't distribute it here. Well, you know Stevens?

Q: Adlai Stevenson?

PEDERSEN: No, Stevens.

Q: Oh, yeah. George Stevens?

PEDERSEN: George Stevens, yeah.

Q: He was like a movie director at the Kennedy Center.

PEDERSEN: Right. Well, he had done this....

Q: Day of Drums, Years of Lightning.

PEDERSEN: Year of Lightning, Day of Drums. They'd got special clearance. This guy knew how to operate. He'd got special clearance and had that movie shown in this country. No clearance for the book. It was widely translated by USIS posts overseas into a number of different languages. Ambassadors would take it around to head of country and present it. They gave the rights to several publishers, and they did not consult with me at all, and the book is still on sale, in Portuguese and Spanish versions. It's in every library here in Washington, around the country.

Q: What's the title of the book?

PEDERSEN: Legacy of a President.

Mrs. PEDERSEN: I'll get it. I can get it for you. It is a beautiful little book.

Q: Well, I am sure I saw it. I was in Belgrade at the time. I was there five years, and Kennedy was extremely popular there. Oh, yes, I've seen this, oh, yes. (looking at the book). Beautiful book. Well, how long did you do this work in the publishing side with the agency?

PEDERSEN: Well, first we wound up not putting out the small tiny pamphlets that USIA had been publishing, because they weren't really all that effective. We produced some fairly handsome materials. That was from 1963 till about 1970. We were doing, among other things, cartoons. We had a strip called "Little Moe", who was a little guy, average guy in Russia, and the problems he had to put up with. They got a certain amount of use. I had a staff of people who didn't get along with each other. They had the people had been designing pamphlets. These had been very mediocre, the things that they had been doing, and the cartoons and the comic strips, and there was a great deal of tension between the two. If I had it to do over again, I would fire the design crew and just contract out the work. It would have been more effective. The staff were not of a professional quality. But we got several publications out. Large publications, again, which the Department of Agriculture loved: Bounty from the Land -- great big thing, which you may remember.

Q: That was one I used to distribute.

PEDERSEN: That went over very well. We had one that I was particularly fond of, that was The Americans and the Arts. I hired a bunch of contract photographers to take pictures around the country of artisans and the various fields in the arts. That one went out...it was designed by a top designer at Look magazine; we got him to do that and he

did a stunning job. If I had my staff do that, it would have been months. He did it in a matter of days and it was beautifully done.

Well, one of the first jobs that I did, aside for the one on Kennedy and Johnson, was to do a piece on how Americans elect a president, which was a very handsome job. I did one on “Mr. President, Lyndon Baines Johnson”. I got Norman Rockwell. I got permission to use the drawing he had done of Lyndon Johnson. I used that for the Presidential Seal. “Mr. President, Lyndon Baines Johnson”. Johnson loved it. Absolutely loved it. Johnson loved pamphlets. Incredible. But, this wasn’t a pamphlet. This was a full fledged beautiful job. And, he had us run off 5000 copies of the cover, and he kept them in his desk, and he would sign them. I got permission from Rockwell to go ahead and use it for Johnson. And he would autograph it to people who came in. We had Wyeth, had done a...

Q: Andrew Wyeth -there are several Wyeths.

PEDERSEN: I figure it had to be the younger one. He had done a portrait of Johnson and he brought it in to show Johnson. Both Wyeths had an incredible reputation, and Johnson took a look at it and said: “That’s the ugliest thing I ever saw!” and he went over to his desk and hauled out the Norman Rockwell thing and said: “That’s the kind of art I like.” When Johnson went over to Vietnam, I did the “Journey to the Pacific”, very lavishly illustrated and lots of photos of the entire journey. Now, one of the interesting things is, whenever I did anything on Nixon or Johnson, I had to submit them to either Johnson or Nixon, or one of the top aides. In “A Journey to the Pacific”, we had a shot of Lyndon Johnson dancing with Imelda Marcos. It was not offensive; I thought it was a very nice shot. But, I had fired that set down to the ranch, and it came back from the ranch, either with Bill Moyers or Johnson himself, with the words: “take that photo out of there”. It seems that it had to be from Bill Moyers, because it seems that Johnson had to give his wife attention on the dance floor, so that had to come out. But, with Nixon, what I did with each of the elections was a piece on each of the candidates, which would be ready to go the moment the results of the election were announced. Hubert Humphrey didn’t really care about his, as long as it was used, but he did have one thing. He kept telling the reporters that he didn’t touch up his hair. Well, I had all of his photos going back for years and in earlier years he had white hair. I couldn’t very well run photos of a possible president showing that he had been sort of fudging the truth. So, I had all of these earlier photos touched up. But he didn’t make the cut. [laughter all round] But he was very nice. But Nixon, Nixon...he was fully convinced that his beard had cost him the 1960 election. You couldn’t have any photos of him with a trace of beard. You know, this guy used to go out on the street. If he thought he would be on camera, he would want to put makeup on.

Q: I had heard people talk about meeting him and said “My god, this guy’s got heavy makeup on.”

PEDERSEN: Yeah, he did. Anyway. I had this whole thing on Nixon, and I got Look magazine to give me this photo of Nixon that they had used. Look did a set up on all of the candidates.

Q: Look was a major magazine.

PEDERSEN: Look was considered secondary to Life, but it was really a beautifully done publication. And, I took this job, all finished up. I took it up to the Pierre Hotel. I picked that up and they looked over every damn photo in there and they picked out one photograph, and it was very small. It showed Nixon, young, with the two daughters very young and Pat, on their bikes -- obviously the girls had been riding on the handlebars -- down at the reflecting pool. But, they decided that Nixon looked like he had a little bit of a beard. I had to have that beard touched up. But, also, I had a real major assembly problem then, because it is fullthat I wanted to use. The art department voted to go ahead on that, I ran afoul of a guy named Jack Frost -- honest to god, that's his name. He was the campaign art director. He wouldn't turn loose of that, because we were evil; we were government employees. We would sabotage Nixon. Well, Nixon's press guy, a guy from San Diego and, I got him to say, "Look, this guy is Civil Service; he's not going to do us any damage." I got that photo, finally. But he delayed that for several days, just because they had this weird idea.

Q: [laughs] [Reads the letter] This is from Richard Nixon, January 26, 1990. "Dear Wes, As I thumb through the two photo albums you sent me, I was reminded again of the outstanding work you did covering our administration during your service at USIA. Some of the photographs were, incidentally, better than the White House photos, and we are going to display them prominently in the Nixon Library, which will open in July. In checking my files, I found that you did not have a copy of my book, 1999, and I am sending one to you under cover, appropriately inscribed. With warm regards, sincerely.....I guess that's D....I can't....it's Nixon's signature.

PEDERSEN: Now....

Q: That's great.

PEDERSEN: Anyway, during that period, among other things I wrote a column used by the magazine that was published overseas: "White House Report". At that time, the byline, "by Wesley Pederson" appeared in many USIA publications.

Q: Now, how long were you doing this publication?

PEDERSEN: Roughly, again, for about 10 years.

Q: And that brings it up to '74, '75?

PEDERSEN: I had been putting out these various publications. I existed, in part, by prevailing on various public affairs officers in the major corporations around the country

and getting them to turn loose of...these companies were putting out these beautiful publications. Some of them quite timely. I was able to get free artwork from them and, on my suggestion, they created an office of special projects that would work with the private sector, and get them to do things for free. That was challenging, but it was a relief to be working with people outside the agency; because, you can get stifled in a government agency, and...these were real free thinkers. There are no free thinkers in IPS. Anyway, I got North American Rockwell, which was a prime contractor in the Apollo project to do this gorgeous book, with all of these illustrations that their artists had done, showing how this is all going to take place. I did this publication, which went out before the Apollo landing.

Q: This is the space, the moon project...

PEDERSEN: Yes. And I was out in California, half of the time. I took some wonderful photos of the engine and our little son there in the Apollo after it had returned. I had samples of the Mylar covering from the spacecraft with an attestation that they were from that original spacecraft. Anyway, I began immediately replacing the artwork with the actual photographs from NASA (National Aeronautic and Space Administration). This was free. I think that's when a science advisor, Simon Borge, he and I reallywell, he was a 'let's not do it' type, when I was a 'let's go type'. He was a science advisor and I got a telephone call from him as we were going to press. I had to stop. There was an error. And, I said, "Sorry, you do know that this is done by the people who put this ship together?" "No, there's an error." And I said, "Sorry, I'm not going to stop this. This is ridiculous!" and I hung up on him. He called me back, and said, "You hung up on me." And I said, "Listen, I am going to do it again." That gets back to my point that you really have to have people who are a little gung ho. And IPS never really had that kind of...except with "American Illustrated", the magazine which was edited for a short time by David McCullough of Truman biography fame.

Q: A prominent historian.

PEDERSEN: A little sidebar there. After I had some success, although no profit from the book on Kennedy, I was going to do one called "Harry, Give 'Em Hell". I don't know whether it was a mistake or not, but I took it down and discussed the idea with Dave, and he said "I don't think anyone would buy a book on Truman."

Mrs. PEDERSEN: [Laughter]

Q: He won the Pulitzer Prize and all sorts of things, just for that.

PEDERSEN: Well, we all make mistakes. Well, it was one of my major mistakes. While I was doing the Horizon...they were really books, I had one sent to higher-ups on Martin Luther King, Martin Luther King, Man of Peace. People thought it was just wonderful; but at the last minute they said: "You can't do that. It's not politically advisable." Well, of course, what happened was that Martin Luther King was speaking out against the Vietnam War. It wasn't just a matter of civil rights; he was taking on Johnson in all this.

Obviously, that was not to be. I had gotten a designer up in New York to do the design for this. It was almost ready. That hurt. That hurt a great deal. I think it would have done the agency a world of good to come out with something like that. I also had one on Adlai Stevenson. Well, he was a spokesman up at the UN, and Adlai Stevenson was getting ready to denounce the war in Vietnam. So, there went another book.

Q: After you finished these publications, what did you do for the remaining years?

PEDERSEN: Remaining years? I got free materials, magazines and publications put out by USIA overseas.

Q: Were you able to tap into available publications? I always think of a couple of publications ones like Arizona Highways and Aramco's magazine.

PEDERSEN: That's where I got most of my material.

Q: Beautiful publications.

PEDERSEN: That's what I said a while ago. It was all free. I have a whole showing for North American Rockwell, showing all these people from different countries in their costumes and everything. Aramco was absolutely delighted with that. They could understand that it was much to their advantage. IPS did not like the notion that you could get anything for free and, it's the honest to gods' truth. Photographs from publications like "Arizona Highways", you just mentioned, couldn't honestly be as good as what you could buy. But they were there for the asking.

Q: It was a prominent magazine. I don't know how it is today.

PEDERSEN: They were on a magazine roll. They were putting out annual reports that were really gorgeous, and they were all on themes that applied to Americana.

Q: Well, Wes, I am just checking the time. When you retired, well I mean you had this wealth of experience, knowledge and interests. What did you do?

Mrs. PEDERSEN: [Laughs]

PEDERSEN: I made the mistake of going to work for a public relations shop, and I really came to understand that it was not the place for me. It was run by a young lady, very dynamic young lady; and, but there is such a thing as billable hours and you have to come up....I was honest on my hours, but the idea of being nudged to boost them up, boost them up....well, I didn't like that. Well, I directed a couple of award-winning national campaigns, one of them for the National Automobile Dealers Association and out of that came an offer from the Chairman, who headed a chain of Dealerships out, god where was that.....to replace the guy at the association and I liked the guy. I didn't think I wanted to do that. Anyway, I wound up doing some work for the Public Affairs Council, and I liked the people there.

I had been working for a client who was a food importer, from overseas, and one of his managers had disappeared from a town in Latin America, and nobody knew what had happened to him. They weren't getting any kind of cooperation out of the State Department and they came to us and I managed to get the guy out just using contacts in the White House that I knew. And, working there late in the afternoon, the head of the Agency came in, announced that we were having a party at a Georgetown club. And, while we wined and dined, we were going to be discussing various plans. I said, "I can't go; I am expecting a call, and this guy is going to be sprung at any moment." They said, "Nothing is ever going to happen. Nothing is going to happen over a weekend. This is a Friday." And, of course, he got out, and instead of getting a call from me....Ella Fitzgerald was up there scattin' away,

Q: Ella Fitzgerald, a famous singer.

PEDERSEN: And... he got the call from the Desk Officer in the State Department that the man was out.

Q: Was he being held? Was he being kidnapped?

PEDERSEN: The Roja boys (ph) had grabbed him and were trying to extort a little money. That's what it came down to...that's what they had planned on doing. But, anyway, there was a strange thing. I got a call in the middle of the night, while this was going on, just one message and the guy hung up, "Your man at CIA ...the man who had disappeared was CIA"...and I believed it. Anyway, we got him out; we got a nice commendation from the company, acknowledging the fact that we had done it. I liked being able to compete with other public relations firms. I didn't like the idea that I had to work on getting a proposition, a proposal ready for an outfit for a breakfast at 7 o'clock in the morning and have this sprung on me and I had to work until 4 o'clock in the morning to come up with something and they'd sent....I got tired of this. I was quite pleased to get out of there. The Council, at that time, was headed by a fellow who looked like a real movie actor, Dick Armsol. I had a lot of contacts around town, and they were just getting into the idea of corporate political action. This is one of the outfits that really started the move

Q: PAC, so called PAC. [Public Affairs Council]

PEDERSEN: Yeah. I was doing a lot of stuff there promoting them as workable solutions to political problems. I wound up there until two years ago. I had a heart attack. It was interesting. I was putting out the publication, Public Affairs Review, which was a quarterly, and putting out a lot of other publications. It was challenging. The Association Trends magazine decided I was The Great Association Communicator and they named me that in '89. They did announce that at a video they had last week. I was still the Great Association Communicator. It was a lot more fun being out of government. A lot of things were challenging in Government, but not much fun, because you never got real credit for what you were doing anything.

Q: We'll stop at this point.

End of Interview.