

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

**EDWARD C. KEEFER**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*  
*Initial interview date: April 5, 2010*  
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**INTERVIEW**

[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Keefer.]

*Q: Today is the 5th of April, 2010, and this is with Edward C. Keefer, known as Ted. And what does the “C” stand for:*

KEEFER: Coltrin.

*Q: Is it a family name?*

KEEFER: Family name, yes. Famous family name.

*Q: Okay. This interview, I might point out, is a rather purposeful one in that Ted is not a Foreign Service officer but has been, for many years, with the Office of the Historian. He's no longer there but compiling the records of American diplomacy and I think for people who were interested and use the FRUS.*

KEEFER: Foreign Relations of the United States.

*Q: The Foreign Relations of the United States they should understand some of the mechanisms and the personalities and how things are chosen. There have been some flare ups, as we'll come to it, from time to time there, so it's not an undisputatious organization but that's not the prime purpose; the prime purpose is to have researchers understand what makes the foreign relations series tick.*

*Okay Ted, when and where were you born?*

KEEFER: I was born in Philadelphia, PA, in 1945.

*Q: Alright, and let's talk a bit, where do the Keefers come from? Let's go on your father's side first.*

KEEFER: My father was a Canadian family who happened to be born during the First World War in North Carolina. So when the Second World War came he was in the Canadian Navy but he was a doctor and he got an internship in the United States so he was able to become an American citizen.

*Q: Well let's talk a little more; do you know anything about some on the Canadian side? Where do they originally come from?*

KEEFER: Oh, you really want the whole history of the people?

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: The Keefers were Empire loyalists; after the American Revolution left New Jersey and moved to Ontario. And I'm embarrassed to say that one of my great-grandfathers fought against the American cause in the Revolution and was a member of the Queen's Rangers, and I know this because it's family history. He died on Staten Island of fever, what they called camp fever which I guess could be anything.

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: But he was on the wrong side. So they were part of that movement of Americans who went to Canada.

*Q: Yes, many also ended up in Ontario.*

KEEFER: Right. They in fact were given land, free land, and they started a town.

*Q: Well then, what sort of occupation were they involved in, do you know?*

KEEFER: Oh I suppose they were originally farmers but then they sort of moved and became engineers and stuff. The theme, I think, is engineering.

*Q: And your father, did he go to university?*

KEEFER: He went to McGill University for undergraduate and as a medical student.

*Q: Then on your mother's side?*

KEEFER: The reason they met is that she was an American living in Montreal because her father worked for RCA Victor and was sent to Canada to be the president of RCA Victor-Canada during the war, just before the war and then during it.

*Q: Where did she go to school?*

KEEFER: She went to schools in Montreal then she went to Wellesley.

*Q: Where did they meet?*

KEEFER: They met in Montreal. She went one year to McGill and then transferred to Wellesley.

*Q: Well then you- But you were brought up in-*

KEEFER: By the time I was born they moved back to the United States. He had become an American, he always was an American citizen, being born in the United States but he declared his American citizenship.

*Q: Did you pretty well grow up in the Philadelphia area?*

KEEFER: They moved to New York eventually; I grew up on Long Island. Originally I lived in New York City when my dad was a resident, an intern at Cornell Medical, you know, part of the New York City, their facility there, and then when I was five I moved out to Long Island.

*Q: Where in Long Island?*

KEEFER: Town of Oyster Bay, which is about 30 miles out of New York City.

*Q: Do you have brothers, sisters?*

KEEFER: Two younger sisters.

*Q: Well what was growing up in Oyster Bay like?*

KEEFER: Well it was sort of rural suburban; now of course it's very suburban but it still had a sort of rural atmosphere. It was a very fancy town with originally lots of big estates and over the years they were all sort of split up. It's still quite a nice area.

*Q: With your family, would you call yourself sort of a middle middle class?*

KEEFER: I guess so, yes. My dad was a surgeon. He's now dead. He wasn't a great businessman and he never really made the kind of effort that I think people must to really be successful financially. I think he was successful as a surgeon.

*Q: Well that's handy.*

KEEFER: Yes but he was not very good at the business side. We were comfortable but we weren't rich. He had problems paying his bills.

*Q: What about, you know, just sort of growing up there? What do you recall? Did you get out and play with the kids at all?*

KEEFER: In the '50s we did a lot of playing with other kids and unsupervised play, which nobody does anymore.

*Q: I call it feral but-*

KEEFER: Right, exactly. Just sort of going from, you know, shooting baskets on someone's barn or playing catch a flyer up at night, you know, that kind of stuff. And very little organized. We had the Little League and things like that but they were not very many times. Mostly it was just unorganized play.

*Q: What about with your family, first, religion; where did they fall?*

KEEFER: Well they were nominal Christians. They made me go to Sunday School when I was 11 and 10 and I didn't like it much. I'll tell you one thing, my Sunday School teacher was Dick Van Dyke, because he lived in the area.

*Q: A very famous comedian.*

KEEFER: Yes, comedian, when he was doing Bye Bye Birdie and he was friends with my parents and went to the same church. My father was not religious; my mother was more religious and she was the one who pushed us into going. But as soon as I could get out of it I didn't go.

*Q: How about politically? Where did they fall?*

KEEFER: My dad was pretty conservative Republican; my mom was one of those Democrats who would go either way. I remember when Nixon lost the 1960 election my dad was just distraught. I sort of picked up on that, oh this is terrible, Nixon's lost.

*Q: This is he lost to Kennedy.*

KEEFER: Yes, right, and then of course by the time I went to college I was pro-Kennedy. But I thought I would sort of follow my father's lead.

*Q: Yes. Well as a kid were you much of a reader?*

KEEFER: The only thing I really liked to read about was history. I knew very early on in my life that history was going to be what I liked best. When I went to school I did best in it. I had this sort of ability to put events in a sequence. I could understand when things happened. I remember reading, the first book I had was The Golden Book of History, which is kind of a child's world history. I just devoured that as a kid and really that's what got me interested in history.

*Q: Did you get involved in the history of Long Island and all?*

KEEFER: No, I wasn't too big on local history, I must admit. I wasn't a fanatic on history, but it was my favorite subject. And I won the history prize at school so that was it.

*Q: Was Teddy Roosevelt a figure in-*

KEEFER: Yes. In elementary school we were always taken to Sagamore Hill and I was just always amazed by all these animals' heads and elephants' feet. I didn't really know much about Theodore Roosevelt but I knew he was a big hunter, that was my main knowledge of Theodore Roosevelt, but it was one of those trips that you went because it was in Oyster Bay.

*Q: Yes. Well, how about at school? I take it was public elementary?*

KEEFER: I went to public elementary then I went to a Quaker school.

*Q: Well let's talk about the public elementary; for what grades did you go?*

KEEFER: One through six.

*Q: How did you find that?*

KEEFER: Well it was one of these Long Island schools that kept expanding. I started off going to a very small public school called Jericho Public School, but as people moved out into the Long Island suburbs they had to keep building new schools. I must have been to three or four new schools because every year they would have to build a new school. In

the '50s Long Island moved from being sort of rural to being much more of a suburban area.

*Q: Long Island was one of the places that probably got hit more by the Baby Boom than-*

KEEFER: Exactly, exactly.

*Q: -anywhere else.*

*Did the outside world intrude much on you during the '50s?*

KEEFER: Not really. It was of course an age of innocence when you're in your early teens. The only thing was that sort of pervasive fear of nuclear war because we had to do the drills, you know, the duck and cover. I remember when I was 12 or 13 I was babysitting my sisters. I started hearing sirens and I thought oh my God, it's a nuclear war. My parents had given me the number to call and I called them up. I said, I think there's a nuclear war going to happen, and they assured me it was not a nuclear war. Well what's the point of calling your parents if it's a nuclear war? It was the only thing I could think of doing. So, in the '50s, I was sort of uneasy about the Cold War and about the threat of a nuclear war.

*Q: Were you getting any feel for the ethnic divisions within the United States at this time?*

KEEFER: No. Long Island was predominantly a white area. I had very few non-white friends.

*Q: How about the Christian-Jewish?*

KEEFER: Heavily. A lot of people came out who were Jewish. I did have a lot of Jewish friends.

*Q: But did that-*

KEEFER: There was a probably latent anti-Semitism in a lot of people in the '50s where I grew up, but I suppose that would be certainly in the older generation, my parents' generation.

*Q: Yes. Well this was almost a generational thing.*

KEEFER: Yes, yes.

*Q: I think the next -- your generation sort of -- what's it all about? I mean, I'm a lot older than you but I used to feel what's the big deal?*

KEEFER: And I think that's the way kids nowadays feel about race; they don't get the race thing, or most of them don't get the race thing.

*Q: Why did you go to a Quaker school?*

KEEFER: I guess because of the disruption because the school system kept growing and growing. Maybe I wasn't doing that well in school. That could have been the problem. But I did go to this school called Friends Academy which was a big Quaker school in the area. And my mom, before she went to Montreal had grown up in a town called Moorestown, New Jersey, near Philadelphia, which is a Quaker town. In fact I can remember when I was young that my grandmother, her friends were Quakers and they would talk about thee and thou. So she had been to a Quaker school and so she wanted me to go to this Quaker school, I think.

*Q: You went there for what grades?*

KEEFER: From seventh to twelfth.

*Q: Alright. How did it strike you? Was it different really?*

KEEFER: Well it was a little different. It broke out of the norm of let's say suburban -- the 1950s and '60s. Most of the professors were probably liberal Democrats. I remember having Norman Thomas come and speak, the Socialist candidate when he was running. Bobby Kennedy came and spoke there when he was running. So I remember being exposed to a broader spectrum of political and social influences.

*Q: Did you find yourself getting engaged, you know, as a high school kid, in any of the political disputes?*

KEEFER: I was pretty apolitical. I liked sports, playing sports, and I suppose I really wasn't that interested in politics. The only other political thing I remember was the McCarthy era much earlier, to go back a little bit. I remember that people would make jokes about McCarthy. Have you been or are you now a member of the something, you know. That phrase stuck in my head, so that was one of the influences that I must have felt in the '50s because I do remember that as a kid.

*Q: The Quaker school; do Quakers date in high school?*

KEEFER: Yes, they do. There are not that many Quakers anymore so most people were non-Quaker.

*Q: Methodists?*

KEEFER: It's a co-ed school and there was a standard junior prom, senior prom, all that kind of stuff.

*Q: Again, here at the school, what courses did you like and what didn't you like?*

KEEFER: Well obviously the history courses were the ones I liked a lot; those were my favorite courses. They had some relatively good teachers who did surveys of American history; we read some of the basic books about the presidency. We just did basic surveying and then a survey of world history and I think I might have taken European history too.

*Q: During all this period were there any novels or non-fiction books that particularly grabbed you that you can think of?*

KEEFER: I remember reading Catch 22.

*Q: Oh yes.*

KEEFER: Reading that avidly when I was in high school. And sort of realizing it was kind of an anti-war book. I was sort of just reading it for the story but then it sort of dawned on me that this is really a book about how the insanity of war. You know, that's sort of the Quaker way.

*Q: Sure, absolutely.*

KEEFER: It wasn't an assigned book; I just read it on my own.

*Q: Well you graduated from high school when?*

KEEFER: Nineteen sixty-three.

*Q: So the Vietnam War really didn't-*

KEEFER: Wasn't a-

*Q: I mean, that wasn't a particular issue.*

KEEFER: Not when I was a graduate from high school, no.

*Q: Well you got your nuclear taste of the Cuban Missile Crisis.*

KEEFER: Right, which didn't leave a big impression on me; I'm surprised. I do remember vaguely people saying they were a bit worried but it was so short. I think, it was 11 days, you know.

*Q: Yes. Did sort of American diplomacy ever cross your radar?*

KEEFER: Not really. I remember there were sections in the book, was it Bailey? I think we might have read that book, which is sort of a survey of American diplomacy. I did read that and I sort of got a sense of the American expansion and the American Manifest Destiny. Usually it stopped about the First World War.

*Q: Did Quakerism intrude at all into your-?*

KEEFER: We went to meeting once a week. They didn't push the pacifism on the students, but I think they allowed students to make their own decisions. And a lot of people who went to those schools eventually became, if not practicing Quakers, philosophical Quakers.

*Q: How did it work? I've always been the person who if people are- everybody's quiet I feel like I should stand up and say I'm guilty or something like that.*

KEEFER: Right. I never said anything. There was a lot of quiet time, and then some of the teachers would say something. Occasionally students would say things and some of the students were quite articulate. The teachers gave the standard pap, but some of the students' comments were a lot better.

*Q: Well then, obviously coming from where you were and your parents and all, you were pointing towards college, weren't you?*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: Did you have any idea where you wanted to go, what you wanted to be?*

KEEFER: I wanted to study history at university, international relations, political science; those kind of fields. And I went to McGill University which was a good thing because it was a lot cheaper. I was accepted at Brown and where else? And I just thought, you know, I'd go to McGill because it was where my father went and it was a big city and my dad was really happy because it was really quite cheap; it was much cheaper than American colleges.

*Q: Well you went to McGill from '63 to-?*

KEEFER: Sixty-seven.

*Q: Well let's talk about McGill. How did McGill strike you? McGill is located in?*

KEEFER: Montreal, Canada.

*Q: Montreal. And what's its background?*

KEEFER: It's the oldest university in Canada. I believe it was started by James McGill in 1821. It's an old line university which had a lot of 19th Century history, I think. It was strong on sciences, medicine. I just went by general reputation and where I could get in. I didn't realize it was stronger in science than it was in liberal arts but it still had good liberal arts. University of Toronto would probably be the better liberal arts school. If I had known that I should probably have applied there.

*Q: During the unrest in the- on the campuses was- first you had the free speech movement and then you had the civil rights and the anti-Vietnam thing, and this would be in another country but did any of this spill over?*

KEEFER: Yes, ironically it did. There was a strong anti-war movement in Montreal, which meant people were picketing the American consulate in Montreal. I mean, I wasn't involved in that but I do remember students talking about it. And students talked about civil rights. That was a little more removed. One, there were a lot of Americans there and two, Canadians are really interested in American politics and American culture and they virtually know Americans as well as Americans know themselves. In some respects though you have a sort of extra added advantage because they can have a little objectivity, so there was a lot of interest in civil rights, anti-war, those kind of movements in the later '60s.

*Q: Well did you find yourself sort of, although you'd lived a relatively isolated existence, coming from Long Island and all that, but either a defender of a detractor of the United States?*

KEEFER: Yes, I was forced on occasion to defend the United States, definitely. Not so much specific issues, but there was a certain amount of anti-Americanism in Canada, a small group, and they tended to be critical of the United States and you tended to react by, you know, by defending it.

*Q: Well I think it was, I may be wrong on this, but I think this was a particularly difficult time for an American because Trudeau was the, wasn't he the prime minister?*

KEEFER: I think he was not. I think he was slightly later.

*Q: Still, I mean, there's always been this, you know, Canadians, we're different and the United States is going through a difficult time so it's kind of fun to be a little bit holier than thou.*

KEEFER: Yes, there is that. Canadians can tend to be somewhat self-righteous about America and they always used to say well they didn't massacre the Indians like we did and blah, blah, blah. But I do remember during the Kennedy assassination, my first year, and that was a great outpouring, I think, of the support for America. That was a tremendously important event that impacted a lot of peoples' lives and at that time I realized I was a Democrat, that I admired Kennedy so I was sorry just that he was killed.

*Q: As you were taking history was there- were you getting much Canadian history?*

KEEFER: I did take Canadian history at McGill. I did get interested in Canadian history and it's not as exciting as American history but there's a lot of parallelism between what's happening in Canada and what's happening in the United States. One of my first really primary research papers I did was on the progressive movement in Canada

comparing it to the progressive movement in America, in the United States. And you know, seeing there was a similar progressive movement in Canada, I just read newspapers and magazines but I did get a feel for it. It was the first real time that I did sort of primary research and realized that history wasn't just reading books and reciting back dates and facts; it was actually making interpretations based on evidence. And that I found very exciting.

*Q: Well you mention exciting but Canadian history not being as exciting; I know I belong to a Civil War studies group and we've got quite a few Canadians because they don't have any real-*

KEEFER: No, they don't have many-

*Q: I mean, they have World War-*

KEEFER: They have one war, the War of 1812, which they think they won; we think it was a tie. They did turn back the invasion of Canada by the American forces.

*Q: Sure, they're stopped.*

KEEFER: And that's where the name "Coltrin" comes from because this ancestor of mine, Asa Coltrin was a POW (prisoner of war), American POW. He was a doctor and he was an American POW in the war of 1812. In those days you were put in a house when you were a POW and you promised not to try to escape and you lived with a family. Well he married the daughter of the family and it was the Keefer family. That's how he got into the Keefers. So it's sort of a romantic story that a lot of people who are Keefers use his name because of the romanticism of the POW marrying the family's daughter.

*Q: Were you aware or was it happening of a rather significant leakage of talent from McGill towards the United States?*

KEEFER: Yes, there was, and Canadian magazines would always do these articles about Canadians who make it in the United States, you know, in various professions. For Canadians it's a tough thing because of the lure of the United States. But then, at that time of course there were a lot of people who were avoiding the draft who came north and there were particularly towards the end of my career at McGill, a lot of professors ended up teaching at Canadian universities.

*Q: Well coming out of a Quaker school, how did you feel about the Vietnam War?*

KEEFER: I did not want to go to Vietnam. By that time I had decided it was a bad war and it was a war that I didn't want to fight in.

*Q: Well how did that play out?*

KEEFER: Well luckily I had high blood pressure. I was at Michigan State this time. I had a grad student deferment. I was married by that time and I had a child and all of those deferments were ended. I went to the draft physical but I didn't pass; I was 1Y, which was very relieving to me.

*Q: What about during your- while you were at McGill, how as, say, England or the British Empire, Britain treated?*

KEEFER: McGill still had the old system of first class, second class, third class honors, which is a British system. After I left they changed to the American marking system and they were in a transitional period. There were still English professors from Oxford and Cambridge but they tended to be rather stodgy and the more dynamic professors were Canadians and Americans. And you could tell that Canada was moving towards the United States in its educational system. The Canadian universities were moving away from the English educational system.

*Q: Did you find in history that you were beginning to look at any particular country or area?*

KEEFER: Well I was interested in U.S.-Canadian relations. That's why I went to Michigan State, also because I got in there but they had a program in U.S.-Canadian relations. The only trouble was when I got there the professor had gone off to teach in a Canadian university. So I just basically took British and American history and then ended up actually at Michigan State doing European diplomatic history. That was my field that I finally went into.

*Q: Universities and American universities have undergone quite a bit of strain during the '60s and you were at Michigan State?*

KEEFER: Sixty-eight to '73.

*Q: Well how was Michigan State? You're a grad student, which made a difference but how was the campus dealing with-?*

KEEFER: There were a lot of protests on the campus. These protest camps would spring up and they would be down there, you know, for weeks. There was no violence, I don't remember much violence but I do remember definitely protests, teach-ins, things like that.

*Q: I just recently have been interviewing a man who was a student at Wisconsin and saying, you know, he was there when they blew up a place and killed somebody and all that.*

KEEFER: Michigan State was probably not of the same caliber as Wisconsin but it still had a very strong anti-war movement. As a grad student you kind of stayed out of it. The grad students signed a petition opposing the war in Vietnam and one of the professors

was pro-war. He refused to have anything to do with the student, which I thought was really unfair, and he had been chairman of his dissertation committee. So the guy had to go find another professor. We all signed it, we the graduate students of Michigan State University oppose the war in Vietnam and this one guy got in trouble with his professor, which I thought was very unfair. I mean, a university is supposed to be a place where you could have differing views. But it was a time when it was very unnerving.

*Q: Were there sort of Marxist professors roaming around?*

KEEFER: Yes, there were a few. There was one at Michigan State, I forget his name now; really gave up teaching and became a demonstration leader. I didn't take his class. He taught about the progressive movement in the United States. His classes were merely harangues about the Vietnam War and then he would go out and lead the group in a demonstration.

There was a big march on Lansing, that I took part in; so did my wife and my daughter. It was a demonstration of anti-war attitude. It's ironic that I was anti-war and when I came to the State Department the first thing I ended up writing was about the Vietnam War or editing the Vietnam War documents for decades. So, I may not have served in Vietnam but I certainly put in my time trying to understand why we got in and how we got out.

*Q: While you were at Michigan State were you pointing towards a doctorate?*

KEEFER: Yes, I got the doctoral degree.

*Q: Continued at Michigan State?*

KEEFER: I got a teaching fellowship and in-state tuition and got a small stipend, which I could live on, basically.

*Q: What was your dissertation?*

KEEFER: It was on British and European rivalry in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia, in the late 19th and early 20th century. It was a time where the French and the British were moving together in Europe but they were still at odds in the Horn of Africa.

*Q: Was there any connect between that and the Fashoda business?*

KEEFER: Yes because that was France's great attempt to try to establish a beachhead in the Horn of Africa. It really was all about the sources of the Nile. The British were really worried about the Blue Nile source in Ethiopia that, you know, they were afraid somebody was going to dam them. Of course it was not a real possibility, but it was a geo-political fear; they wanted to make sure the French didn't become dominant in Ethiopia.

*Q: When did the Italians get in?*

KEEFER: The Italians lost the Battle of Adowa in 1896. That's when people sent representatives to Ethiopia. And the person I studied was an Indian army officer who went there. He had been in Somaliland as a sort of a resident, which was kind of like a commissioner. It was a protectorate and he was working actually for the \_\_\_\_\_ but then he was sent there as the first minister. So I really followed his career in Ethiopia.

*Q: This- Did Africa raise any- I mean did it really interest you?*

KEEFER: Yes, it did. I did become interested in British imperial history in Africa especially. And this year finally went to Africa for the first time. So I fulfilled that dream. But yes, I was always interested in Africa, faraway places interesting.

*Q: Well I got back in the end of the '60s I guess I was INR officer for the Horn of Africa.*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: And I remember looking up- I had these- Checking on Haile Selassie, was- I had to figure out who was going to replace him. And people have been doing that since 1916, actually.*

KEEFER: That's right. One of the reasons I did my dissertation on Ethiopia was because we had at Michigan State a very strong African history department. Harold Marcus was one of the leading historians of Ethiopia. He said look, this is a really interesting character; you should write a dissertation about him. Marcus knew Ethiopia really well and had done a major biography of the emperor, Menelik the Second, who unified Ethiopia during and after the battle against the Italians. I benefitted a lot from his courses and from his knowledge of Ethiopia.

*Q: The Battle of Adowa. I served in Italy at one time and you know, you had people sort of made reference to the fact that supposedly a lot of the prisoners, Italian prisoners, had their balls cut off.*

KEEFER: I think that was a rumor; don't know if it was true or not.

*Q: I don't know. I remember even seeing an Italian movie based on an officer-*

KEEFER: Yes. It may have been the dead prisoners.

*Q: Yes. But anyway.*

KEEFER: It was a real stunning defeat because it was the first time that an African army defeated Europeans. I tried to read about the campaign. It sounds like, you know, they got sort of lost in the mountains.

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: That's the kind of thing that can go wrong anywhere but they were a well-trained force. We forget the Italians had a reputation as being for the 19th century quite military.

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: With Garibaldi and the unification of Italy. And it's only that they got a bad reputation after Adowa.

*Q: While you were at Michigan State, were you aware, was it evident that there was a growing disparity between the political science types and the history types, which later, I guess now is almost an impossible chasm or something.*

KEEFER: Yes, it wasn't that bad. I took some fairly elementary political science courses but I had friends that were in the political science departments. They started getting very much into quantification, working on computers, getting computer time on those big huge computers. They had to do these sort of studies and they were going off in that direction and I never heard of a computer let alone knew how to use one. At that time my interest was just private sources.

*Q: Yes. I've got a fairly strong prejudice; I just think it's a waste of time.*

KEEFER: Yes, there are some political scientists who are coming back. Some of the better historians turned out to actually be political scientists who have been gravitated back to history. I don't know how they're treated by the other political scientists but there are quite a number now who are quite good historians.

*Q: How did you find the PhD process? Some people I've talked to find it rather stultifying and others find it, you know, a lot of fun.*

KEEFER: I enjoyed it. It was what I always wanted to do, history, and after I did a few courses in political science all I took were history courses. We had reading courses, seminars; some were better than others. Some of the professors were kind of lazy and you did the book and you talked about the book and that's all you did. And other ones were more challenging and inspiring. My main professor was a British historian who was very, very good, but he moved out of history and became an administrator. But I found him if not inspiring at least impressive.

*Q: Well, you know, people I've talked to who have gone through the European system have found that at the university level so often the professor would come and lecture-read from yellowed notes-*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: -read to a class and then disappear.*

KEEFER: That's what they tended to do in undergraduate classes. I was a teaching assistant for a lot of professors. They tended to do that in undergraduate. In the graduate program it tended to be more seminars. A lot of it was sitting around basically just talking. I found that to be a better system. The undergraduate was pretty much taking lecture notes.

But when you're an undergraduate, I found at McGill- I really enjoyed learning things, information. When you got to be a grad student you got much more into what made up history and historiography, theories of history. You realize there wasn't one interpretation, there were multiple interpretations of history.

*Q: Well Ted, when you were at McGill and all, did you find you were sort of reading the newspapers about foreign- well history was in the making at the time- what was going on; were you taking a more interested look about what was happening in the world?*

KEEFER: The Montreal papers were not that good on international relations and I didn't read an American paper so I was a little bit out of it. At East Lansing you could get a better American paper. I was always interested in international relations and in Africa and Vietnam.

*Q: What was your feeling about Vietnam?*

KEEFER: I was virtually in the last group of people that really were subject to the draft. When did they go to the all-volunteer army? I should know this. Nineteen seventy-three?

*Q: Something like that.*

KEEFER: Yes. And they went to a draft lottery earlier than that and I had of course a low draft number, which was too bad. I felt that the war was wrong and we weren't there for the right reasons but also, quite frankly, I didn't want my life disrupted. It was partially a selfish feeling.

*Q: No, well I think this is- I mean one-*

KEEFER: I wanted to get on with my career, I wanted to get my PhD; I didn't want to have to go spend two years.

*Q: Well one notes that the great protests about our war in Vietnam and what was happening over there, once the draft ended we were still involved to a certain extent but the campus interest just stopped.*

KEEFER: Right. And also by that time Nixon had withdrawn most of the troops from Vietnam. But only the real anti-war demonstrators continued the battle against the war.

*Q: Yes.*

*Did the State Department loom at all in your mind?*

KEEFER: No, it didn't. I never had any idea that I was going to work for the government. Like all students I felt a little anti-government. I didn't think much of the government. But it was a very hard time to get a teaching job particularly if you weren't from Harvard or Yale or someplace like that. I actually got a teaching job when I just had an MA. I said well I'm not going to take this job. I just applied on a lark. I'll wait until I get my PhD then I'll get a better job. Well I couldn't have gotten the job I was offered when I had the MA by the time I got my PhD because the market had collapsed. It was very hard to get a teaching job. I remember writing thousands- And you know, there was no central way of doing it; you just had to sort of write to the universities and-

*Q: One hears about market collapse; why would- what would cause sort of a- almost like a stock market up and down-?*

KEEFER: Well I think we put our finger on it, the Vietnam War. People stayed in graduate programs because they didn't want to be drafted. Plus lots of universities like Michigan State, think tank universities, started really churning out PhDs. I mean, the more PhDs you produced the better your university was. There were like 56 people in the PhD program at Michigan State, I believe, and that's a lot of PhDs to get jobs for. Most people got a job eventually and some of them got relatively good jobs but it was hard, it was really hard. One of the professors at Michigan State, Paul Sweet, had worked for the State Department as an editor of the captured German war documents. He vouched for me at the State Department and then I got an interview and got a job there.

*Q: So you graduated- you got your PhD in-?*

KEEFER: I actually had finished my dissertation when I came to work at the State Department. Then it was called the Historical Office. I was one of about 12 PhDs they hired and everybody was from a Big Ten school or University of Texas or Berkeley but nobody was from the Ivy League. I didn't really take much notice of it until later I was working on the Nixon files and noticed a memo about the Office of the Historian from Ehrlichman to Nixon. Ehrlichman said, the State Department wants to hire historians so they can speed up the foreign relations of the United States. They want to hire 10 or 11 people. Ironically it went up to the president and he approved. Nixon said, yes, no Ivy League people.

*Q: Honest to God?*

KEEFER: Honest to God. I've seen the memo.

*Q: I think it's wonderful.*

KEEFER: So then it dawned on me, that's why I got a job because I wasn't the Ivy League. And I changed my view of Nixon right then and there. He was a very wise man.

*Q: Well of course he'd been beaten over the head by-*

KEEFER: By that time he was so fed up with professors and Ivy League types.

*Q: Well then, here you are in a non-Ivy League context. What was your first job?*

KEEFER: When I came to the Office of the Historian, I was not in the foreign relations side of the office; I was in the policy research side, and I was supposed to write a history of U.S. response to terrorism in the '70s, because that was 1973 that I started working. I did a lot of research. I really focused on airport and airline security and the diplomatic attempts to solve that problem. The idea was that hijackers would be extradited. It was worked out through mutual agreement. That was my first job. Then I switched over to the foreign relations side and started working on the end of the Korean War.

*Q: Well the- Terrorism, you know, we've gone through various stages and this was basically...*

KEEFER: Basically the terrorism tended to be hijacking of planes, of Cubans hijacking and leaving Cuba or leftists, people who were dissidents going to Cuba, and then there was the Arab hijacking of planes.

*Q: The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization).*

KEEFER: PLO, stuff like that. So what the airlines had to do was one, they had to work out the sterile concourse concept, where they would prevent people from getting in with arms. They had to have these agreements where if you wanted to have air traffic going into your country you had to agree to extradite hijackers, otherwise people wouldn't fly into your country. That's why Cuba was always a destination.

*Q: Yes. I guess, '73 or so, I was consul general in Athens when the PLO attacked a plane, had nothing to do with- I think they got the wrong plane. Had nothing to do with Israel but just mainly Greek Americans, TWA I think it was, coming home or something; killed a bunch of Americans and they were all caught. They were really terrorists, they weren't even hijackers, and eventually the Greeks let them go.*

KEEFER: Yes, there was a lot of that. The U.S. Government was part of a group trying to prevent that. And so I did that but to me the foreign relations seemed to be the more interesting side of the office so I soon transferred over there.

*Q: Who was the head of the Historian's Office?*

KEEFER: William Franklin, who had been there for a long time. He was older -- probably younger than I am now -- but I thought of him as old. He was the director of the office and the general editor when I applied for the job was Everett Gleason. He was the guy who took the meetings of the NSC (National Security Council) meetings' records

under Eisenhower and also had written a book on U.S. diplomatic history with Langer. It's a famous survey of diplomatic history so I was kind of impressed with him but by the time I got there he had retired and another guy had become the general editor.

*Q: What was the atmosphere when you came in?*

KEEFER: It was interesting. It was all of these young people coming in so there was a bit of tension between the new people and the older people, a lot of ambition of people. There was still tension on the Vietnam War. Some of the office opposed the war, some didn't. I was ready to get down to a job and to work, make some money and buy a house and settle down.

I never really knew the Washington area so I was surprised how nice it was. And I had some other friends. My good friend from Michigan State was teaching at George Washington University. He helped me meet people that he knew and I got to know some people in Washington. I never thought I was going to end up in Washington but in retrospect I'm glad I came.

*Q: Well did the Historians Office at the time, did you- How would one show one's sort of ambition?*

KEEFER: There was an older group of men and women who were probably in their 50s and they were at the division level and they were starting to retire. It was more of an informal process; I don't think you even bothered to apply, you just got told you were promoted. Nowadays you have to apply for the job but in those days you just got tapped on the shoulder.

*Q: Well did you get any feel for the Department of State or were you sort of sealed off?*

KEEFER: Once you started working for the department you got a pretty good feel for how the Foreign Service worked, how the department worked. It tended to be 30 years after the fact. I mean, the Department of State that I really knew most about was the Department of State in the 1950s or then the Department of State in the 1960s. You did get to be much more knowledgeable about the department than you would have been as an independent scholar. Not only did you spend years reading the records and collecting the records but also you were there. And there was that tension in those days, I don't know if it still exists, probably does, between Civil Servants and Foreign Service officers.

When I came into the department, they decided they were going to get rid of that and make everybody Foreign Service officers. So I was a Foreign Service reserve officer. This meant I was theoretically liable to be asked to go abroad but of course I never was because I was an historian. Officially I was a Foreign Service reserve officer, not a Civil Servant. The problem was that the Foreign Service reserve didn't get promoted. Your job was not connected to your rank so you had to be promoted by a board. The boards were stingy with promotions. What they basically decided was that the Foreign Service reserve system was not a good system; they had to get rid of it. So they stopped promoting

people. Quite a hard time getting a promotion as a Foreign Service reserve officer. Eventually I switched to Civil Service, except I was able to stay in the Foreign Service retirement system. So now when I retired I'm treated as a Foreign Service officer. I get invited to Foreign Service Day.

*Q: Well your first job was what?*

KEEFER: First job was working in policy studies and then the next job, after about a year, I went over and worked for John Glennon, who was the division chief. He had been doing the career volumes for the Korean War. I took over to do the one that covered 1952 to 1954, which was the end of the Korean War, and the last year of Truman and start of Eisenhower sort of end to the Korean War.

*Q: What was your impression the first time you were sort of immersed into the documents?*

KEEFER: For an historian, that job was really a fabulous job because you were essentially let loose in records that in those days nobody else could see until they were declassified and we were seeing them. And we had all the clearances and access so we would go into the Department of State files and the great, really great excitement was going into the presidential files. By that time we were heavily into presidential libraries so I remember going to the Eisenhower Library and the Truman Library and really enjoying seeing those high level files.

*Q: Well those files and the presidential ones, were they restricted too at the time?*

KEEFER: I wasn't the first but the office was the first group to actually see, other than the participants themselves, the minutes of NSC (National Security Council) meetings under Eisenhower. Nobody knew these existed. The NSC didn't publicize the fact that they had these huge memoranda of conversation. They were minutes that Gleason had done. They made copies and put them in the suitcase and took them back to Washington and then took them to the office. You couldn't do that nowadays. And there was some question whether these things would ever be released but they were, and I think they really revolutionized the view of Eisenhower as a president.

*Q: What were you getting as you're looking at this, a young guy-*

KEEFER: It's almost a "you are there" kind of history. All of a sudden you're listening to the debates, among the Eisenhower Administration in my case, about whether or not to use the atomic weapon to end the Korean War. I mean, they never got to the point where they agreed they were going to do it but they certainly discussed it in great detail. And that was really exciting to read that kind of stuff.

*Q: Was there any overflow into the Vietnam War? I mean, you know, I'm talking about Dien Bien Phu?*

KEEFER: This was '53 and Dien Bien Phu was '54, and there was a guy who was working on a big volume on Indochina.

*Q: So it would- that would have been in that one.*

KEEFER: Yes, and he was very interested in the decision not to support the French at Dien Bien Phu. His main objective was to document how close we came to supporting the French and using nuclear weapons at Dien Bien Phu.

*Q: You must have picked up an awful lot of frustration of our administration with the Koreans and Syngman Rhee and all.*

KEEFER: In fact I wrote an article about that after the volume came out. Yes, there was a lot of frustration, one with his anti-Democratic tendencies and two with his unwillingness to accept the armistice.

*Q: Freeing the prisoners.*

KEEFER: Freeing the prisoners, yes. It was bad enough having to negotiate with the North Koreans who were impossible to negotiate with but then having to negotiate with the South Koreans as well. I really felt for the ambassador and for the military types in Korea; they had a really hard job.

*Q: Well how did this work, because you had the Panmunjom business and all and you had- our lead negotiator was an admiral.*

KEEFER: Right, Admiral Turner Joy. Well, the military armistice talks were done by military officers but they were getting their instructions from the White House and from the State Department.

*Q: Well was the Department of Defense, their historians, how did this work?*

*Were you looking over your shoulder or-?*

KEEFER: They'd already written a book on the Korean War because I used it; it was called Truce Tent and Fighting Front and it was their history of the Korean War. So they were ahead of us on the Korean War. They had really focused on the battles. But they did have some stuff on the diplomacy too. I remember that was a major source I used.

*Q: Well did you look upon the Army Green Books, the battle-*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: -as sort of a guideline of what the Department State should be doing?*

KEEFER: Well the ones on the Korean War were black but they were based on the Green Books. We were much more dealing with high policy, with policy determinations and the military, the historians tended to write the history of the war as a war itself, campaigns, battles, offenses, counter-offenses, but they also got into the question of the POWs (Prisoners of War) and negotiations because it was a military negotiation. By the time I got to the foreign relations staff it became clearer and clearer that we couldn't cover everything. We had to start focusing on foreign policy of the United States. So the series really should be called the Foreign Policy of the United States. The old relations which we had in the 19th century where they would publish all of those batches coming from a country and the instructions going out or a good percentage of it, you just couldn't do that anymore. There were so many cables going out so you really had to focus on some of the major policy issues.

*Q: Well did you run into the problem that I think is- With the military, if General X goes to the left flank and he probably should have gone to the right flank, okay, that's General X, you know, and that's something. But when you're dealing with foreign policy very quickly it moves right up to the top. Even no matter if the president had nothing to do- why did such and such happen and- in other words, you're blaming an administration, a party, the whole thing and in foreign policy where you're not and military policy-*

KEEFER: I was surprised and impressed with the involvement of presidents in foreign policy decisions. That became very obvious when you looked at the documents at a presidential library, even at the State Department, that the president was heavily involved. Less so in military acts because the tendency was to let the military make the battlefield decisions; but the strategy decision, do we do a bombing campaign, that was done at the political level. But I think generally the president and his immediate staff are really more interested in foreign policy than they are in obviously battles. They can affect foreign policy, other than providing the troops with adequate supplies and weapons. Once the battle starts there's not much you can do about it; it's going to play it out.

I mean, wasn't Lincoln probably the last, not "the" last president but he was really involved in war policy because- but after that I don't think it was-

*Q: After that I don't think there was-*

KEEFER: Yes, I mean, FDR (Franklin Delano Roosevelt) was more grand strategy; Wilson was not really interested in-

*Q: Yes, unlike Winston Churchill's bane of the British high command, FDR sort of left it up to Marshall and \_\_\_\_\_.*

KEEFER: Exactly. And I think that tradition continued. Even Eisenhower; you would have thought Eisenhower as a general would have meddled in- but he was very, very good about that, did not, as far as I could tell, did not second guess.

*Q: Well he had such- came with such great diplomatic experience; did this show, you know, when you started reading the papers?*

KEEFER: Well yes, what we realized when we read them was that Eisenhower was not the boob that we were told he was in the 1950s. It was eight years of golfing and goofing is what everybody used to talk about Eisenhower.

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: But in fact he was a much more dedicated president, much more involved in policy decisions. He just did it behind the scenes. At least that was the intent or that was the impression you got from reading. He was much more on top of issues when you read these private NSC minutes.

*Q: Yes, I've interviewed some people who were involved in the Eisenhower times and how Foster Dulles kept a telephone on his desk at State Department meetings of his council; he was always calling the president.*

KEEFER: Yes, right. They have records of Eisenhower telephone conversations with Dulles. They were very cryptic but they were very, very extensive. You had to read between the lines because they knew they were on an unsecured phone.

*Q: Were we still using the system where when one of the principles such as Dulles or assistant secretary would pick up the phone and the assistant would be there to-*

KEEFER: Yes, usually somebody would listen in.

*Q: -to take notes. Which was not eavesdropping; it was basically to commitments made and all, somebody was taking notes of what to be done.*

KEEFER: And I think people knew that that was the way it was-

*Q: Yes, I mean, well, they were doing-*

KEEFER: Yes, everyone did that. Usually a secretary would be doing shorthand. I've actually seen it. Of course, I don't read shorthand, nobody can read shorthand anymore, but I've seen the shorthand accounts that somebody had to type them into memorandums.

*Q: Well you had pretty thorough records, didn't you?*

KEEFER: Eisenhower was very good for records. He had a very organized NSC system. You'd have maybe a national intelligence estimate, then you'd have a paper, then you'd have a NSC meeting, then you'd have a NSC decision. And it made it very easy, or easier, to document policy under the Eisenhower period. Then you moved to Kennedy where it was total chaos. You never knew what was going on. You had endless drafts, papers, you never knew which was the one that the president saw or signed off on. It was

much more difficult to do the Kennedy years because his system was not anywhere near as organized as Eisenhower's was. And so you had to do a lot more reconstruction of what actually happened. And I remember looking at multiple drafts and saying I wonder which one the president actually saw. I still have no idea.

*Q: Yes. Well, when it came- let' stick to the Korean War and then we'll move beyond that but- Okay, you look at all the documents and all and then what are you writing? Are you writing-*

KEEFER: We would take the top 300 or 400 documents that we believed explained Korean War policy, so they would be heavily weighted toward presidential decision making. And we'd put them in the book, chronological order usually, tie them together with footnotes and editorial notes and try to tell the story of the end of the Korean War from 1952 to 1953. And then I did a little bit about post Korea war in Korea.

*Q: Well you assemble the documents but do you explain what the documents are?*

KEEFER: No, you yourself have to decide what you're going to cover. Obviously the first thing you want to cover is how Eisenhower ended the Korean War. Did he use an atomic threat? How was the negotiation at Panmunjom? Why was the POW issue so important? And you look for documents that explain these things. Originally you copy a huge amount of documentation, read it, and try to organize it in your mind. Then you organize it, actually physically organize it and put it together.

*Q: How did the process work at that time in the Historians Office? You were doing this but then would you go feed off somebody else?*

KEEFER: Well you did a lot of talking to other people, but basically each person was in charge of their volume then they would be reviewed by a division chief. They tended to accept your selection of documents although occasionally they would say, your volume was too big and you had to cut material out.

*Q: Was mainly chopping.*

KEEFER: Yes, which was hard to do. You invested a lot of interest. Maybe you had hundreds of documents and you got it down to 300. You'd made a lot of hard decisions and you had to make even more hard decisions. It was difficult. In those days if we needed to, we made a second volume so I actually had two volumes in the Korean War, which I never would be able to do again. When I became editor we had to do one line.

*Q: Were you ever called into- "account" is the wrong term but say, you know, you're coming- you're pushing towards this conclusion and maybe this other conclusion is more apt or something of that nature?*

KEEFER: No not really. I was always amazed how there was almost no political pressure to document someone in a favorable light. We were told we were supposed to be

objective. We were told we're not supposed to censor ourselves and we didn't. The problem was that a lot times when you're trying to get the documentation declassified then that's where you ran into problems. Some of the stuff that you were trying to document was still considered sensitive.

*Q: Well for one thing you were in a way fortunate that you had just bypassed McCarthy accounting.*

KEEFER: Right. There were stories when I came to the office about the McCarthy years and there was a sort of pervasive fear about writing stuff critical of McCarthy.

*Q: MacArthur or McCarthy?*

KEEFER: McCarthy and then McArthur would be another era. I know the guy who did them; he thought McArthur was sort of a grandstander.

*Q: He had elements that were very important but at the same point, I mean, he was at his end and outside of Inchon it was all-*

KEEFER: Yes, that was a very lucky. I think he pulled that off beautifully but then of course he then wanted to go into the \_\_\_\_\_ and that would have been a disaster, I think.

*Q: Yes. Well he also didn't cut off the North Korean army when they came out of Pusan and all that.*

KEEFER: Whenever you say you're a government historian, they assume that you're writing an apology but in fact that's not what government historians do. Mostly they tend to be given their direction, told to go and do it. When you're writing a narrative it can be more difficult than a documentary, when the documents speak for themselves. Of course, it's which documents you choose and what they say but still we try to be objective. If I saw something that was arguing a point of view that I didn't- I'd still put it in if I felt it had some impact on the policy process.

*Q: Was there any sort of repercussions or something later on saying well why did you do this?*

KEEFER: Well people always second guessed your selections. Particularly in the '70s there was a feeling that oh, well, government historians are just apologists. But I think the series itself spoke for itself when we started publishing.

There was a period when the Foreign Relations Series got in trouble because it didn't produce some of the CIA documentation people expected. I wasn't working on the areas where the CIA was heavily involved.

*Q: So in a way the Korean War, which is sort of now labeled the Forgotten War and all that, did you feel, I mean, it was sort of a forgotten war? I mean, you were working on this but were they really-*

KEEFER: During the Vietnam War, yes. It was a forgotten war. It ended up in an inconclusive end with only an armistice. I was pleased to be able to shed some light on it and when I did produce the volume I know it made some pretty big news because there was a lot of discussion in the volume about potential nuclear attacks on China. Now, they never got to the point where they agreed to do it but they did agree that if they were going to do it this is how they would do it. And then there was an attempt to pass a message to the Chinese, which I'm not sure they ever got, or if they did they disregarded it, that if they didn't sign the armistice or didn't come to some agreement the consequences would be potentially nuclear.

So I think we did shed a little light on the Korean War, the end of the Korean War. I think the documents surprised people, how frank they were. I think the volume had some problems but it was, by and large it was good.

*Q: Did you move to the Vietnam War with trepidation or-?*

KEEFER: Well, that I knew was going to be a little more difficult to document because it was, one it was longer and two, it was certainly controversial. When I started working on Vietnam the war had pretty much wound down. I believe I started it, maybe it was '75 so it was just before the end of April when the collapse came in Vietnam. But it was much more controversial. People really had strong feelings about the Vietnam War. So I went in with slight trepidation but I also thought it would be interesting to see. I started working on the '50s and of course the Pentagon Papers had come out so that was a bit of a help. I started working on the '50 period, which was really a quite interesting period with the rise of Diem, the Diem government and our support for him and our failure to hold elections. There was a lot of interesting stuff in that period. So I started working on Vietnam in the 1950s.

*Q: Well now, did the Pentagon Papers, the disclosure, this was Ellsworth and the New York Times, I guess and all, exposing these papers, did that sort of send a shockwave or anything through the historical community?*

KEEFER: Yes, it really did. Ellsberg did not have access to presidential library materials; all he had was access to Department of Defense materials, but he still had a lot of interesting documents. It released the history of the negotiations up through '67, the multiple negotiations we had with various channels. It showed how pessimistic the U.S. Government was about the war itself and the realization was that they weren't going to win this war. They were looking for a negotiated settlement, and that was not so much the public message that was being sent at the time by the Johnson Administration.

*Q: Oh absolutely not.*

KEEFER: The Pentagon Papers were only a partial release of documents but they really did point some interesting directions.

*Q: Well did the fact that they were already out mean that you were probably acting more freely because what the hell?*

KEEFER: Yes, we still had trouble getting stuff out but you could build on them. He had some good documentation and if he printed it, I didn't always print it because I said go read the Pentagon Papers for a validation. It allowed me then to print more of the high level discussions at the presidential level, at the White House level, and I didn't have to always print the Defense Department documents.

*Q: When the Korean War ones came out, this is the first time they really opened up the NSC.*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: Did you feel that the NSC types were taking a look and saying hey, wait a minute. Let's not-*

KEEFER: Well, yes, there was certainly a backlash over the Pentagon Papers against Ellsberg. When you're reading about Vietnam invariably you get into the Pentagon Papers. I think it was the Nixon Administration that was very concerned about the release of the papers. We were following so far behind it, by the time we were working on Vietnam the Pentagon Papers had been out for a number of years. And people said well why do you bother to do Vietnam because the Pentagon Papers have already been released? Well, no. They were only one side of the story. It was a good collection of documents and of course he had a narrative as well, but it was not anywhere near complete.

*Q: Well you were doing, again this first time, in the first place, your personal dates from when to when you were working on this first slice of the-?*

KEEFER: I must have finished the Korea volume about 1976. I started working on Vietnam for the '50s in the late '70s and continued into the '80s. I was probably working on Vietnam policy as it happened under the Kennedy Administration and Johnson Administration. The volumes tended to take about five to six years to get published after I finished them, to get declassified. They were still doing old fashion printing I know for Korea. I think they switched to computerized printing so it came out a little quicker. But they would lag behind so I was working in the '70s on Vietnam and then into the '80s on Vietnam.

*Q: Well there's this first hunk of study on- this was when we were getting involved in Vietnam?*

KEEFER: Yes. I mean, 1955, with the so-called “sect crisis,” when Diem was challenged by a variety of religious and gangster sects. With the support of the U.S. Government, particularly of Edward Lansdale, he was able to take control, at least of Saigon, and then he became the American candidate, I mean the American man in Vietnam. He was just blown up out of all proportion and in 1957 he came to the United States and addressed Congress and he was our anti-communist alternative to Ho Chi Minh. The Eisenhower Administration was very much pro-Diem until the end, until the late ‘50s when you started getting the reports from the embassy and from the military that things were not going well and Diem was not doing the job that we hoped he was doing.

*Q: Well were you, as you looked at the paper- In the first place, where did the paper emanate? I mean, because now you had embassies and all much more involved than you would have in the-*

KEEFER: Yes, well we certainly looked at the records. I did Vietnam I also did Laos and Cambodia as well, which were sidelines. I did a little volume on them as well. We looked heavily at the State Department cable traffic, which was organized by country, looked at the State Department memos to the principals, those were very key. Each country had a number. You just learned the system. And then looked also at the presidential libraries. With Vietnam we started getting into former Defense records as well. So we used those sources primarily: State Department, NSC, White House and DOD to tell the story and it was a major undertaking.

*Q: Were you still working on a system that you were not producing a narrative but producing a document?*

KEEFER: Yes, you’re producing a document that would have had a narrative coherence to it. It would cover different topics. You didn’t just cover one topic; you would cover multiple topics and just intersperse them in documentary collection. It was rare that you would do it just by topic; you’d just do it by straight chronology.

*Q: Were you seeing in a way sort of almost the classic split between the field, and I’m referring to when people who are getting out and around, you know, basically junior officers and the political section of the embassy?*

KEEFER: Definitely. In Vietnam particularly but in other places too. I remember reviewing the Rand volume just before I left the Office of the Historian. You have all these people saying that the Shah of Iran is not working out but nobody believed them in Washington. The reports from these junior officers or from the embassy never made it into the policy process. Same with Vietnam. But under Kennedy but also under Eisenhower there was a realization even among the political types that things were not going well in Vietnam and that they needed to do something about Diem. Of course, what eventually happened is Kennedy sort of gave a green light to the overthrow of Diem and that was a very fascinating topic and I really enjoyed that.

*Q: But that came-*

KEEFER: That came in '63; I remember in '63-

*Q: It came in '63.*

KEEFER: -just before Kennedy was assassinated.

*Q: Did- Was Diem- Were there qualification, saying, you know, Diem really isn't the great white hope?*

KEEFER: Oh yes. What you get is you get like the military or the embassy writing about the pacification program, saying it isn't working. The strategic hamlet villages are not defensible, they tend to be prisons. The people living there don't want to be living there. That kind of reportage would come back and it would sort of get so high but it never really got to the top people. Finally the problem was so bad that some major event would get them interested in what was wrong with the strategic hamlet program and then they would go down and start looking at all these-

*Q: Well about this time you had people writing, considerable newspaper- media corps, David Halberstam-*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: -and others, were these- could these, what they were doing, could these be correlated with what you were doing?*

KEEFER: My impression was yes, definitely. The Presidents tended more likely to read the journalists than they were to read the embassy. They would believe a journalist before they would believe the State Department. Kennedy particularly was very interested in independent reporting on Vietnam and he read a lot of the journalists' articles about it. I think they provided another point of view; it was a way for a president to get around the fact that the government doesn't always move the bad news up the line.

*Q: Yes. Well listen, this was very true and- but how- in the official records, how do you deal with this, the fact that there is another- I mean, you're producing these official records but who is producing sort of the other source of information that those that are making policy are using?*

KEEFER: Well the only way we really did it was occasionally the president would say so and so said in this, what about it, and he'd task the bureaucracy to respond to Halberstam's criticisms and the strategic hamlet program and then you print the response, adding per his request and then you print the response.

*Q: Would you produce Halberstam's?*

KEEFER: No, you'd just cite to it. People can get that out of a newspaper. You might summarize it. That's probably where the official histories tend to slightly be weaker because it's harder to document that outside influence but it's there; it's clearly there.

*Q: And it's so, so important.*

KEEFER: Yes, right. You can be sure that a president, particularly a president who reads all the major newspapers or has somebody clip the major newspapers because it's going to come across those kind of articles.

*Q: Yes. Well Ted, I'm looking at the time; this is probably a good place to stop maybe.*

KEEFER: Okay.

*Q: And I'd like to pick it up- I've put at the end where I stop but we should pick this up at still the early years in Vietnam and what you were getting out of it and some of the things would be- we'll ask next time, you know, how the NSC notes were and relations with the military and all and where you saw things, what was happening to you and to your colleagues about the Vietnam War, was this setting you up for more suspicion about the whole process?*

KEEFER: Okay.

*Q: Good.*

*Okay. Today is the 12th of May, 2010, with Ted Keefer. And Ted, we had left off, you were dealing with the fairly early Vietnam. And I may have asked this question before but sort of how did sort of the historians, you yourself and others, feel at early times about Vietnam?*

KEEFER: Well we were talking about my career- as I began my career documenting the Vietnam War.

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: Yes, okay. In our office we were doing the Foreign Relations Series. The general editor decided that the Vietnam War needed to be documented ahead of time; we needed to get out material on the Vietnam War because at that time I guess it was in the '80s, there was a lot of ferment about the-

*Q: Oh so this is after- We were talking- Actually we're talking about after the war.*

KEEFER: Yes, well after the war; this would be the early '80s.

*Q: Did you come away with a set feeling about the war?*

KEEFER: As a student I opposed the war, I felt it was a wrong war and it was putting soldiers, our soldiers and airmen and stuff at real risk. When I got to see the documents I got much more sympathetic, even to the leaders. Initially I saw LBJ (Lyndon Baines Johnson) as a very one dimensional character. Then when I saw the documents about LBJ and listened to the LBJ tapes I realized that he had a lot of difficult choices. He went into those choices with a certain amount of empathy and realization that he was making tough choices. I would say most people that worked on Vietnam got much more empathetic to the leaders and the dilemmas that they faced. Even someone like Nixon.

*Q: Yes. Well, what- Was there, I mean, the war was over, the Ellsberg papers- the Pentagon Papers had come out and all, and was there at all a feeling, was this just a bureaucratic exercise or was there kind of behind it saying let's get the full record out there?*

KEEFER: I think that's exactly what we thought because the Ellsberg papers one, stopped at 1967 and two, did not include other, important material. They were based only on Department of Defense records so they had a fair amount of stuff that went to the president but Ellsberg didn't have the White House reactions to the DOD materials. So we felt we still had a role to play. When we started documenting it, it was confirmed to us that there was a lot of stuff that had not been available to Ellsberg. We really felt that we had a story to tell that was larger than Ellsberg. It was used as a political opposition to the war., but when he wrote it he was just trying to write a history of the war. He was basically trying to be analytical about it.

*Q: Was there, during the- What was your final product going to be and what was it?*

KEEFER: Well I think we published or we're now finishing up. Our management promised it would be done by 1990- '93. It's now 2010 and I believe the Office of the Historian of the State Department will have published all volumes on Vietnam by the end of this year. It started about 1980 and it took almost 30 years really to publish.

*Q: Looking at this from the outside, so I'm asking questions that sort of a general civilian would ask, why so long?*

KEEFER: Well, partly because we were doing other things, too; we weren't just doing the Vietnam War. That was just only a part of the foreign relations series. It went in fits and starts. As quickly as we could we did the Johnson and the Kennedy years and then with Nixon it slowed down. And what also happened, quite frankly, is the Vietnam War became less topical, less interesting to people. It's only now again I think people are starting to look at Vietnam as obviously the model for what we're doing in Afghanistan or Iran. There was a period, I guess in the late '90s when there was a lot of ferment about the Vietnam War, a lot of books were written about it. There's a revisionist group saying that it was the right war, it was just not fought the right way. We kept working but we didn't put the same resources into Vietnam; we only had one or two people working on it.

*Q: Well you have of course the Gulf War at that point-*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: -and other things going on.*

KEEFER: We were really more interested in the Cold War, U.S. relations with the Soviet Union, the opening to China; those were the things that we pushed to publish. And the Vietnam War always had one or two people working on it but it didn't have that same immediacy. We didn't have five or six people working on it.

*Q: Were there any pressures on you? I'm still speaking about the Vietnam War; we'll move to the others later but you know, people saying don't do that or you know, you're dwelling too much on this or that?*

KEEFER: You know, this is hard to believe but I think in the entire 34 years I worked in the State Department Historical Office I never once was told not to -- for ideological or political reasons -- not to publish something. There were declassification issues, there were issues of language. At one point in the 1950s we were not very appreciative of Sihanouk; we didn't like him, we thought he was an idiot. It became kind of the thing to do in your cables to write derogatory comments about Sihanouk. And then by the time that we wanted to publish those volumes from the '50s Sihanouk was the last hope for Cambodia. He'd allied himself with us and the Chinese so some of those had to be taken out. We basically made a deal where we take out some, the most offensive ones, and leave the other ones and just say "adjective deleted," much like Nixon said "expletive deleted." But that was basically what we did. So where we really felt pressure was from the declassification people. It was not from a political point of view but from what they considered a current relationship point of view or from the CIA, which felt very much they didn't want to release information about anything they were doing anywhere. So it was a real battle to get them to release material.

*Q: What about, again, on Vietnam papers, I mean, everybody knew what the CIA basically was up to.*

KEEFER: Yes, they did, but of course it was never officially acknowledged. The CIA came upon this idea that in order for them to release material on any given topic, other than finished intelligence which they could release, they would have to have an executive disclosure. This meant that the president or someone from the Executive Branch said yes, admitted that there was a CIA presence in a country and that they had operations. And what happened to us during the Kennedy years was that Kennedy admitted that we had a station chief in Vietnam, in Saigon. We said look, this is an executive disclosure. Here's the president naming the station chief, and for that reason only, because there's one time in a press conference we were able to document the CIA station in Saigon, not anywhere else in Vietnam but the main station in Saigon. And more or less CIA agreed to that; they would argue about whether they could release operational stuff but they did acknowledge that we had a station in Saigon. So they did abide by their theory of executive disclosure.

*Q: Were you looking at some of the books that were written about, what was it, was the book, was it Decent Interval?*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: She's a CIA-*

KEEFER: There were plenty of books by CIA officials who had served in Vietnam or had served in the Far East, and we used them. But the Agency itself always made the distinction; they had this program where they will vet their releases by their employees but they will not acknowledge that these are official releases. So you'd have someone like William Colby writing his book about what he was doing as a station chief and yet we'd have to fight to get material that Colby had described when we actually had the actual documents. I must admit, the CIA at those times was pretty good about saying well if it's in Colby's book, but that's because he was a CIA director. But it was a tough battle. They have their own viewpoint and they're not keen on releasing material.

*Q: Well let's, again, I'm going back to those times, kind of, can you describe how a battle would be fought and waged and resolved?*

KEEFER: It was done through memos. Let's say we'd want to acknowledge some operation. We would go to Colby's memoirs, go to other people's memoirs, highlight the stuff that we thought benefited our case, that showed it had been written about. Then we would try to find documents that were declassified, if they were declassified, that related to it, which sometimes existed, sometimes didn't; present these to the CIA and then they would make their decision. They didn't always go the way we wanted them to go, but for most cases, particularly on Vietnam, they felt, to a certain extent, like a lot of people, that Vietnam was history. We didn't have any more assets there. It wasn't some place that we were still worrying about our sources because most of them had left the country or had been reeducated. So they were pretty good about releasing material.

We finally created a mechanism to allow us to disclose material. Essentially it got certain people in the government at a certain level, one from the NSC, one from State and from CIA, to say hey, we can release material on this covert operation. These were people at the assistant secretary level or above who would look at them; we would write a little brief summary of the operation, we would say what we thought the impact of releasing it would be; CIA would look at it and say what it thought and then they would make a decision. And it's worked pretty well. I think we've released about 25 or 30 covert operations that we would not have gotten otherwise if we didn't have this little mechanism. But it is a very slow process and it's sometimes three steps forward and two back or two forward and three back. The CIA personnel changes; the mood changes in the country. One of the real things that I noticed was after 9/11 it was much harder to get stuff declassified. Even though, obviously, 30 year old material didn't relate but there was a new feeling of secrecy in the country, a sort of new wind blowing. I think we're still in that era where it's much more difficult to get people to release material.

*Q: Did you find that there were efforts by historians, and I'm talking about both writers and professors and all, maybe joining together, maybe on their own, but coming and saying hey, we want this or that? We know this happened; open this up?*

KEEFER: Definitely, definitely. They were a real force for releasing material. They would battle the CIA; they would become allies. And also there was the National Security Archives. Which is a major proponent for releasing material and they were very keen and they still are. We've had a mixed record. A lot of the stuff that they want we still haven't been able to get.

*Q: How was the National Security Archives- who's the head of this? Is it Tom Blanton?*

KEEFER: Yes, right.

*Q: He's been in forever.*

KEEFER: Yes. It's been a major force for declassification. It's the one who has gone to court using the Freedom of Information law or the mandatory review law. It really helped to release the Kissinger telephone conversations.

*Q: Did the Historian's Office get direct inquiries about things?*

KEEFER: Oh yes. People would say, when are you going to publish a volume? Is this going to be in it? And of course you really couldn't say. For a while you had a website and asked questions.

*Q: But early on that of course wasn't.*

KEEFER: Yes, that didn't happen until much later but then you'd get a letter or a telephone call.

*Q: Well at a certain point aren't you up against something which is even far more important than secrecy and all, and this is plain space? In other words, if you're producing a volume you can't put everything in.*

KEEFER: Absolutely.

*Q: So the chopping away, can you talk about sort of how you approach it? Again, I go back to the earlier years.*

KEEFER: Well what you did was, essentially you would collect, I'd say, anywhere from 10 to 20 times as much material as you could possibly squeeze into a volume. You had to have that sort of mass to start. Initially we would go through the State Department files, then we decided it was better to go through the presidential library files first and then go back and do State Department files. Then we were going through DOD files, which are major files but basically focusing on the secretary of defense and the assistant secretary

for ISA (International Security Affairs), which was the sort of mini State Department in the DOD. You go through the CIA's files, as we could get into them. You need about four major repositories. If you were doing a thing on economic foreign policy you'd go look at Treasury files. By and large you went to those four sources and you'd collect about 10 to 20 times as much material as you thought you were going to be able to print. So your first cut through you're looking at documents and you're making an initial selection -- is there any chance I would need this document in the volume? You tended to err on the side of yes I could use this document. One of the problems is that you know the basic story, you know what's going to happen in any given topic you're working on; in Vietnam you know we lost the war, you know we did this, but you still don't realize what the topics at the time were and how sometimes things that have never been written about were very significantly discussed and decided. How much coverage do I give to this issue? Because it was obviously a major issue at the time and it hasn't really lasted, it hasn't had significance that it maybe should have had. We made Xerox copies in those days, we didn't have any ability to scan stuff. You'd have this huge collection of Xerox and put it in a safe and then put it in chronological order or the order that you thought your presentation was going to be and then you sort of make your next selection. And you keep weeding it down until you had about three to four hundred documents and about that equal number of documents that you'd use for footnotes. So you'd go from thousands down to about 800, 1000.

*Q: Was there any thought of- Since you'd already gone through this collection business, of- these were- in those days Xerox copies- of at least putting them into a file somewhere so that-*

KEEFER: Oh yes.

*Q: -20 years from now when you'd say who gives a damn, it will be open for the real, the deep story.*

KEEFER: Well we did do that and it was a tremendous fiasco because we put a lot of the material on microfiche, which was a technology that was, you know, already obsolete.

*Q: You might explain what microfiche was.*

KEEFER: Microfiche was a little transparency. You could get like 150 to 200 pages on one little card about the size of a six by four card and you put it on a machine which magnified it, you could print off it. And it was sort of technology of the '60s and maybe early '70s but by the time we were using it there were very few microfilm readers.

*Q: Yes, and very difficult to use.*

KEEFER: Hard to use, hard to find. You had to make this stuff available, you had to get it declassified and the declassification system can only tolerate a certain amount of material. We sort of came to the conclusion we could only tolerate about 2,000 pages on any given topic so if you added another 5,000 microfiche potential documents it became

very difficult to get it declassified. And then you felt well, it's only going to be in the microfiche, I don't need to fight for it. There are microfiche collections that are still available. You can't buy them anymore. But we did toy with the idea of sort of trying to do what we do now, which is to put documentation online. If you could get a system that could read these microfilm cards and then turn it into a text you could put it online but I don't think they've been able to do that yet.

*Q: This whole technology is moving so fast and what do you do with everything? But in the '80s and all you weren't really thinking in those terms, were you?*

KEEFER: No, we were thinking in terms of either the printed book or microfiche. The big change came when we made that decision to go from publishing books that weren't actually physically books, just books on the Internet, you know, books in cyberspace. We started putting our books up on the website, I guess maybe in the late '90s, we would actually put the printed book on so you could look at it on the Internet. But then we decided well, this is the way people are using foreign relations more and more; why do we need to actually print the book? We'll just put it up as it is a book.

*Q: And they're easier to search through.*

KEEFER: Yes. They have all kinds advantages; they have some disadvantages too.

*Q: Yes. I mean, a book is easier to read.*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: But no. Well, while you were doing this, again, back- I'm sticking to Vietnam and we'll move to other things, but while you were doing this, Ted, there must have been times when you wanted to say God, so and so is alive, why don't we go talk to him or her and do essentially an oral history on this or that incident?*

KEEFER: We did do a bit of that for Vietnam; it's exactly what we thought. In fact, we took a little course on how to do oral history interviews, which actually I found quite useful. We hired some oral history expert and she gave us a pretty good little introduction about how to do oral history, how to try to focus the discussion. We talked to people like Roger Hilsman, we talked to ambassadors, we talked to Averell Harriman about Vietnam. The trouble was that if they- that their reminiscences, especially if they'd written a book, were really their books and it was hard to get anything that we could really use in a foreign relations volume. We dealt with documents and specifics and oral history tended to deal in feelings, you know, atmospherics, assumptions. No one can remember a memo they read 30 years ago; you just can't do it.

*Q: Yes, no, I mean, sometimes I get requests for, you know, on our oral history program, I got one about cables. I don't think the word "cable" ever appears except I drafted cable, or something like that, because who remembers, you know, you might say I reported such and such, and it's all very broad and-*

KEEFER: I had a very enjoyable interview with Roger Hilsman, but what I got was the Roger Hilsman sort of mythology; that if we had listened to him we'd have won the war because he wanted to fight a guerrilla war, not a conventional war, and Kennedy was going to get out of Vietnam. Well, that's what he's developed over the years; that's now how he remembers the Vietnam War. Now he's dead but when he was alive that's how he remembered the Vietnam War. You could not really get him out of that mindset, try to bring him back to, you know, his conflicts. He could remember he had conflicts with Johnson, but what we found was I found oral histories very, very invaluable. To me, what they provided was the relationships between people, the sort of general recollections and judgments on what they've done. But when you try to put that into a documentary publication, which was so policy oriented, it was hard to sort of figure out where to put the footnotes or whether to-

*Q: It really means to exist almost on a different plane.*

KEEFER: It does. But I would say if you're writing a book about Vietnam you definitely want to look at oral histories about Vietnam because you're going to get sort of an extra dimension. If you're lucky you'll be able to listen to the person talk, which is always valuable; two, they'll talk about relationships and you don't know these relationships from the documents. You can't really tell.

*Q: You mentioned Roger Hilsman and his outlook, I remember briefing him when I was in INR back in the late '60s and he was still fighting- he'd been in OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in Burma.*

KEEFER: That's right, right.

*Q: And so he saw things through the eyes of an OSS operator parachuting into the jungle; he couldn't get rid of that.*

KEEFER: Exactly. He had his oil spot theory: that if you pacify the little oil spots eventually they become one big oil spill like we have in the Gulf. He may well have had some ideas that could have worked. He always said he was the only guerrilla fighter in the U.S. Government and we were in a guerrilla war and that they weren't listening to him.

*Q: Well it's an interesting thing in that the influence in many cases of personalities. Often the personalities are developed by past experiences and those don't come through in the cable traffic and all; I mean, it's just a different dimension.*

KEEFER: Yes, I think that's what I found so useful, yes, exactly. Talking to Hilsman you immediately realize where some of his more formal arguments came from, from his experiences. You could read his biography and find that out but if you didn't have that biography the oral history would be very invaluable.

*Q: Well then, what else were you doing besides- I mean, were you sort of exclusively on the Vietnam Papers?*

KEEFER: I did many of the Vietnam volumes, not all of them; I co-authored a number of them. I also pushed a series of individual volumes on Laos because I felt while the Vietnam War was relatively well known the secret war in Laos was almost not known at all. So I pushed very hard when I was at the historical office at State to have separate volumes on Laos starting in the Kennedy years and going through the Johnson years. I did succeed in getting a volume for Kennedy. I mean, people said why do you want to publish a volume on a tiny little country like Laos? I remember my boss at the time was a little dubious about it; isn't this just an adjunct to the Vietnam War? And to a certain extent it was, but there was also a separate war going on in Laos. It was a war fought not the way it was being fought in Vietnam. It was fought with proxies, the Hmong, then called the Miao, and it was a different experience. No one knew very much about it and it had not been written about and not much material had been released.

I was able to get that volume on the Kennedy years and I got one out on the Johnson period. In the Nixon period I was in charge of the division that was doing Southeast Asia, among other things, all of Asia but particularly Southeast Asia. So I made the decision to put Vietnam and Laos back together again because under Nixon the war in Vietnam no longer becomes a war in Vietnam; it spreads out into Cambodia and Laos and into North Vietnam and the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And even by the end of the Johnson period it was getting to be like that; there was no real distinct difference. We had a very good ambassador in Laos, William Sullivan, who went on to be the ambassador in Iran, but he was a very strong advocate of the war being directed by himself; he was basically running the war in Laos so I thought it was a really fascinating story.

And I'm sort of pleased and all that there have been a number of books written about Vietnam but mostly about the secret war, mostly about CIA's role but no one has yet to really write a good sort of history of how Laos fits into the larger Vietnam War. There was one guy called Stephenson, I believe, who was a congressional staffer guy who had a lot of access to material; he wrote a pretty good history of Laos but more from a diplomatic point of view.

*Q: I'm just finishing a set of interviews with a man who was ambassador to Laos not too long ago; we were talking about cleaning up after the war and if you recall there was quite a- we had a secret radar up on top-*

KEEFER: Yes, yes.

*Q: -and which, I think we had 12 Americans or something like that.*

KEEFER: Eighteen, I think 18 contractors.

*Q: Who were killed.*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: But this was a secret radar which was on a supposedly impregnable cliff.*

KEEFER: It was called Phou Pha Thi, I think, Phou Pha Thi. Yes.

*Q: But the Pathet Lao was able to climb up, sort of like the Plains of Abraham and get up behind and kill everybody there almost- And here is our ambassador 30 years later or something, talking about going up there and talking to people who were around, trying to figure out- trying to find the bodies.*

KEEFER: Yes, I actually documented the raid on Phou Pha Thi. It was one of the most poignant things. Of the contractors, I think a few got away in a helicopter but most were caught on the top of this mountain. It was actually the North Vietnamese, not the Pathet Lao.

*Q: That's right.*

KEEFER: And this was the first time that I can remember the North Vietnamese actually using their air force. They used a couple of biplanes to bomb the mountain. Eventually that material was declassified about that because it was fairly hush hush. I believe what it was, it was a navigational thing for bombing of North Vietnam.

*Q: Sort of like a LORAN (Long Range Navigation).*

KEEFER: Yes, LORAN. And eventually it was declassified, I think in good part because the National Security Archives got ahold of it. But then I believe a guy called Timothy Castle wrote a book about it and it's a truly quite a good story. I was disappointed because he didn't use the foreign relations series and there was a lot of information in there but he did it from DOD files.

*Q: What about, still sticking to the area, what about Cambodia? Cambodia was technically not in the war but it was a host of a hell of a lot of North Vietnamese troops.*

KEEFER: Yes. Well the problem with Cambodia was that I really couldn't justify a separate volume for Cambodia. So what I tended to do was to put Cambodia in with Thailand and more regional issues. To understand the Vietnam War you really have to look at the Vietnam volumes that we published, the Laos volumes and then the volumes on Southeast Asia which a lot of times would include places like the Philippines. But remember the Philippines had a role in the war because a lot of the technicians were Philippines technicians.

*Q: Oh yes.*

KEEFER: There was also a Philippine engineering battalion that fought at Vietnam or built things in Vietnam.

*Q: And a significant portion of their forces I would see troop into the PX (Post Exchange).*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: In Saigon on a rather regular basis.*

KEEFER: Probably sending the stuff home, yes.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

KEEFER: It was a real challenge to try to document something like the Vietnam War and we did it as best we could and we remained open to different ways of doing it so I think we did the best job we could. We put a lot of resources into it. In many respects it's one of the reasons why the foreign relations series is not moving as fast as it should. I think we did 17 volumes on the Vietnam War if you count all the volumes. That's a lot of volumes to cover a war and it took a long time. The production of the volumes is one thing and then the declassification usually and putting the volume into a book form or putting it online takes almost longer than it does to do the volume itself.

*Q: What about South Korea? I had a significant number of-*

KEEFER: Yes, we always put the story of South Korean in the South Korea compilation. It went in with Japan. Because South Korea, you know, while their division was fighting in Vietnam what really interested us was our relationship, how we got them to agree to send troops to Vietnam. It was essentially we agreed to pay for everything, including the kimchi, right down to the kimchi, and then we would replenish them with new equipment when they, you know.

*Q: When they left.*

KEEFER: So essentially we paid for these troops.

*Q: And also when they left they had, what was it, a cubic ton of- each person had a cubic whatever it is, a significant bit of cargo space in which they could buy things from our PX in Tokyo, which was sent to Vietnam and then loaded on or something.*

KEEFER: Yes. And the same thing for the Tiger Division, the Thais, it was the same kind of a deal. Essentially, you know, not to put too fine a point on it, these were mercenary soldiers. We put them in. The Thais, of course, also fought in Laos. That was part of the story in Laos that I wanted to release and it's been released. There's been some problems but the Thais played a really large role in Laos, which they didn't get a lot of credit for. And when the war was over we all pulled out and the Thais were left kind of having to worry about the Pathet Lao but they've managed to come to terms with it.

*Q: Were you able to deal with the Hmongs' contribution to the war or not?*

KEEFER: Yes. Well, from the high level point of view. There have been some histories written about the Hmong. Certainly when you were documenting the war in Laos the only people fighting were the Hmong. The Royal Lao Army never really fought; they just sat around and collected their pay and occasionally went out and lobbed a few mortars at the Pathet Lao but they weren't interested in fighting at all, they were interested in just making money. So the only people that really would be counted on to fight were the Hmong and the general who was in charge of them.

*Q: Vang Pao.*

KEEFER: Yes. They were really the troops that we could count on and they would fight these seasonal campaigns against the North Vietnamese on the Plain of Jars. And ironically the North Vietnamese were more mechanized; they had artillery and they had tanks so they would fight in the dry season and they would push the Hmong to the edge of the Plain of Jars and in the wet season the Hmong would push the North Vietnamese back. And this happened for about five or six years, until the end of the war when finally the North Vietnam-

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: We provided all the equipment and air support through Air America. So it was an interesting story and that did actually get into the volume at the very high level, you know, but they were certainly mentioned. That was a story I think I'm pleased I was able to tell.

*Q: Well when did your responsibility move elsewhere?*

KEEFER: About 2002 I became the general editor.

*Q: But before, I mean, you had Vietnam but then you took Southeast-?*

KEEFER: Well then I became a division chief and I was in charge of all of East Asia.

*Q: East Asia being?*

KEEFER: East Asia, Southeast Asia.

*Q: What was East Asia?*

KEEFER: We'd do a volume on Korea and Japan and we'd do a volume on China; always had a volume on China. Then we'd have a volume on, basically, Southeast Asia, which would be everything except Laos, Vietnam. And then we'd have a volume sometimes on the Philippines, Malaysia.

*Q: Did you get involved in dealing with the- around '65 or so- the Suharto-Sukarno-?*

KEEFER: I did a volume on the overthrow of Sukarno. I was very proud of that volume. It was the only volume that was translated into whatever they speak in Indonesia.

*Q: I think it's Malay.*

KEEFER: Yes. The only trouble is they changed the title but they took it and they translated it verbatim, but I think they changed it to the CIA overthrow of Sukarno. There was so much mythology about the overthrow of Sukarno that I really felt that my volume helped. At least discerning readers understand what we really did and what we didn't do. The Indonesians themselves tended to believe the worst. And to make matters worse, when the volume was published, this is what always happens in the foreign relations volume, Sukarno's daughter was the prime minister.

*Q: Oh yes.*

KEEFER: So imagine trying to get a volume out-

*Q: Megawati or whatever.*

KEEFER: Yes, Megawati, yes. And that volume would have never come out, I don't think, except that the GPO released it by mistake. Because we were waiting. The State Department, we were wondering what are we going to do with Sukarno's daughter? But the volume came out and I think actually it had a healthy effect. This is what we always argue to people, if you release material about what actually happened. Another volume that had that effect too was the volume that a friend of mine, Luke Smith, did on the war in 1971 between India and Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. There was a lot of very unflattering material in this volume about our relationship with Indira Gandhi and with the war and we released the volume and it got a lot of publicity. I got some emails from Indians and Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. They don't really have any history, particularly Bangladesh. It's like being able to read about the creation of your country and you could read the British reports about the American Revolution if you read those. And so there were some groups reading them. They didn't always like what we said about India but they were amazed and pleased that we did publish this volume. I think that's the real value of publishing an official documentary history because you, you know, as a democracy I think you make the information available to people not just in terms of Americans but for the whole world.

*Q: Well what about, I mean, the early days with, I think it was Ambassador, was it Jones?*

KEEFER: Yes, he was the first- yes-

*Q: His relation with Sukarno- the rest of our embassy was seething about the ambassador willing to tolerate-*

KEEFER: Yes, Jones wrote a book on Indonesia.

*Q: And this was just, I mean, you know, I don't know, could that get out in a volume?*

KEEFER: Yes, I think that came out fairly well. Probably the internal embassy dissatisfaction with Jones would have been harder to document. But what was easy to document was how pro-Sukarno Jones was and how much he acted as his sort of go-between with the U.S. Government because without Jones I don't think- the relationship with Indonesia would have been much, much worse.

*Q: Well somebody can go to our oral history collection because I've got people who were still boiling when I talked to them about how-*

KEEFER: Right. And the other guy who they didn't like was Robert Komer, who was also a Sukarno advocate. I remember actually publishing some documents where McGeorge Bundy would kiddingly call Komer our ambassador from Indonesia. They claimed he was the Indonesian ambassador. But you get a few things like that. Most people thought Sukarno was a crypto-communist. A few people like Jones and Komer saw them as a sort of third force.

*Q: And there is this thing, too, that if somebody looks at the documents, I mean some ambassadors, Jones and Komer would be typical of this, become such advocates of somebody who is basically pretty odious to, you might say the body politic in the United States, that what they report in is discounted so that they're, you know, if one looks at their cables and thinks okay, but policy is really probably being much more dictated by personal letters, visits back to Washington.*

KEEFER: Yes, that's clientelism, where you become the advocate of Trujillo. I mean, it works both ways. You can be advocate of a dictator too. That was a real problem with Vietnam, because all the ambassadors, with the exception of Henry Cabot Lodge, eventually became spokesmen for Ngo Dinh Diem. And they really could not see him objectively; they all tended to see him as sort of a savior and the only hope for Vietnam, South Vietnam. It was only Lodge who went out there already very dubious about Vietnam and about Diem and his impact on Vietnam. He was the first one that really didn't fall for that trap.

*Q: Was there any way in these volumes, could you say okay, you've got this real bad relationship within the embassy, I mean, in Jakarta, our embassy, and- between many of the officers there and the-*

KEEFER: That's hard to document but not impossible.

*Q: Because the information goes through the ambassador.*

KEEFER: Yes and what you end up doing is printing the approved version of the recommendations about Jakarta and that's been edited by the ambassador. You would have to go down and look at what some of the political officers were writing. I mean, you'd have to actually go to the embassy files, see if you could find some drafts and then see how it had changed. We didn't have that luxury but I think that was a case in point where we probably would not have been able to sort of really document that.

*Q: You know, I'm looking at it as a, I mean, two people who served in the system. I mean, you can't do that.*

KEEFER: We did document that, you know. Jones' cables were, a lot of his cables were printed. You could see very clearly that Jones was pro-Sukarno. You would see how people reacted to them in Washington, you would see occasional comments about Jones being pro-Sukarno. But that will be done, I think, by a historian, a really good diplomatic historian who got down into the embassy files or who would talk to some of the people who served under him.

*Q: Well there was an awful lot of talk.*

KEEFER: Yes, right.

*Q: Of course you had the, call it the Cornell Mafia, which dominated Southeast Asian studies, particularly Indonesia and they were strongly pro-Sukarno.*

KEEFER: Right, but who was the famous professor?

*Q: His name escapes me.*

KEEFER: He wrote a book on Sukarno, I believe, but I can't remember his name.

*Q: Did you get to the point where the accusation that we gave the Suharto people a death list?*

KEEFER: Yes, I had to deal with that because that was a very strong charge against the embassy. I looked through the files. I did find three- actually they were airgrams, which you don't normally find good information in airgrams, or you do but you don't usually print airgrams; but of the names of the people, all I could document was- and I wrote three editorial notes on it- was that the State Department did give- The trouble was that the Indonesians did not have a very good intelligence system. They didn't even know who some of the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, communist party of Indonesia) members were. So the embassy had a file on PKI members and they gave the Suharto- I mean the Sukarno government the names of the top leadership of the PKI. Now we're talking about 200, not thousands and thousands.

*Q: Well I had- I can't think, the name escapes me, but he was a political officer who would- I had a long interview with him; he'd come out of Moscow and had used Moscow*

*techniques. He went through, describes how he went through the newspapers and would make notes of all this, who attended such and such meetings and, you know, I mean, build up this file. This was before anything happened.*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: And this is, you know, and then he handed it over.*

KEEFER: All I was able to document was what they sent back to the embassy- to the headquarters, to the department, but I suspect on a more informal basis more people were named. But certainly they did a formal airgram saying these are the people that we've given to the government.

But the problem was you're dealing with accusations of- Like the other great issue was how many people died in the genocide against the PKI? And I felt the volume needed to have some kind of a statement on at least what we estimated was the number of people that were killed, at the time that's all I could do. So I was able to come up with- after the fact the ambassador wrote an after the fact report; he put a figure at a certain number.

*Q: As I recall it, I mean again, I'm getting these stories but you know, the country team is sitting around and my same man, my Moscow man, said how many were killed? They said I don't know, maybe 300,000. And all of a sudden that became imprinted, you know.*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: I mean, that's the way these things happen.*

KEEFER: I did manage to read a report by somebody. They did send out a couple of officers to go to the villages in which the deaths occurred and try to ask people how many people died. So they would go to the village and they'd say how many people died in your village, and they'd say well nobody died in our village but in the village downstream, boy, a lot of people died down there. So they'd go to the village downstream and the same thing; no, upstream a lot of people died. It was very hard to really find-

*Q: I mean, who's going to say oh yes, we killed about 30 people or something like that?*

KEEFER: Yes. I ended up saying that the government's claimed this much, the embassy claimed this much, the opponents claimed this much; somewhere between those numbers, I probably came to the conclusion that the embassy figure was probably pretty close; it might have been, I think it was probably over 100,000. It was a major sort of thing.

*Q: Oh yes. But again, it coincided with- I mean, there had been a series of pogroms anyway that, you know, hadn't stopped.*

KEEFER: Yes. And how much of it was score settling and how much of the people were ethnic Chinese as opposed to Indonesian? It was very tricky. That was probably one of the hardest things to document in a foreign relations volume. There was a lot of controversy about it. I just felt, when I did the volume, that people expected to at least see that in the volume, even if the figures that I presented didn't really enlighten anybody.

*Q: Well when you're working on the volume, was it a feeling that, you know, we have- I mean, there's so much controversy on this and we're tarred with this brush of one, we caused the coup, which we didn't, I mean-*

KEEFER: No, I mean we expedited it but we didn't cause it.

*Q: You know, I mean, obviously Sukarno killed a bunch of his generals which sort of enraged the other generals.*

KEEFER: Right, really initially. When you get something like the overthrow of Sukarno you really are dealing on an hour-by-hour basis and you really are looking at documentation on an hour-by-hour basis. That's the one time you really get down and really work the embassy files or work the intelligence files and try to figure out really what happened on an almost hourly basis.

*Q: Did you get to- in- as you do this, do you make judgments?*

KEEFER: I tried not to. I tried to keep an open mind. But clearly as the documents were put together certain theses have appeared: Sukarno's attempt on the generals clearly was a factor. I think Suharto lost a family member, one of his nieces or nephews.

*Q: I think so too. And also Nasuto, or whatever his name is-*

KEEFER: Nasuto, yes. Who was thought to be the big figure.

*Q: Yes he was but was killed right away.*

KEEFER: He was killed later on, but everyone thought that he was the guy who was really running the show when it turned out it was Suharto who was running the show.

*Q: Well, as we understand it, and I mean, this may not be-*

KEEFER: Yes.

*Q: -it was more fortuitous that Suharto was marching through, essentially through Jakarta with his troops, division or something, when this coup was on, which the coup was launched by Sukarno to begin with.*

KEEFER: Right, as a sort of purge of the anti-Suharto people.

*Q: Well, I think also you're dealing, all of us are dealing with sort of the American psyche which is there's a significant number of people, particularly in the academic world who say whatever happened we are responsible for.*

KEEFER: Yes,. That's sort of an Amero-centric view of diplomatic history: that America is so all powerful and so therefore is responsible for everything that happens in the world like any minor coup in The Congo. I mean, we have a volume on The Congo, which has yet to be published, but I think that will show that the role was not what is assumed. Certainly, U.S. was very pleased that Sukarno was overthrown. And certain parts of the government were working with the generals, would encourage them, that \_\_\_\_\_ was really very much dealing with the United States and they thought he was the guy, the really powerful guy. But, the idea that somehow we orchestrated this, I think that's what the foreign relations series can do, is to try to disabuse people of that idea that everything that happens is our fault. Or, if it is our fault, this is the role we played but it was not the dominant role.

*Q: During the time you got involved in some very controversial areas and did you find that you were up against a very skeptical audience or was it a divided audience or how-?*

KEEFER: I think it was a fairly skeptical audience. I think the trouble with Vietnam is you get hit from both sides; you get it from the right, you get hit from the left. And what I try to do is try to present, as best I could, the documents that I believe were the significant ones that helped the president and the secretary of state and the secretary of defense make the decisions that they did. There's a lot of judgment goes into that. And working as a documentary editor on foreign policy you become really attuned to how policy is formulated. You know how the ambassadors' recommendations get fed into the process; sometimes they're accepted, sometimes they're not. And you read a lot of records of meetings, particularly under Kennedy, or you hear some tapes, although I didn't have that many Kennedy tapes at the time. You really develop this view of how policy is formulated. That really is what I was involved with, trying to show what went into the policy decisions, like the decision to sort of pull the rug out from Ngo Dinh Diem.

*Q: What about, you know, when you move away to, I mean, with Indonesia, with Vietnam and all, things were really hopping, but what happens when you get to Japan where, you know, I mean the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) said this or that for 50 years. I mean, it could be awfully dull.*

KEEFER: Well Japan wasn't as interesting except when you get into the question of was the LDP accepting money from the U.S. Government; that was real major issue.

The other question was nuclear weapons in Japan; nuclear weapons and Japan were the two issues. Those were the hot, the third rail issues in Japan. Other than that you're talking about, you know, trade, us trying to get the Japanese- I mean, it's interesting but it doesn't have that sort of really fascination that you would get maybe from another volume. But still, I found even some of the duller volumes that I worked on to be interesting. I mean, Japan, one of the main themes in our relationship with Japan is trying

to get the Japanese to pay more for their own defense, getting them to increase the Japanese defense force, buy more sophisticated equipment, get them to make less cars, you know, to try to improve our balance of payments with the United States. Generally those issues are not as exciting but I think they're perhaps even more significant in our relations.

Sometimes the biggest relationships with the United States generated the least interesting and least documentation. I mean, the relationship with Mexico or Canada, from an economic point of view. These are our major trading partners, and yet it's very hard to find anything really to publish on Canada or Mexico.

*Q: Well for one thing, of course, you've got this- both- and with Canada, you've got these relationships that go from the governors are talking to the governors-*

KEEFER: Yes, that's right.

*Q: The FBI has- we're- you know, we're so intermingled there-*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: -that sort of the State Department plays really a secondary role.*

KEEFER: Right. And it was very hard to find any good documentation. We always used to make a joke about Mexico; if it wasn't for the salinity of the Colorado River we'd never have anything to publish or thank God the Colorado River had a lot of salt in it because we wouldn't have anything to publish. That's the only thing we ever talked to the Mexicans about from a State Department point of view, was the Colorado River's salt content.

*Q: Did you get involved in your Japanese volume of dealing with something that was termed at one point "the second battle of Okinawa"?*

KEEFER: I only oversaw the Japanese volumes; I didn't work on them. I don't think I ever worked on a Japanese volume, now that I think about it, but I reviewed the-

*Q: South Korean?*

KEEFER: I worked on South Korea, yes. But the second battle of Okinawa, you mean the reversion of Okinawa?

*Q: Yes.*

KEEFER: Yes, that was a big issue.

*Q: Oh boy.*

KEEFER: That was a real big issue.

*Q: And that was actually fought mainly between the State Department and the Pentagon.*

KEEFER: Particularly the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff).

*Q: Or, more specifically the Marine Corps and the State Department.*

KEEFER: That was fairly interesting. And then finally the reversion in '71.

*Q: With South Korea, did you get into evaluations of South Korea and Park Chung-hee and-*

KEEFER: We hadn't published the one on the assassination of Park Chung-hee, and I think that will be a very interesting volume. The State Department did a study of that and the whole Gwangju uprising, the assassination of Park, the coming to power of Chun Doo-hwan. That's a really interesting story. They had somebody who was supposed to do it. He was a Vietnam historian, but he's going to retire instead. Somebody's going to have to do that volume. I've seen a lot of the documentation when I worked on a chapter here and then what I'm working on now for the Carter volume that I'm working on for DOD; that's going to be an interesting story.

But what I worked on mostly when I worked on Vietnam was, I mean on Korea was, you know, Syngman Rhee, a fascinating character. The first volume I ever did was on the Korean War and then I would oversee a lot of the Korea volumes.

*Q: From what you saw, how was Syngman Rhee seen, because you know, you have some of the- sort of those- the- people say well I mean, he was our man and he was really tough and all, and others say oh my God, you know.*

KEEFER: My impression was that he was not very popular in the State Department, that most of the people that served in Korea felt he was a force not for good. Also, he was too dictatorial, was probably not helping the cause. I mean, he was a darling of the right, the conservatives, but he was not very popular, I don't think, among the people that actually served in Korea, at least that was my impression. He didn't get along very well with the ambassadors usually. He didn't treat the ambassadors very well, was part of the problem. He felt he wanted to deal with the president and secretary of state and the ambassador was beneath him so he did pretty rocky relationships. And of course his overthrow in '60 was, I don't think we had any role at all in that but nobody warned him of that.

*Q: Moving to China, there is a relationship, particularly in early days filled with mine fields.*

KEEFER: Yes. When we first did the China volumes--I didn't work on them but friends of mine did--we couldn't even say, I think it was we had to use some euphemism about the "China area" because we hadn't recognized the PRC (People's Republic of China).

When we were doing the volumes we were at the point where we were starting to recognize the PRC so we ran into all kinds of trouble so eventually, you know, now we just have a volume on China. When we talk about China we mean the PRC but in those early volumes when you talked about China you really meant the ROC (Republic of China). One of the first things that I remember when I first came to the office, I wasn't involved in it, was that they had some discussions in 1948 with Zhou Enlai, between Zhou Enlai and a Foreign Service officer, I believe, or maybe it wasn't, maybe it was an ambassador. It was about possibly recognizing the mainland government, recognizing the PRC. We thought this was a nice interesting episode of a road not taken. We tried to publish it and it took us years to get that published. They were worrying about our relationship with the ROC, but eventually it got published.

*Q: Well, I wonder if you could talk a bit about the internal problems of the Historians Office. Because when I came, and I served there, I think it was '84 to '85 or so, and Bill Slany was the head but I had- getting from you, you historians there, that at least two previous chief historians had had problems. I mean, you know, because to me it sounded like, I mean, I couldn't think of a more idyllic sort of setting, in the groves back then, we had- in the middle of the State Department where you've got 30 years to look at a problem.*

KEEFER: Well there were some good things about that, I agree. You did have a sort of unique ability to have access to documentation nobody else had, and that was really exciting, particularly more so in those days but now with the Freedom of Information with the National Security Archive, there's a lot more material available. But still, we had the first access to the Eisenhower NSC minutes, to the Nixon tapes, to Kissinger telephone conversations. We actually didn't get into the Kennedy tapes because the Archives wouldn't make them available. But yes, there were great things about that office. But remember, Kissinger always said about academia, the battles are so fierce because the stakes are so low. The Office of the Historian tended to mirror the issues and the tensions of academia in the period. In the '70s there was a lot of ferment in academia and it still is. We were exposed to that stuff. There were young historians coming up, there were older historians who had served in the '50s and tended to be much more government oriented, bureaucratic. And then you had the people who really saw themselves as academics, and they clashed and that was inevitable.

So Bill Slany was dedicated to the office but he was kind of autocratic. And he stayed a very long time. I think if you stay too long in any one job you kind of outlive your usefulness. In the '50s, he instituted this thing about looking at what we call loft files, which are files of offices. But what happened in his period is we started looking not just at the State Department files. Originally the series, when it was doing pre 1947, it just looked at the State Department files. We then started getting into all these other files and it became a very different operation.

There was always that tension within the office between management and the younger historians. They tended to hire historians in groups because you would hire a new batch. I told you the story about Nixon and how I got hired. Then 10, 20 years later you hire

another new batch. Continuity was never apparently good in the office. It was difficult to get people at different levels. You had a lot of people competing for jobs, then a new group took over and then new people came in. So that was part of the problem.

There wasn't so much political problems as personal, personnel problems. We had a series of pretty bad, in my view, directors. It's a very hard position to fill, the office of the historian in the Department of State. If you want to get a really big name historian, somebody who's got credentials as a historian, he or she is not going to want to come and work 52 or 50 weeks a year, eight hours a day. It doesn't compare with an academic job so it's very hard to get someone with a big academic reputation to come in. There were a couple of times that they did that and it didn't necessarily work terribly well, at least one time.

*Q: Was that Trask or-?*

KEEFER: That would be Trask, yes. And so you either had to hire from within, which is what they did with Bill Slany after Trask left; or you had to hire somebody else from outside the office like they did with Marc Susser. He had a PhD but wasn't really a working historian. Right now they have an ambassador in charge of the office on a three year detail.

*Q: Ed-*

KEEFER: Ed Brynn. He was telling the staff that with all these special assistants that have been created, special representatives, the ambassadors who used to be looking for jobs now are being sucked up and given jobs working for these special representatives. They are working for them so there are not a lot of ambassadors who are interested in being the historian in the Department of State. They really want them to have a PhD and some teaching experience so it's a hard thing to find someone to fill that job.

Under Slany I think it was just a matter of not allowing new people responsibilities that they felt they should have. People were doing the same job too long and becoming too set in their ways and relying on only a certain number of people for advice. So really that was the problem, I think, with Marc Susser that he just became more and more reliant on a very few number of people.

I don't know about this view of the ivory tower. Most people say that academic history departments are snake pits. They're worse than anyone could imagine. There's this mythology of the ivory tower and then there's reality and there's no real connection between the two.

*Q: Well was there, you know I'm aware because I talk to people in my oral histories, those who got involved in political science, you know, before things became quantified and after things became quantified; did quantification which, to my mind, seems to have had a very pernicious effect on political science but had quantification become a factor in the new historian versus the old historian?*

KEEFER: Yes it did, it did. For a period of time it did but the real switch now has been that the social historians have really come to dominate the field and the old military-political-diplomatic historians are very much on the outs. But by the very nature of the foreign relations series, and the State Department connection, you are ipso facto a diplomatic historian, political historian. And that's really not where the emphasis is being placed on history today. Interestingly enough, a lot of the quantification issues meant that a lot of political scientists became historians. In fact, some of the best historians, I've read their books or listened to them talk, turns out they're political scientists who have left the profession or have moved towards being much more historical in their analysis. There are probably about 1,000 diplomatic historians in the United States. There are quite a few in the world. At one time it was kind of the dominant field, political-military history, diplomatic history, that's where most of the people went. Then you'd have your other specialties, for example, Civil War history. But now everyone's really interested in social history, which has got a lot of value but-

*Q: But you know, I mean, one of the things that I note is gender history.*

KEEFER: Right.

*Q: Which has to be- seems- I've looked through the faculties from time to time for amusement and you have to be of a gender to be a gender historian, i.e., you have to be a woman to be-*

KEEFER: Yes. Well, it makes sense to study with- because women make up half the population and certainly it makes sense to study the role of women in society but the idea that you have to be a woman to do it is crazy. The other thing that happened in my 35 years working as an historian is that when I started it was mostly a male profession, particularly in the diplomatic military. Now it's at least half if not more women. The impact of women on the profession has been real large.

*Q: Do you think there's a difference in outlook?*

KEEFER: I don't think so. I always thought women had a better feel for social relationships. I know my wife reads books about social relationships; I read books about events and things happening.

*Q: I go through the same thing. I mean, and I'm always astounded at my wife's judgment of people, how good it is.*

KEEFER: Yes, I always say to Carol, does anything happen in this book or is it only just about people relating to other people? And if she says well nothing really happens then I'll read it. The fact that this office now, the head of the office is a woman. Women are moving into military history too and I think they'll bring some new skills to it. I always found military history fascinating and I always liked it as a kid. That's one of the reasons

I wanted to be an historian because I like military history. And certainly it's still very saleable; you can still write a good military history.

*Q: Military history sells.*

KEEFER: But it's very hard to get a job as a military historian anywhere because there are not that many places that offer military history.

*Q: Yes. One of the things sort of on the oral history side, which of course we're performing right now, is that for the military they spend most- you know, now with two wars going on it's different but up to then there was a long hiatus of really training troops or going to school and then a few months of very intense activity of shooting at people and blowing things up and then back to training, which doesn't make for a long oral history, whereas with the diplomatic type, I mean, if you aren't talking about some great event you're talking at least about a country and relations with that country or an issue in the department, and so you get much more, I mean a fairly easy to draw out.*

KEEFER: Some of the great new fields of diplomatic history are things like study of topical issues like environmental relations or drugs, the history of drug interdiction and drug prevention. As the international community gets more and more involved in, things like climate issues that stuff generates its own documentations. That's where I think the growth of the field is. Military history is basically stuff you're writing about, either the changing role of the armed forces in society or the battles that they fight.

*Q: Well I was talking to a woman yesterday who was a political advisor to Northern Command and she arrived just at the time when Northern Command was handed responsibility for much of the response to Katrina in New Orleans, and talking about what they were having to learn. I mean all issues that you'd never think about, I mean, the pouring in there and you know, they were getting involved in things they didn't know. But they said there was a crew who was sort of hanging around documenting sort of ready to come up with lessons learned from all this.*

KEEFER: Yes right, and there was a thing like the Haitian earthquake. There was a huge military response to that and I think that this office or someone should write a history of that because the role of military in humanitarian affairs is getting much greater.

*Q: It really is and the whole dealing with non-governmental organizations and all that.*

KEEFER: Yes, right.

*Q: It's a different world and this is where the action is.*

KEEFER: It is exactly. I think that redefining diplomatic and military history into those broader terms is probably the way that the field is going to bounce back. The role of the volunteer army, the role of women in the military, all of these are good issues. People have written books about them already but they're the kind of issues I think have broader

appeal. And you're always going to have people who will buy books about the Civil War because that's one of the fascinations of America with its battles and generals. But beyond that I think going to larger topics is probably better for the profession.

*Q: Well Ted I think- Is there something we haven't covered, you think?*

KEEFER: Yes, well we haven't covered the immediate end of my career but maybe I'd rather not talk about that too much. I had planned to stay on until I had to retire at 65 because I'm officially a Foreign Service officer because of some quirk when I came in. But I left the office early because I felt that I couldn't work with the then current leader who's now since gone. I felt that we were losing too many good people; we were losing too many of our best historians because of mismanagement or inferior management. So I figured, if I can do something maybe my leaving will galvanize some opinion. I think it had an effect; it wasn't a major effect.

*Q: But it's interesting. I mean, here is a small little enclave in the State Department and yet was on the front page of New York Times and the Washington Post?*

KEEFER: Well yes, the previous time we were is when we didn't publish these volumes on the covert operations in Guatemala and Iran. The Office of the Historian is a very small, but it has, because of its connection with the U.S. Government, with the Department of State, with the official record and the fact that it was started in 1861, it has tremendous respect as an institution, the series and the office. I think that's one of the reasons I've always been happy that I worked there because I really felt that we were doing something that was significant and was appreciated by a lot of people, not just scholars but by the general public. And the fact that when something goes wrong, as it did, people would come to the rescue. There were people in the State Department, Condoleezza Rice would be one of them, who did come to the rescue and who made the tough decisions. So I was very pleased.

*Q: Well how did you find- In the first place, the officers, the historians who left, were they able to get respectable jobs?*

KEEFER: Yes they got good jobs. In fact, it's always been a case where people that leave the Office of the Historian tend to get really good jobs. A couple of them went to INR which is a natural-

*Q: Bureau of Intelligence and Research.*

KEEFER: Yes, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, where you use your expertise as an area- these were both area specialist- but they developed their new specializations. One of them went on to this office-

*Q: This office being?*

KEEFER: OSD's history; she's now the head of this office. Some of them went to private teaching but most of them found other government jobs. I think that working in a historical office is really good training for any kind of job you'll do in the government. You have looked at past governments, past administrations. You have a much better understanding of how policy is formulated and if you know how policy is formulated you can maybe get- make a little more impact on current-

*Q: You can also read between the lines.*

KEEFER: Yes, right.

*Q: And understand what a government document means.*

KEEFER: Right, yes. Because a lot of memos are not written in a piercing style; they sort of write around a topic but if you're smart enough you can see what they're getting at. There are a few exceptions like Robert Komer; Bob Komer always used to write what he thought and that was always very refreshing. I used to love Komer memos because he would tell you exactly what he thought was going on in the bureaucracy and he was a very good, energetic writer.

Anyway, I've enjoyed the interview.

*Q: And you'll get a copy and you can edit and expand it and all.*

KEEFER: Okay.

*End of interview*