

Interview with John O. Bell

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

AMBASSADOR JOHN O. BELL

Interviewed by: Arthur L. Lowrie

Initial interview date: June 17, 1988

Copyright 1998 ADST

Q: Ambassador Bell, I notice in your bio data that you began in the State Department when you were 19 years old. I wonder if you could say something about how you got started in a Foreign Service career?

BELL: Well, actually my entry in the State Department was a combination of accidents, perhaps. I started working when I was sixteen in the Agriculture Department as a messenger boy. They then had an examination for promotion to clerk, which I took when I became eligible (age 18). I came out second in the Agriculture Department. This was in 1930 and times were tough. They said they might have a job to which I could be promoted in maybe six months to a year. So I started looking around. If you had established yourself on one register you were eligible elsewhere. There was a chap I knew who had worked as a messenger in the Civil Service Commission, so he and I would walk over from the Agriculture Department to the Civil Service Commission (a mile or so) at lunch time now and then, and go upstairs to the office where they kept the requests for certifications and see who was looking for whom. Security was somewhat casual in those days and we just walked in, picked up the book and looked.

Library of Congress

I saw one day there was one in the State Department (about which I knew nothing). So, I went down and put my nickel in the phone and called the personnel office and said I understand you're looking for a clerk and I'd like to apply for the job; could I come over? So they gave me a time to come over. I was interviewed by a gentleman named Percy Allen, who was the Assistant Chief of Personnel. At that time in the State Department this was a small office. He wanted to know if the Civil Service Commission had sent me and I said certainly not, so he wondered why I was there and I told him and he seemed to be intrigued. He said, I don't think you can qualify for this job, and I said, well, I passed the exam. He said, we need somebody with a college education and at least one language. (This was to pay \$120 a month!) I said I'm going to school at night. I've got one year already done and I'm on my second year at night and I have some Spanish. Oh well, he said, that's a good story; but he seemed sympathetic and he said maybe we'll have something sometime.

So I chalked that one off and went home. About three weeks later I had a call from him asking me to come back and see him again. I did and he said I think we've got something you can qualify for and I said, oh great. He said you don't mind hard work and I said, no. No sir. No way I mind hard work. (You know, you're young and you don't care.) So, I transferred. The Agriculture Department then offered me \$100 per month. I said why should I stay for \$100 a month when I can get \$120 at State. All I'm interested in is getting enough money to pay my tuition, going to school at night at George Washington. So I started in there. I had met Mr. Allen. He was in Room 102 in the old State/War/Navy building—a very fancy office, you know. Big mahogany doors and everything was plush. I got there for duty and we went down the hall to a stairway and went downstairs to the basement—which still looked alright—went down the hall, went down some more stairs to the subbasement and back in a corner of the subbasement to room 02 which was the lowest numbered room in the building occupied by personnel. I was the lowest paid white man in the building.

Library of Congress

It turned out this was a job with almost nothing to do except to answer the phone from time-to-time and keep up mailing lists so that we could mail out monthly copies of the Diplomatic List and annual copies of the State Department Register and Foreign Service List and such things. So I had lots of time to study. Mr. Allen once in a while would drop by and he'd say are you working hard? and I'd say I'm getting done what I'm given to do. He'd say are you studying hard? I'd say yes sir. He really was giving me a break is what it amounted to. That lasted for a couple of years, I guess, until the Congress passed a bill saying that you couldn't have more than one member of the family employed by the Federal Government (that was part of the depression). So, the State Department had to let go a lot of wives because their husbands were working and I got a chance to move, or was drafted to move, from that job to the Passport Office which I didn't mind. It wasn't very exciting what I was doing, but in the Passport Office you had to work a lot harder and you didn't have much time to study.

I had a chief who was notorious as “a tough old lady”. It seemed at that age she was a tough old lady. Actually she was a very industrious woman, Ruth Shipley. I worked for her for eight years in the Passport Office. I started out in the Passport Division, one of the lowest jobs they had which was pasting pictures in the Passports and running the shredding machine where the photograph was fastened then typing up lists of Passports for the Post Office. I was handy and they moved me around until I did almost every kind of job they had. At the end of eight years there, I was number three in the Division—Executive Officer—but with very little prospect for advancement beyond that unless the Chief or Assistant Chief died, which didn't look very likely happening and, as it turned out, neither one did for 20 years or more. I guess the Passport Division really is what got me excited about the State Department because they had not only interesting exposure to the whole works, but a lot of chances to do different things. It was a place where you could make sense out of trying to improve management, because when you're dealing with anything that involved 100,000 or more pieces of paper going through a process, if you could save 30 seconds on each of 100,000 you could do a lot.

Library of Congress

Q: Was it in the Old Executive Office Building?

BELL: Yes, the whole State Department was there, the Adjutant General's Office was there, General Pershing's office was there. Chip Bohlen once said that the great mistake was to move out of that building. He said if we had been forced to stay in that building, then we would have been forced to keep the size of the staff to rational proportions and might have been able to do a decent job. There's a lot of truth in it.

Q: We're you able to continue studying and get your degree during this time?

BELL: Oh yes. I was majoring in chemistry and for some reason wanted to be a chemist when I started. I got my bachelor's degree in that in 1934 and by that time I knew I didn't want to be a chemist and I thought well, I'll shift to maybe a patent lawyer. Still, you can see, not thinking about the Foreign Service as a career. So, I went to law school and I passed the Bar in 1938 and then I got my law degree, finally, in 1939. I did well in law school and was on the Law Review.

Q: That was at night too?

BELL: Sure. You took the same work, you just took longer, that's all. You had the same teachers. The classes were packed. You had freshman classes with 250 students in the class, but it was so much easier, I thought, than undergraduate work in chemistry. In chemistry it was a killer. You had labs and you had reports and tests and experiments to write up and intricate calculations to make. In Law School you took an exam in June in each subject and that was it.

Q: So, you were in the Passport Office when the war started?

BELL: Yes, I started to say, there were interesting things in the Passport Office. The concern with the activities of the German/American Bund on the one hand and the Communist Party on the other. They, particularly the Communists, were active in trying to

Library of Congress

get false passports, or good passports with false identities. I worked for a while in the fraud section of the Passport Office and this was very interesting. You began to get involved in political considerations whether you intended to or not. One of the things that the Fraud Section was suppose to try to prevent was people getting passports to go to Spain, and many people got there as you may remember in the Abraham Lincoln brigade particularly. It's very interesting to me that out of all the several thousand people that we were able to identify there, there were only two who fought on the Franco side and one of them had fought on both sides (he was clearly a mercenary, Whiney Dahl). But, when that war was over and they started repatriating those fellows, a couple of us went up to New York to meet the boat when it came back with several hundred of them and interviewed them all. The police handled that really intelligently. They just didn't let anybody off the boat for nine hours and the crowd that was on the pier to raise cain had dissipated by that time so there was no demonstration. But that was very interesting because you got a view of these people as a small handful that had really gone for the money thinking they were going to make a lot of money very disappointed. There were a few who were there that I would call really hardcore members of the communist movement, but the majority were just idealistic young kids who had gone there because they thought that was the thing to do. I must say my sympathies were wholly with them. I found it very irritating to be trying to stop them going to prevent this.

We also got involved another way with trying to keep people from going to China with which I was quite sympathetic because there we were trying to prevent involvement that might get us into war with Japan. I began to get acquainted with missionary groups. Jim McKenna, who was Consul General in Canton, tells a story about some Chinese gentleman in his Consular district who told him at lunch one day how grateful they were to the American missionaries for coming over to tell them the right way to go, but how puzzled they were because there were, in the Canton district, 28 different Christian denominations, each one saying I am the true way. He had a suggestion which he wanted Mr. McKenna to consider—that they all go back to the States and when they had agreed

Library of Congress

which one was right, send that one. I thought that was great. I became intrigued with how many of those missionaries were so imbued with their faith that they felt that nothing was important but that, and if the United States got involved in the war because of their activity, that was God's will. I don't know that it came from that, but it certainly strengthened what had been a lifelong aversion to zealots of any sort, shape or description. I distrust them more than anybody else I guess. Persons who know the whole truth and nothing but the truth leave me cold. We were also involved in the war in the sense of, when war came I had gone on vacation to Atlantic City when the Athenia was sunk and I was called back and I never had a day that wasn't exciting since that time.

We went on a program to replace all the passports which were in existence. Change the passport, redesign it, change the color, the whole thing. A new passport. Everybody had to turn their passports in. The idea was to try to latch on to any spies or potential spies or agents that we could.

Q: When was that?

BELL: 1939.

Q: Oh, 1939 before we were in the war?

BELL: I believe it was 1939. I believe I'm right. Maybe I'm wrong. It was in that era sometime between 1939 and 1941, that's for sure.

Q: What precipitated that?

BELL: Fear of agents, foreign agents and that the passports were too easy to forge, too easy to counterfeit. They wanted to make one that was really tough. They had guys work up at the Government Printing Office for a long time trying to design foolproof, well not foolproof, but as near counterfeit-proof as they could—paper, overmarks and whatnot. When we started replacing them, I had to get some extra help. We were allowed to hire

Library of Congress

a couple of people and one of the guys I got from another division to come up and work (he was working at \$135 a month) was Bob Ryan, now Ambassador Ryan and father of Ambassador Bob Ryan Jr. Bob worked for me then, a very bright young man, very able person. That was an exciting time, but as I say it had to be 1939 because I left the Passport Division in 1941, in the middle of 1941.

I left because they had started a new system in the State Department. As you probably know, there were Foreign Service personnel and Civil Service personnel. As far as Civil Service personnel were concerned, they started a new system which was that if there were any vacancies then they had to ask the personnel office first whether there was anyone on board who was qualified. If there were people on board that were qualified for consideration, they had to be interviewed before they could go outside to get somebody. These appointments were largely Civil Service Schedule B, I think, which essentially meant it wasn't competitive except that you had to meet Civil Service qualifying standards, you didn't have to be on an exam list and you could be fired for no cause. I got on a panel for a job in the Division of International Communications, which handled Aviation and Shipping and Telecommunications and I was interviewed for that job by Tom Burke, who was the Chief of it at that time. He spent most of our interview telling me how the last thing he wanted were any lawyers, which was my only qualification for the job (I had passed the Bar).

But he decided he liked me so he offered me the job and Mrs. Shipley said, you can't go you're too valuable to me. But the job paid \$600 more a year, it was a bottom job in the Division of International Communication and I was as far as I could go in the Passport Office. I went to see the Assistant Secretary, Mr. G. Howland Shaw at that time, who had charge of Mrs. Shipley's division and said, if I'm not qualified that's one thing, but the Personnel Office says I am qualified and Mr. Burke says he wants me. I said, I know it's inconvenient for Mrs. Shipley, but for me it's whether I've got a future here or don't and if I don't, then I'm going to leave. You decide if I'm going to Mr. Burke's office or not. If I'm not, I'm leaving. If I have to drive a bus I don't care, I'm not going to sit here for 20 years and

Library of Congress

wait to be patted on the head and told “good dog”. (Mrs. Shipley was a funny character, I thought she was a model of a sort of 18th century matriarch. She would defend you against outsiders all the way, and she somehow knew magically what was going on with everybody's private life and would help them if she could, but you had to be mama's boy. Don't try to get out from under her or you're bad.) Well, he said I would go. I had about a month before I was transferred.

It was very interesting to me at any rate, I thought a lot about what I was going to say to her about why she tried to block me from this promotion which meant a lot to me. I said something to my wife like, I'm going to tell that old biddy off, and she said, don't be a damn fool. I said, you're probably right. So, the one and only time in our long association I felt that I had the best of her was when I went in for my farewell call and said, I just want to thank you for all you've done for me and the opportunity you've given me here and tell you that if I can do anything for you in the future please let me know. Well, her jaw dropped and she started thumbing her beads (which she always did when at a loss). It was the only time I ever felt I was at the advantage. She didn't speak to me for a year. But then my oldest daughter was born and, much to my amazement, at the hospital arrives a great vase of flowers for my wife with a nice card from Mrs. Shipley and relations were resumed and we got along fine after that. Looking back at it, I understand a lot better how she felt because I was in a sort of key spot and it wasn't easy to replace anybody who had done every job they had and knew the system and could be told to do something and get it done, you know. Somebody else could do it, in time, but it was inconvenient.

So I shifted over to Aviation Division—lowest job, higher paying—and for a while wondered what I was supposed to be doing, but then we got involved in what turned out to be very active work. At this time people were flying out of Europe trying to get out of Europe because the Germans were moving along. The war had begun and things were kind of bad and there was inadequate means of escape. (We had had a lot of problems in Passport because of that too.) PanAm ran the only air service between Europe and America at that time and it consisted of two flying boats a week, going either to Foynes in

Library of Congress

Ireland or Lisbon, sometimes via the Azores. They could stop in the Azores if they carried more passengers, but that depended on the weather and the waves. Particularly in Lisbon, they were swamped with refugees all wanting to get on the plane—far more than they could carry—and each alleging importance, urgency and whatnot. They asked the State Department if they'd please tell them which people to take first, if it made any difference to the Government. So in a way quite illegally, but with nobody raising that question, the State Department Aviation Division Office started loading those airplanes by saying give priority to Mr. Zilch or Mr. Whatever for passage; we were loading all of the planes coming from Europe. Then we began to do it for the Far East, as well, where they had a little service.

The war came, and by Executive Order this priority control went to the War Department and not to the State Department. (The State Department was not a contender for it for that matter.) In the War Department, the General Staff, Operations Division had the job and they got bothered by this. They came over to the State Department and said, we wish you would tell us, or take on the task of deciding priorities for civilians, anyone who is not traveling for Army or Navy you say and we'll go along with it. State Department agreed to that and I inherited that job. The fella who had been doing it primarily went over to the War Department. He got a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel—a nice safe job during the war. I had an office which then was supposed to decide on priorities. This meant anybody traveling for the US Government who didn't travel for Army or Navy or any foreign government or any private citizen that wanted priority and if you didn't get priority you weren't going to go, at least to Europe or Asia. And, you had a hard time going to Latin America without it. We ended up with about three people working for me and that was a real pressure job, believe me. You were never free from somebody on the phone or banging at your door or whatnot.

Q: Was the priority based on individual names?

Library of Congress

BELL: No. The criterion was its importance to the war effort. A very broad criterion but excluded personal business or that sort of thing.

Q: How about refugees or Jews trying to get out of Europe?

BELL: No priority for anybody trying to get out of Europe unless you could show a connection to the war effort.

Q: Even before the war?

BELL: Even before the war. No, this wasn't something being done because of great compassion for the Jews at all. The amount of people you could move by PanAm wasn't that big anyway. You're not talking about modern aviation. You're talking about, well, by the time the war got on you were beginning to talk about modern aviation because you were talking about flying in Army planes. The technological change between 1939 and 1944 in air traffic was beyond belief. By 1944 we had transport aircraft crossing the Atlantic every 15 minutes. We had two a week in 1939. It became a big thing. It was a pressure job. The only complaint we ever had was one I got from the State Department Foreign Service Personnel Division because I had not given priority to some guy who was a Cultural Affairs Officer who wanted to get to Turkey for a fair and I sent him by boat.

The aftermath of all this change, at the end of the war of course we had big problems because you had had this big technical jump. As you were going to move from military aviation to civil aviation you suddenly realized there were no ground rules. There were no international arrangements, permissions for operating services such as PanAm had operated had been privately negotiated by PanAm with the countries and it was apparent you needed something more. So Aviation Division was gung-ho. We had a big conference in Chicago in 1944 for seven weeks at the Stevens Hotel (I don't recommend it) at which we negotiated what became the International Civil Aviation Convention and Treaty and out of it grew the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which still exists and

Library of Congress

functions. There were 54 countries at that meeting, which was a lot when you consider this was before Africa blossomed and the war wasn't even over.

We had a funny incident, the Russians announced on the radio one day that they had denounced the conference and refused to attend it because Spain was attending. It was fascinating because we'd had a series of bilateral talks before the big multilateral meeting, including some with the Russians who had come over from Russia during the war and we met at Blair House. I was in the meetings and I know this is fact, and discussed what might come up. The Russians didn't have anything to say much about Spain at that point, but they had a very simple theory of how international aviation should operate after the war which was that you divided the world up into sectors and we would have a sector and they would have a sector and the Europeans might have a sector and maybe somebody in the Far East and you would fly your traffic to their border and they'd pick it up and they'd fly it to the next and they'd pick up. We sort of said we believe the planes fly around the world and everybody should fly around and regard airspace as common property and not as separately owned.

The fascinating part was that the Russians, in fact, did come to the conference, or a delegation came to the conference. We had arranged for their flight permits because they came across Alaska and down across Canada into Chicago and they landed in Chicago and came to the hotel and checked in and that night was the night that Moscow radio announced that they had turned down the invitation. And, the delegation got in cabs and hotfooted it back to the airport so they could get back to Russia. Things get screwed up in Soviet communications too. They're not really as efficient as they think. Anyway, they didn't attend.

It was obvious that you had to have the same kind of landing procedures and technical safety standards for civil aviation. That went easily, but when you got to the question of how much service can you run and the economic competition, that was a different can of worms. The British and ourselves were particularly at odds on this. The British felt that

Library of Congress

we had a great initial advantage because we had been building all the bomber planes and they had been building fighter planes so that we were advanced on the transport side. So, they wanted to limit what we could do until they could catch up. We, of course, didn't want to limit anything. The big argument was over what they called Fifth Freedom traffic. If you were running a service from New York to London to Paris to Frankfurt, Fifth Freedom traffic would be that which you picked up in London to take to Paris. It is not generated at either end of the line.

Q: Were these negotiations in the hands of the State Department?

BELL: Oh yes.

Q: Weren't other agencies in there?

BELL: The Civil Aeronautics Board and the State Department were doing the negotiating. There were also some people from the FAA but they were more on the technical side than the economic side. The economic side was CAB business and the State Department.

We met with the British then in Bermuda and we reached a compromise with the British, which to me was another lesson. What we did with the British was agree on a form of language; we agreed that we would use that same form of language in any agreements we made after that with anyone else; and that we would modify any agreements we had already made to contain that language. This was language which referred to the carriage of traffic beyond that which you initiated. And the particular words used were "with due regard to the requirements of through airline operations". Now, the beauty of that language is that it means sort of like "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious". It doesn't mean a damn thing or it means whatever you want to say it means. Each side understood that. It meant that we agreed finally that we really didn't know what the future was going to prove so we wanted a form of language which would go on without deciding now on the regulation, but be free to argue any position in the future. A very, very useful thing and it worked out very

Library of Congress

well because our positions both changed somewhat in the light of time and experience. But it gave us some interesting negotiating problems.

I was particularly aware of some in Latin America because I helped negotiate a number of agreements there. You had to have the text of the agreement valid in both Spanish and in English and you began to find out how difficult it was to translate ambiguity. We have six different Spanish versions of that one English text, which were accepted as ambiguous to the other party, at any rate.

There were several lessons in this to me. One is that you can get people to agree on infringements on their sovereignty when they see the clear benefit and necessity of it on the technical side and you can wisely decide not to try to press to an agreement when the time isn't right for it. It was interesting to me. We had an exciting period because in two years we completed not only that big 54-nation multilateral treaty. If I remember rightly, somewhere in the 20s of bilateral air transport agreements and more than 20 air facility disposal agreements with regard to airfields we built all over the goddamn world, like John Payne in Cairo. It was a wartime measure and only with wartime provisions so the question was what happens to it now. Well, you can't pick up an airfield and bring it home like you can a tank. It's there and there's no sense in tearing it up. What you want to be able to do is use it. We wanted two objectives. One is to be able to use it commercially and the other was that in case of war again the right to use. Well, the latter wasn't so easy and the former had prices attached. Everybody had a price he wanted to extract for accepting our gift.

But, we negotiated a lot of agreements. Now the War Department was in on those. That was the State/War/Navy Coordinating Committee paper. I was a State Department man on that set of agreements more than the others. And, we negotiated a lot of them. So, it was an interesting time. This was about 1947, I guess. By that time we were pretty well through the exciting part, in my mind.

Library of Congress

The National War College was started in 1946-47 and they had invited the Foreign Service to send officers to attend the same as the Army, Navy and Air Force. The same number. The Foreign Service had been a little difficult about it. They had sent some but they didn't fill their quota. They could have sent 30 and they had only sent about 20. So the next year the War College said well they would really like to have us filled up, so we'd like you to send this invitation not only to Foreign Service but to any senior officers in the State Department. A fellow named Willard Barber became aware of this and we had lunch and discussed this and decided we would like to go. The Foreign Service Personnel was a different office from State Department Personnel. Willard found out about this first and how he found out about it I never did know. The Foreign Service Personnel was not making it known to the State Department as a whole that this offer existed. So, each of us went to our respective Assistant Secretaries and said we'd like to go. What about it, will you back us for it? Each of our Assistant Secretaries said yes, great idea. We ended up going! Participated the next year in writing out criteria that should apply to the selection of people to go! This was a lot of fun.

It was an absolutely great experience. It was the second year of the college, 1947-48 at Ft. McNair. Admiral Hill was in charge and the Army Deputy Commandant was General Lemnitzer and the Air Force Deputy Commandant was General Landon, who was a real brain. The State Department sent Maynard Barnes, who wasn't so hot. (He had been preceded by George Kennan.) It was a fascinating experience. There were 120 students divided into 20 committees at random, given a problem to work on. The requirement was that you came up in JCS format with an answer to the problem. You could have dissents if you wanted but they had to be documented. The faculty 'staff' would pick out a solution or two that they thought were the most provocative and that committee or committees would have to present their solution to the rest of the 20 and defend them in an open debate. That was one part of the program.

Library of Congress

Then you had a lecture series which were the best people they could find or at least the most informed or responsible people they could find on whatever subject it was. They had General Groves to talk about the Manhattan District project. You had Oppenheimer to talk about the science side of it. You had Eisenhower to talk about problems of combined command. I mean it was a stellar group.

Then you had a seminar in which everybody got to do a particular term study. I did mine on Soviet Aspirations in the Mediterranean Sea.

To digress here a second, years later when I was at the University of South Florida I couldn't find my copy of the damn thing. I thought well I'd really like to see what I said. How far off is it now? I couldn't remember for sure. So, I wrote the War College and said would you mind sending me a copy. I know you've got copies of everything. I heard back—well we'll have to get clearances on that. It took six months on a citation I made 20 years before for God's sake, or more. Anyway, I finally got it. (It wasn't too bad, but it wasn't too great either.)

Anyhow, the competition committees changed every problem so you dealt with five new people. By the time the year was over you'd worked at least once with everybody else in the class. All these guys were pretty hard-nosed, opinionated people. The military had to have at least 15 years outstanding ratings and be at least Colonel grade or equivalent. The State Department had no particular criteria at that time. In fact, Fisher Howe and I were the two youngest guys in the class—about four or five years younger than the average of the group. Not abashed by it but we were. Everybody got to act as Chairman once too, that worked that way. You had to try to make the group coalesce, which wasn't easy. It changed my opinion somewhat about the Services. I had an image in my mind, derived from God knows what—too many books, I guess—of the Navy as being the sophisticated people who would think in international terms. And they turned out, at least as far as that class was concerned, to be the most conservative, hide-bound group of all. Maybe an unfortunate group. Not everybody in there was that way, there were some exceptions.

Library of Congress

The Air Force was erratic. Some very bright, some very much fly boys. But, the Air Force was very young. Many of the Generals and Colonels were guys who had made some spectacular combat records, which doesn't necessarily equate with being good staff officers. Makes them good fighters. The Army turned out to surprise me most because they were, by far, the most sophisticated in that class and General Lemnitzer, I thought, was very good. Truman Landon and the Air Force deputy was very bright too. He was only there the first semester and they pulled him out and he went over to do something about the Italian elections in 1948. He and Eddie Page from our class. What they were doing, I don't know but they were pulled out. He was succeeded by a General named O. P. Wyland, who was a "fly boy" who really wasn't smart, I'm sorry to say. Anyway, it was a great experience.

The last problem we had in the year was what should we do about Europe and the Russians. There we were, it was 1948, June, May. Well our committee (I was Chairman for this one) came up with an answer that essentially said we've got to draw a line. We've got to draw a line here and say this is as far as you go. Any further means war and we ain't kidding. You could say it was like a prototype for NATO. We got picked to give the presentation on this final problem of the year which we enjoyed.

Then I went back to the State Department. I had worked a deal that I was going to the European Division. Jack Dickerson was Chief of the European Division. They were to give me a job, essentially one they would create for the purpose, Deputy Chief of Northern European Division. Shortly after I was to go out in the Foreign Service Reserve and be assigned to Oslo. Then when I had served a tour there I would come back to be Chief of the Northern European Division and Ben Hulley, who was then Chief, would go back to the field. This was the sort of interfacing they were trying to do in those days between Civil Service and Foreign Service. But as it turned out, when I reported to the Northern European Division, they had me set up there alright, but they didn't have the budget to send me to Norway. So they said, help out. So, I helped out. And when somebody would go on leave, I'd do their job. The main thing that was interesting going on them was

Library of Congress

Indonesia, which you'd be surprised was part of the Northern European Division's problem because Holland was. Fritz Nolting was working on that desk and I'd substitute for him when he was away. Cap Green, Northern European, was working on the Antarctic Treaty. Northern European was sort of a funny name for it. I finally went around to Hickerson and said (I'd known him a long time), Jack, I'm sure you know I haven't got enough to do. I want you to know I know it and I feel like I've had my vacation and I'm prepared to work and if you've got something for me to do, I'd like to have it. He said, don't worry, don't worry. About a week later he said, well, go help Ted Achilles.

So, I went around to see Ted Achilles. Ted Achilles was in the Western European Division. It turned out what Ted was doing was negotiating a North Atlantic Treaty as this point. I always think, there's a guy who was really smart and never got nearly as much credit as he should have, Ted Achilles. He was some man. He was doing that negotiation, damn near single-handedly as far as the State Department was concerned. Well, then he got me a little bit and Bill Galloway to sort of circle his desk. He reported to Hickerson and they talked to people above, I'm sure. But, what he did that was so smart is that he essentially co-opted four members of Congress, Vandenberg and Connally, the Chairman and senior member of the Foreign Relations Committee and the equivalent two from the House Committee. Every damn step of that negotiation he consulted with them. I mean he would go up there and talk to them about what the other people said and what he thought. By the time that treaty was done, it was their treaty. This was a fantastic accomplishment, I thought. You had a Congress which the President-elect had just lambasted the hell out of, do nothing, whatnot, Mr. Truman's salty language. And, you were proposing a treaty which was a fundamental reversal of US foreign policy from the days of George Washington. We're going to get involved in an entangling alliance, about as entangling as you could be. That got ratified with only three dissenting votes and, I say, because of Ted Achilles' technique of working in with the Congress. There was no publicity about it. No speeches, no big talk. Just quiet, patient, time-consuming, tedious, laborious negotiations.

Library of Congress

He negotiated with more Congressmen and 8-10 countries and he got it done. I did very little in this. I mean he was doing the whole thing.

About this time, the State/War/Navy Coordinating Committee had recommended a paper saying they really ought to work out a military assistance program. The President approved that and it was given to the State Department, Hickerson, who gave it to Achilles and said, do something about this. So, Achilles called a meeting of his boys and a few others (about a dozen people there, I guess) and they discussed what do we do. Well, we agreed it had be an interdepartmental effort. Obviously the Defense Department, obviously the State Department, but also the European Recovery Administration because we were already embarked on the Marshall Plan. The concept became that you should have a committee set up with representatives of those three agencies, chaired by the State Department, to work out the specific policies and proposals, draft legislation and develop a budget. They tried to figure out who to give the jobs to. Nobody wanted to be stuck with this job which looked like a tough one, you know, work with the Pentagon and all that. Finally, they picked on Ernie Gross, the Legal Counsel who was in Paris at that time. He was attending a meeting and so they said fine, so they got Ernie Gross. Ernie Gross was then the Chairman of this committee. Well, Ernie had to get a staff and he had a young lawyer working for him that he wanted, Walter Surrey. He wanted to get somebody from the Policy Planning Staff, so he went to George Kennan and said give me somebody on the Policy Planning Staff. Well, George Kennan wasn't sure he even agreed with this idea and he gave the impression "if I didn't think of it first it's no good anyhow". But, he finally said well they could have Hugh Cummings. Well, Hugh Cummings didn't even belong to him. Hugh Cummings was actually the Counselor at Embassy Stockholm. He happened to be in Washington, technically on detail with the Policy Planning Staff. Actually, he was in Washington to settle his father's estate and was supposed to go right back to Stockholm as soon as he did that. His father had been the US Surgeon General. Hugh reported to Northern European Division (where I was). Hugh didn't want to be stuck with this stuff, although they said it was only going to take three weeks. He was too busy so he asked me

Library of Congress

wouldn't I like to do it, and I said sure, always being willing to try something new. So he told George Kennan, well let Jack do it, he's free. Kennan didn't really care so I went. We weren't representing him anyway. It was just a body they wanted to work.

I went around there and they said it was supposed to be three weeks; it ended up being three years. That was 1949 and I never worked so hard in my life as that year. There was no day I didn't work, Saturdays, Sundays, Holidays. Sundays and Saturdays a little less time, but you were just going like crazy. But, it was really exciting because on the Defense side they appointed somebody else to be the top committee member but the working guy in charge turned out to be General Lemnitzer with whom I had just spent a year at the War College. So, I had a communication entree that was very useful. Jeeb Halaby from the Defense Department was their man for writing policy. He and I were the policy writers. We were supposed to write the policies which were to govern this stuff and Surrey and some military lawyers were going to write the draft legislation. George McGhee was going to be the program man, but we felt he was too pro-Pentagon so we told Webb you got to get George McGhee away, he's too soft for the Pentagon. George had been "running" the Greek/Turkey program, but anything the military wanted was okay with George.

It was exciting. We tried to figure out what do you really need for this program. One of the things that we had to do was to decide where we wanted to provide this military assistance. Where we wanted the military assistance program was for the NATO countries. We were working on it concurrently with working out NATO.

When Congress passed the authorization bill for the military assistance, they said it had to be related to an agreed strategic concept so that there was a furtherance of a joint plan, not just dispense a little stuff to everybody. They had to first get an agreed concept which led itself into force goals. What kind of force goals did you have? The NATO military chiefs came up with a set of force goals. And, if I remember right, they wanted 90-some divisions in Europe and so many aircraft, and so many ships. I remember the 90 because it sort of symbolized the thing. Then we had to do a study on what part of those force goals

Library of Congress

could be achieved. In particular, in terms of equipment. What would be the equipment requirements for those force goals and how could they be met and how much money from each country, and what production in each country? These are broad terms but we eventually came up with the idea that the Europeans could not manage it all and the residual requirement which would have to be met from us if you were going to make the force goals by the critical date of 1954. (That was picked out as when the break would be most likely to happen.) They were going to need \$25 billion worth of equipment. \$25 billion at a time when the American defense budget was less than \$14 billion. Mr. Truman was presented with this information and we said you need \$18 billion the first year because of lead time and \$7 billion the second year. He said don't be stupid, no way, he said, we can do that. There is no way I'm going up to Congress with any such figure. Figure out what you can do for \$1.5 billion. Harry was a man who made up his mind.

Q: What did you say about 1954.

BELL: I said that was regarded as the date by which you needed to be ready for all-out war. You had a medium term defense plan which was geared to getting ready for that date. Then you hoped by that date to be in a position to be a real deterrent.

Q: Was there in the State Department a real sense of urgency to get doing something for Europe? The cold war was underway by that time.

BELL: Oh yes, there was sense of urgency. People were serious about it.

Q: Why did it take so long to come to the defense of Europe?

BELL: I think, the number one problem was that you had this sort of almost irresponsible demobilization. People wanted their boys home. The war was over. They had won. The concept of the Russians as enemies hadn't really percolated thoroughly. Hitler was beaten, the Japs were beaten. What the hell are they doing? Why don't they get these boys back? Almost panicky. We really felt this in the business about the airfields. We couldn't even

Library of Congress

keep enough people on those damn airfields to hold them a lot of the time when we were trying to negotiate. We were giving them up so fast it was obvious we were leaving. They just wanted to go home, that's all. The defense budget was pretty high during the war but in 1949 it had dropped way down.

I think it interesting to point out that shortly after Mr. Truman's decision, the military chiefs met again and revised the force goals to some 50 divisions—plus air and navy. And some four decades later have yet to reach these reduced goals. I recall talking with General Lemnitzer about this and asking him how they could have been so exaggerated in the first place. He argued with some force (and truth) that the time given made a fully considered calculation impossible, that it was the military people's responsibility to state what they believed would be needed to assure victory, it was not their job (nor capability) to define either economic or political limitations. If what was sought was a decision as to what we were capable of doing to meet the perceived threat, that was properly the responsibility of the political decision maker which Mr. Truman had met. Then the military, as always (he opined) make the best they can with what they get. I think decision makers in all fields are constantly looking at experts and trying to get them to make decisions which really are their own to make and the responsibility theirs to meet.

Anyhow, we got started with military aid to the North Atlantic treaty countries. In the very first year it was expanded beyond NATO by Congress adding to the bill \$75 million for military aid “in the general area of China”. This was the result of a lobby for Chiang Kai-shek. It wasn't wanted by the Administration at all. But, it was put in there and, of course, immediately we had pleas from everyone to use some of that money. I remember people coming up and proposing aid for Afghanistan from the general area of China.

Well, that was the beginning of a gradual, but not too gradual, expansion of the military aid concept. You've got military aid in Latin America and a lot of other places where we should never have placed it, in my opinion. I don't doubt that aid for NATO was well worthwhile, but elsewhere it wasn't.

Library of Congress

A most interesting thing, to my mind, of the events of this period occurred when the North Atlantic Treaty was about to be signed in April 1949. The Dutch in December, 1948 had undertaken what they called a "police action" in Indonesia. If you remember, they had been expelled by the Japanese after 300 years and they went back to take it back over after the war in anticipation of resuming that colonial role. We had been trying to get them not to take military action. They came to us and asked us for military assistance in restoring Dutch rule. This was in early 1949. There was a big argument in the State Department about this. The Ambassadors to England, Holland, France, Belgium and Luxembourg were to a man in favor of our helping the Dutch. They didn't want it to interfere with the Brussels Treaty buildup, which was a forerunner, in a sense, of NATO. There were some of us, including Walter Surrey and I particularly, who were vigorously opposed to this.

I mention this because at that point in time we were briefing Mr. Acheson for the military aid program and so we were consulted about this proposal for military aid to the Dutch. We had a big, big debate about it. Mr. Acheson finally came down on our side against the Ambassadors and said no aid to Holland. It surprised me. When the Foreign Ministers came over for the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, they wanted to have a meeting with Mr. Acheson about this to discuss it further. They had a new gimmick. What they wanted us to do was to provide military aid to the Brussels Treaty powers so we wouldn't be providing it to Holland, as such, an obvious subterfuge. By this time the United States had already taken the lead in the U.N. of voting sanctions against Holland for the police action. This was a very interesting meeting. We sat in there (Surrey and I were backstopping Mr. Acheson) and each of them had a couple of people. There was Ernie Bevin and Stikker and Paul-Henri Spaak, Robert Schuman and Bech. Mr. Acheson listened to them and then said, well obviously we're in sort of an impasse here. We cannot possibly provide military assistance that would reach a country which is in violation of the Security Council Resolution. He said, you say this will be worked out soon. Maybe the best thing is for us to just forget about military aid this year and wait until next year and see how it is

Library of Congress

then. Bevin practically blanched and Sticker said that means we wouldn't get any help this year. And he said, yes and got up and left. It was late Friday afternoon. That was a dramatic moment, I'll tell you. Spaak turned out to be the natural leader of their group, oddly enough, the Belgian.

Q: Who got up and left, Acheson?

BELL: Acheson. He just walked out and said we'll talk about it next year. Take it or leave it sort of. Spaak took on the job of coordinating views and then Surrey and I spent some hours that weekend talking, talking, not giving an inch. Monday we met again and they said okay. They accepted his decision. I had great admiration for Mr. Acheson anyhow and I thought boy it takes a cool cat to do that. What he would have done, I don't know.

Q: Did you have much to do with Acheson directly during those years?

BELL: A fair amount. I told Mr. Acheson goodbye when he was Assistant Secretary. I told him goodbye when he was Under Secretary. I told him goodbye when he was Secretary. He knew me and I knew him. I wouldn't say I was an intimate friend, but for certain things we worked together. The military aid particularly. I was a great admirer of his. During the military aid hearings it was an interesting time too. The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee was Richards from South Carolina. He was a good man but not really very quick. But also unusual for many Congressmen, had a good appreciation of his own limitations. The Chief of Staff for the House committee at that time was Burt Marshall, who I think still teaches at SAIS. He was on the Policy Planning Staff later at the State Department. He is a very brainy man. Well, Marshall was very interested in this whole thing and he got the job of writing the report of the House committee. And, being interested in it and having his own philosophy about it, he wanted his report to be a landmark document. I got assigned to go work with him on this report. Not at his request, but because there were certain things the Administration definitely wanted to be in that report, I was supposed to sell Marshall on those ideas if there was any problem. That was

Library of Congress

a very interesting experience too. I didn't have to do much selling. I did more learning than I did selling. It was fascinating.

They were doing some construction up there on the Hill at that time and so Marshall had an office down in the basement of the Capitol which looked like some illustration for a medieval alchemist. You know with lamps hanging down and great vaulted stone around here and he worked every night. Every night was when you'd do the writing after the hearings. Spend all day with the committee and the hearings and work every night. His style was to type, cut and paste. I thought, boy this is the way to write. He ended up with a great roll which he'd drop over at the Government Printing Office and the next day they'd have a galley proof. You can't beat that. You don't have to do any writing. During the hearings, he and I got to be pretty good friends and Richards had a lot of questions he wanted to ask, but he told Marshall, I want you to find out what kind of answer I would get if I asked these questions. I don't want Acheson coming down here and making a damn fool out of me. If Acheson had a weakness in Congress that was it. He didn't suffer fools very lightly or gladly. If you said something, he'd give you a sharp, nasty remark back to make you look like that big. It wasn't very bright but that was the way he was.

Marshall would ask me the question and I would tell him back, sometimes insulting, sometime not, what Acheson would say so they could decide whether or not to ask him. This was great. I remember the night before the first hearing and we went up to brief Mr. Acheson. Go over the whole thing, the legislation, first time for military aid legislation. He listened to us for about two hours and then he said, it reminds me of (he always had a story for everything), it reminds me of the man in jail and friends went by to see him and said what can we do. Can't we get you a lawyer. He said, hell I don't need no lawyer. What I needs some witnesses!

He went on and said what questions do you think they are going to ask. We started both talking at once and he said, well, you all go and make me a list of the questions they are most likely to ask and what answers you think I should give. He said, have it here in the

Library of Congress

morning, goodnight. Surrey and I worked all night. We wrote 80 questions and answers. I discovered he and I could work together, write together, which is rare. At least I found it rare. It's very hard to write with someone else, but he and I worked together well, wrote together well. We got them for him. Acheson was a great witness in many ways. You really didn't have to write out how to say it. If you made the idea you were trying to convey clear enough, he could say it better than you could anytime. He was gifted in that way. (As far as dealing with witnesses as Congress was concerned, Doug Dillon was much better. He could listen to drivel from some Congressman with his baby blue eyes wide open like I'm hearing the gospel for the first time and turn around and say, if I understood correctly, what you said was, and then tell them something totally different and the Congressman was delighted at how bright he was. It was funny.) Anyway, we got started with military assistance and then worked on that for the next couple of years.

Q: Did George Kennan play a big role in all this?

BELL: No. No. Kennan never could quite make up his mind what he thought about the North Atlantic Treaty. I am a little biased. I think Kennan is a bright man, but I never thought he was the brightest. He thought he was. His perfectly valid question was the concept of the North Atlantic Treaty, a dumbbell concept or a pie concept? Were we all members of a whole or were we two forces loosely connected or lightly connected? In a sense, we were ambivalent on this question. Oh sure, our policy has always been a little ambivalent on it. But, it was like one of those questions, you know why does it have to be settled? What difference does it really make? I wouldn't say he had a big role in it at all. No.

Q: What about his explanations today, recently, of how the theory of containment was militarized? That's not what he meant. Did he object at the time to the arming of the Europeans, the necessity?

Library of Congress

BELL: Not really that I recall. I don't recall him objecting. Most people didn't take George as seriously as he did. You know, the policy planners. It's an unsolved problem. Walter Rostow used to try to push this when he was on the Policy Planning Staff. You should have a plan for every country. The trouble is the possibilities for different circumstances are infinite. There are an infinite number of scenarios one could create and would have to create if you're trying to postulate policy into the future. There is just no way you can do much, I think, beyond trying to identify what your basic interests are and what the physical factors are about the places you are or as much as you can about what you have to confront and what sources there are for further information. Beyond that, I don't think you can do very much contingency planning that's useful.

Everybody says you should have plan for everything. Well, you can get a plan. Just like at Strike Command, they had to have a plan for military action anywhere, anytime, either side. You can make one but you have to make so many assumptions, by the time you get through altering one or two of any of those assumptions, it makes the plan invalid anyhow. So, how far can you go? You can't really. Many people in the operations tend to feel that the planning is fine as long as you don't get in the way of judgement. And, the planners never can seem able to get enough philosophy, perhaps, of purpose to make their product very useful. What do you do when the chips are down about something? You can't go read a paper and say well the policy says it ought not to be this way. You're confronted with the facts.

Q: You're about to go into the Foreign Service I gather. Had you done a lot of traveling in these years up until this time?

BELL: Up until that time, I had traveled in Latin America in 1946-47 on the aviation agreements and negotiated the one with Ecuador and helped negotiate the one with Peru and helped negotiate the one with Argentina and talked to the Brazilians and some others. I went to Europe right after we started the military aid program to London to do some briefings and Norway to brief them and Denmark to brief them and then back home. I went

Library of Congress

to London, I guess, and Paris maybe a total of 8-9 times with meetings related to NATO or military aid. That amount of traveling, that's what it was up until that point. By 1951 I was pretty well tired of what had been an exhausting three years for me. I mean 1949, 1950 and 1951 were really wearing and I was eager to try something different and I had been thinking about whether or not the Foreign Service was what I would like to do and I finally thought well, it seemed clear to me that the Foreign Service dominates in the structure and it has certain attractions. I guess a particular attraction is that the retirement looked so much better. You could retire earlier than you could from Civil Service. Ten years at that point in time. They had this program of lateral entry in which you could apply once a year for lateral admission to an upper class. They could appoint, if I remember rightly, five percent of the number being promoted into that class from outside, or one, whichever was the greater figure. It was not a very open integration program.

Willard Barber, I mentioned before, my comrade at the War College, he and I both decided to apply for the Foreign Service. We both, by that time, had super grades in the Civil Service. Super grades had come along. We applied for Class 1. Why not start at the top? Nothing ventured, nothing gained. What you had to have at that time for that program was an oral examination. No written. Your experience and your record was enough. I guess there were seven or eight senior Foreign Service officers on this board, all Class 1 or better, in the case of Class 1 applicants. They gave you an hour or two of questioning. Whatever they feel like.

Q: Any substantive things?

BELL: Oh yeah. They gave you some substantive, some nonsense. The nonsense I always think of as saying, you're in Helsinki and you've got to go to Manila and you're the captain of a ship, what 12 waterways do you go through, tell us now. I guess nonsense because they want to see how you react, I think. They also had ones like you're in a bar in England and some guy is raising hell about this policy on the part of the United States,

Library of Congress

what do you say? Probably they tried to see whether you lie. I think it's kind of silly at that level to be doing it that way.

Q: It's the kind of thing they ask on the regular oral exams.

BELL: Grade school stuff. I guess the question they asked me which was really one that came from the heart was, why are you applying to enter Class 1. Here are all these guys that didn't enter at Class 1 at all. Well, I said, I figure I served a kind of lengthy apprenticeship here, 20 years. I said, I've been working at a Class 1 level for quite a long time, which I had. I said, I've had Class 1's working for me, which I had. I'd been working with Class 1's. I said, I don't have any doubt that I can compete with them. One of the guys on the examining panel was in charge of the Western European Division and with whom I had been having a series of arguments with about instructions to Italy. Anyhow, they offered me Class 2, which is what they offered Willard. I decided I would take it even though it meant a slight reduction in pay. It would get me out of the rat race, I thought, and give me a new horizon, a fresh start, and I would be able, in the end, to retire sooner.

That may sound nutty, but that was, in fact, the case. When they offered me that, then I waited and waited and waited and nothing official came. I finally began to inquire what's happening. I checked with my friend Bob Ryan, I mentioned before, who by this time was Chief of Personnel in the Department. I said, Bob, what in hell is going on here? Is something wrong? Why haven't I heard anything before this. He was embarrassed and he said, well, it looks like you're going through a full field FBI inspection. I said, really. He said, Yeah, it's compulsory when you have these appointments. It's required. I said, well that's fascinating. You better send them up here and get this Top Secret stuff off my desk and you better take me off the Loyalty and Security Board. I'm passing on whether or not people are fit to be retained. I said, If you don't know, you better sure find out in a hurry. Well, they cleared it up. They give it low priority in the FBI, which I think is understandable. Anyway, I went around to European Division (I wanted to go to Europe—I knew that) to see Art Stevens who was the Executive Director. I had known him for

Library of Congress

a long time. He said, when can you go, when can you go? I said, well I can't go before the first of the year. My wife is pregnant and expecting a child in early October and I don't want to go until after that. He said, that's too bad. That let's out Spain, I had in mind for you. He had been thinking about me evidently. I said, Oh, well what else have you got? He said, Copenhagen. I said, Copenhagen. I let him sell me. I had thought about Europe and Copenhagen was the place I thought I'd really like to go. It sounded ideal to me. I let Stevens talk me into it, never even thinking at that point in time about what the job would be. Just the place is all I was thinking about. Then he said the job was as Economic Counselor. My heart dropped. Economic Counselor, I said, how in the hell can I be Economic Counselor? I took six hours of economics in college and disliked it intensely. I don't know anything about economics. Ah, he said, you worked in the economic area. He was talking about aviation. I said, I worked in aviation, but I was doing political work, not economic work. He said, you know all those guys over in ECA. I said, but I'm still doing political work. I'm trying to balance the economic and the military and political. Well, he said, Jack, fact is we don't have enough Economic Officers. Now you're an Economic Officer. Okay. So I went to Copenhagen as Economic Officer. What gave me a little kudos was that the ECA was willing for me to be also Deputy Chief of the ECA Mission, the AID Mission. That was because they knew me and I had worked with them. We had been working all the cables going out about AID economic and military and they had to be cleared with us. We were delegates of Presidential authority to coordinate the programs and I had worked on this for a year and a half, saying no you can't and yes you can. So, they knew me one way or another. This was the first time any Foreign Service Officer was going to do this—be a two-hat man. The AID Mission the State Department was very interested in, because they always wanted to grab it back. They were unhappy ever since it got away from them to start with. They wanted to have that program.

Off I went to Copenhagen and a very pleasant three years indeed. I got a lot more experience than I expected to. In the first place, the Deputy Chief of Mission was Harold Shantz, whom I had known before was away when I arrived but he had written me saying

Library of Congress

use my house until I get back. He had a government-owned house which was a beautiful place. We lived in that for about three months until Harold came back and then we rented a place. It was less than three months after that before Harold got named Minister to one of the Balkan States. So off he went and, much to my surprise, I was named to move up to be the Deputy Chief of Mission.

In the meantime, with regard to the Marshall Plan mission, the Chief of that was a man named Charlie Marshall, an older man, who was about 70 and I thought then that was really old, which it was, of course. When I arrived Mrs. Anderson, the Ambassador said, do you bring with you anything about the dual assignment? I said, no I didn't bring anything with me but it's all agreed to in Washington and I was briefed by ECA and there isn't any problem. She said, we haven't heard anything about it. I said, well I'm sure Mr. Marshall has heard something about it. She said, what do we do? I said, don't do anything, just be calm. I met Mr. Marshall, he never said a word. He was pleasant enough, but he didn't say anything and I didn't say anything. We went on like that for about three weeks and he called me one day and said he was going down to Paris for a meeting of the Marshall Plan mission chiefs and would I like to go with him. I said, sure.

I told Mrs. Anderson that I was going to Paris with Mr. Marshall. It was a 24-hour ride on the train, very nice. We had long talks. But he never mentioned it. We get to Paris the next day at the Talleyrand and he said, come on down to my office and talk to me. He said, how would you like to be Deputy Chief of a Mission? I looked at him and I said, I thought I was. I figured you just wanted to see if I was tolerable or not. He looked at me and laughed and said, that's right. He was going to get his own opinion first. Then he said, well I really don't need a Deputy. In terms of dividing the work, he didn't. It was quite true. But he said, I would like to have somebody I could talk to when I have to make decisions, to chew it around together.

Ambassador Anderson supported Stevenson in the 1956 election. You may remember, he didn't win, much to my disappointment and a great many people there. To the

Library of Congress

disappointment of a great many Danes too who had some ideas on the subject. I became Charge because she said she wasn't going to stay and when she had campaigned against the President she wasn't going to stay. So, she went home and I became Charge which turned out to last for a little more than a year, to my surprise. I was in charge of the US Mission while I was Deputy to Mr. Marshall so we teased a lot and say decide which floor we meet on, your floor or my floor. He resigned too, and then I was made Mission Director. I had a lot of different jobs in my three years, all moving toward more responsibility and I enjoyed it very much. I liked it and it was a great place to be. Al Shantz said it was the worst place to come as your first post because you'll never find anything better. In a way that was true, but it was a great experience, I think, because one it was the times but also was the fact that it was small and in a small Mission you got a chance to see it all. Whereas you get in a really large Mission like Paris (I was offered to go to Paris—not as Economic Counselor—but to go to Paris) and you're going to be pigeon-holed just like you are in Washington. To get a feel for how the thing works it was ideal.

We got inspected one time by John Burns. When he got through with inspection, you have your little review. He allowed as how every Mission had a sort of different ambient and the thing that struck him about the Copenhagen Mission was that it seemed more like Washington to him than most—acted more like Washington. And, he said also (that was just observation, his next point was criticism) you know that this Mission has argued more instructions from Washington than any Mission in the world except one, which is somewhat larger. I said, so? He said, well you're supposed to carry out instructions not argue about them. I said, John, what you just said illustrates that while we're about the same age, and we've been working in this racket about the same length of time, you've been in the field most of the time and I've been in Washington most of the time. I've signed too many hundreds of those messages with Acheson is (or whoever was Secretary) name was to believe that whoever wrote them or sent them out was omniscient, or that he cleared it with everybody informed. Even if he cleared it with everybody, what the hell good is it to have a person out here if he can't tell you and won't tell you that what you're asking

Library of Congress

him to do is going to be counterproductive in terms of local environment? I said, I don't think it's a right. I think it's a duty to go back and say I think you're all wet. If you do, these are the things that are going to happen and they're bad. Now if the Department comes back and says we know that but we've got a different purpose or a higher purpose or overriding requirement and do it. Then I say yes sir, I do it. Unless it's a matter of principle, which I would resign about.

It was interesting to me and I thought about it a lot and I think that it's a mistake that happens frequently in the Foreign Service, not to argue about them. I've never been one that believes that all the top jobs should be reserved for Foreign Service Officers. I think Foreign Service Officers can be as good as anybody, maybe better if he's got the gumption to not be hide-bound by the book and precedent. Not afraid to argue. Of the really good Ambassadors, some of them I've admired like David Bruce. I think he was a terrific guy. It never bothered him to argue. It never bothered Ray Hare to argue. Ray Hare had a great technique. He was a specialist in the sending in a long message thing saying unless instructed to the contrary, I'm going to do this tomorrow. Knowing damn well they'd never be able to clear a negative message in time. Denmark was interesting.

Q: These years in Washington and these years in Denmark, they are now looked back upon as the golden age of American foreign policy. Was there a sense in Washington or in Denmark at the time of that, or participating in these great events and in a really constructive, positive American foreign policy?

BELL: Yeah. I think so. I don't know if it was looked at so much as historical, but it was sure exciting and it was very stimulating time. I tell people that talk to me now about going into the Foreign Service, I say, well my experience, I think, was fortuitous. It was unique in a fortuitous way. Now whether it will be anything like this in the future, God knows. Because what happened was we had a total redefinition of what America's foreign policy was going to be, what our role was and what the State Department's role was. From the time I went with the State Department, you had less than a 1,000 people. You knew

Library of Congress

everybody. You worked from 9:00am to 4:30pm, maybe. Very different by the time the war ended. There are 10,000 people working in this. You've got several other agencies. You're into a whole new ball game. How are you going to respond? The Marshall Plan, NATO, when you thought about those you felt really privileged to be a part of it. Really privileged. I still think the European Cooperation Administration, in its first two years, was the best Government agency there ever was, ever could have been. They had motivation. They had a combination of idealistic and can-do people from business, from industry, from academia, from everywhere. The brightest people you ever saw coming together to do something creative and new and exciting and philanthropic, and self-rewarding and without any goddamn administrative control from Congress or the Budget Bureau for two years.

The countries had to provide counterpart, 5% of what you gave them in dollars they had to pay back in francs or whatnot. We used to kid about there being a barrel in the Talleyrand where you go and dip in if you wanted some francs, go get some. But, the thing was if you wanted to do something you could do it now. If you needed a building, you bought it. You didn't put it down on your budget for two years from now and fight 500 committees and a lot of crap and have to buy American. You just bought it. If you needed to go to Washington to talk about something, you got on a plane and went. If you wanted to phone, you phoned. You didn't worry about it. I mean, they had it made. Gradually the binds of bureaucracy controls grew about it. It's as bad now as any other agency, maybe worse than some. They now keep trying to prove they aren't going to do wrong. You know you can't do that. You can't legislate good judgement and make it work. It was exciting. NATO was exciting. You believed the stuff and you didn't have all the doubts that time will eventually bring to you. In that Aviation Division I talked about, we said you know there were about 12 guys and we were all about the same age. It was a joke. We said if you don't have two kids you don't belong here. You're married, have two kids and you really think aviation is important. I went to work and I finally realized that the plane flies around the world instead of the world going around the airplane. A different perspective.

Library of Congress

Q: What about the Europeans, and the Danes in particular, wasn't there a resentment connected with all this? About the United States coming in?

BELL: The Danes are a very sophisticated people, a very sophisticated people and, on the whole, they are very pro-American people. Are you familiar with the annual event at Rebild in Jutland? Never heard of it? Well, for God knows how many years, it must be 50-60-70, they have had an American-Danish association formed largely by families who had people who had immigrated to America and Americans who retained ties with Denmark. They formed this organization and they bought about 12 acres of land in Jutland near a town called Rebild. They gave it to the Government of Denmark as a national park on two conditions, one that that could maintain a museum there and the other that they could have an annual Fourth of July celebration there. So this museum is made up of logs of every State in the Union. It's in a kind of natural amphitheater where you walk down past flagpoles which have the flags of every American state, (the only place I've ever seen them), all 50 American states. Then, two giant flagpoles with the flags of Denmark and America. Every year they have this big celebration. Now Rebild was a town of maybe 10,000-15,000 people. You'll get somewhere around 30,000-40,000 people for this thing. Almost all Danes, but all with some connection to America. Every other year the King comes. Somebody from the government comes every year and the American Ambassador, which just makes the Fourth of July great to be Denmark. Everybody goes to Rebild. That's the big day, makes a speech. They start out around noontime with a lunch and then you start the speeches and singing. They raise both flags. They have color guards. Somebody will make a speech then they'll sing—somebody will make a speech—then they'll sing. Eventually in the evening they have a big dinner and fireworks. Well, you get 30,000-40,000 people singing the Star-Spangled Banner, it'll get to you. There is a strong feeling of connection.

That doesn't mean they aren't critical. They are among the most critical people in the world. You can't talk to a Dane seriously about anything for more than 15 minutes without

Library of Congress

having him insert, at some point, “Denmark's a little country”. They have a “little country” complex. This goes back basically, I think, to the war with Prussia about 1863 when Denmark lost Schleswig-Holstein. The Germans took away from them about 20-30 percent of their country at that time. Some Danes still covet getting it back, but most don't. Anyway, Denmark then came to the conclusion that there was no way in which it could compete with the really big powers anymore, (it had been at one time a very big force back in history) and that their future, therefore, depended on accommodation, policies of accommodation. Sort of like a raft on the sea, they accommodate themselves to the wind and the tide and survive. Don't buck them. It's been a tradition for nearly 100 years in the country. Well, you couple this with the fact that Denmark has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, they are the fathers of continuing adult education back in the Middle of the 19th Century. You can go anywhere in Denmark and have an intelligent discussion about almost anything with anybody. They are not dumb people and they think of themselves as very smart, very intelligent. It's inevitable that when you couple a belief in yourself as superior intellectually, with a conviction that you are powerless, it's very easy to be critical of those with power and tell them how they ought to be doing what they are not doing or how to do what they are doing.

Q: They put a restriction on nuclear weapons right from the very beginning didn't they?

BELL: I don't know when they came to that conclusion. They have never been comfortable with it. Niels Bohr, whom I got to know in Denmark (a very great man), was deeply troubled by this whole business of nuclear weapons—what he had done, what he had contributed to it. He really felt appalled that now we could blow the world apart and he had some responsibility for it. But they basically like Americans. They just liked to tell you what you were doing wrong, but they don't want to take any responsibility themselves. They're not strong enough to do anything. You can have some damn good arguments with them. One reason why Mrs. Anderson was so attractive to Denmark. She was a great Ambassador in my opinion. A really great Ambassador for Denmark. Couldn't have been better. The first job she ever really had and she hadn't looked for it, but she took

Library of Congress

it seriously. The first thing she did before she went there was learn to speak Danish. She was the first Ambassador from anywhere that ever bothered. What for? They speak English, French, German. What do you want to speak ...? But she did. Then she had her first public speech in Denmark which was to an association of newspaper editors. Denmark has something like 10 times as many papers as England, with a fraction of the population. They all read and they keep up. A big change in the Danish legislature in a vote is three or four seats. I mean, these people are right on top of what's going on in their society. The newspaper editors are the most critical voice in any group, I think. She made a major speech to them in which she dealt with what had been one of the main subjects of criticism of the United States in the Danish press for some years which was race relations. She talked about race relations and she did a bang-up job of it. She didn't deny anything, but she accentuated the positive and what changes were happening. It took all the wind out of their sails. That speech got wider circulation than any speech ever made in Denmark, by anybody. It was terrific and she became a sort of folk heroine to the Danes. She was really great.

No, the Danes were a little nervous about the whole thing. You could understand it when you can talk about the medium-term defense plan and the longer-range plan under the most favor circumstance of NATO military planning, you might hold Denmark three days. They're 15 minutes from Russian airfields, 15 minutes. That was in 1952. Now you don't even have to fly, just bomb a few. So, they were very exposed and the whole thing that they had to be convinced of, or try to be convinced of, was that the object was deterrence and it had to work. If it came to war, they were gone anyhow. Very easy if you figure that way to say why should we break our backs to spend our resources. There is always going to be a difference in their view of how much they should do and spend with our view of how much they should do and spend. Particularly, because they have such large social programs. Really very effective social programs. I think it's a great little country and it was very pleasant living there and working there. The climate is not much, but otherwise it's fine.

Library of Congress

Q: You still knew just about everybody in West European Division of the State Department didn't you? Abroad and in Washington?

BELL: At that time, yeah.

Q: What was the attitude of this group that you were a part of at that time toward the rest of the world, the rest of the Foreign Service which was expanding into Africa and the Middle East?

BELL: The European Foreign Service, I'm sure, always thought of itself as they were the ones who were concerned with the important stuff, with Europe. Europe was the important area. There was a Far East and there were some people worried about that, but you know that was just a little group over there. Africa was European colonies. The Middle East wasn't too much. South America, who cared? It was historically also true that the prestige was in the European assignments. Oh there were nice places to go like Buenos Aires or whatnot, but I'm talking about prestige professionally was in Europe. I dare say it is not unfair to say that most of the people in the Foreign Service working in Europe thought they were a little better whether they were or not is not really relevant. You were in the more important area, why obviously you must have been chosen because you were better than somebody else.

It sounds accommodating and maybe snotty to say that when the war came along and there were no homes for a lot of the people in Europe, the American Foreign Service in Europe, they had to be put somewhere else, is the time that Latin America got some of their best personnel. They finally got some people who were better. That was the general attitude. Africa was not taken too seriously, I don't think is still taken too seriously. Serious enough to know that the colonies aren't there anymore, but as a place where it matters what goes on in Zambia or not, who cares? The Middle East probably looks more important today than it did before, although it's more in the sense that nobody knows what the hell to do about it.

Library of Congress

The Far East people, I think, have changed their minds about whether it's important or not considerably. But, it was sort of remote. Go back to 1944 when they had the United Nations Organization Conference in San Francisco. They had a false VE Day while we were there and then VE Day did come while we were there and nobody seemed to be in the least excited in San Francisco. This was in time of war and we had a police guard and our anti-aircraft guns on the opera house, all sorts of stuff around. I remember talking to a cop there. I said, don't these people know that the war is over? That war?, he said, wait until VJ Day! It became apparent to me forcefully that as far as we were concerned, we really didn't think about the Far East. We did know there was war there. God knows, a serious war, but The War was ended when you beat Hitler. That was it. The rest was clean-up. But on the West Coast there wasn't a perspective at all. The war was ended when you beat Japan. Hitler would have died sooner or later. Different perspective. I think the people of the European Bureau are probably less confident of themselves now. I doubt that it exists today to the extent that it did exist. But it did exist. I don't think there is any question about it. Arguments, just like over the question of Indochina and Indonesia, the arguments between the Far East Bureau and the European Bureau over policy and the international organizations got into it because of the U.N.

Q: It was a natural development? Keeping Western Europe for the old hands or the real Foreign Service was not a conscious thing, it was just part of the ethos?

BELL: I think that's true. I think there was an effort made to try to send good personnel every place. I don't think they looked at them and said, This is a jerk. We can send him to Uruguay. I don't think that at all. But I think it was just sort of taken for granted that the relations with Britain were more important than the relations with Uruguay. And they are. They are. Relations with Russia are more important than relations with Manila. Maybe you can argue it.

Continuation of interview: June 28, 1988

Library of Congress

Q: To continue in a chronological way, after Denmark I believe you went straight to Pakistan?

BELL: I went to Pakistan after about four months in Washington, but I was due to go to Pakistan all the time. I was just held up for some extra work.

Q: As Deputy Chief of Mission?

BELL: I was originally assigned by the State Department to go to Pakistan as Deputy Chief of Mission. I was advised of that when I was in Copenhagen. Before I left Copenhagen I got a call from MSA in Washington asking me if I would be willing to be Chief of the US Operations Mission in Pakistan; they told me that the State Department had already agreed to that. I said, well, I hadn't heard anything from the State Department to that effect. I wasn't sure about it. I had both jobs in Copenhagen and I thought maybe you could do that in Pakistan. It was left in the air until I came back to Washington. I came back to Washington and Jack Jernegan, then Deputy Assistant Secretary in Near Eastern Division, was very clear that it wasn't in any way practical for what they had in Pakistan. I wasn't at all sure that I wanted to go as Director of the US Operations Mission.

I went to see Harold Stassen who was in charge of ICA, with whom I had had a considerable series of arguments when I was in Copenhagen. I was trying to close the Mission before he wanted to close it. We also had some arguments about the implementation of the Battle Act. Anyway, I went to see Stassen and I said, I don't need this job. I'm in the Foreign Service and I don't need a job with ICA. I know that, he said. I said, I'm a Democrat not a Republican. He said, I know that. I said, well I've tried to close the Mission in Copenhagen when you wanted it left open. He said, I know that. He said, I want you to go there. He wanted me to go there. The Department was delighted. It was the first time they had a Foreign Service Officer be Chief of Mission. I think it was the first time. No, I was the first one in Denmark. But, it was the first one in that area. They wanted me to do it, they liked the idea very much.

Library of Congress

So, I went there and I wrote HQ after, I guess, a month or so and I said this is the damnedest mess I have ever seen in my life. It really is. We had over 70 different projects which were started out as Point Four type activity which was mostly to exchange or provide information, not money. We built up a humongous Mission here and nobody had any real idea of what it was we are trying to do or where we expected to get. Administratively its awful. The staff is terrible. We just don't have what you need. I was fortunate in a way. The Economic Counselor of the Embassy was Ross Whitman and he and I were old colleagues. He had been Economic man in Norway when I was the Economic man in Denmark. We were friends. So I got him named to be Deputy AID Mission Director, as well as Economic Counselor. This required some negotiating with the Embassy. Art Gardiner was then the Deputy Chief of Mission in Karachi and he and I agreed that he would be Ross' boss for Ross' Embassy functions and I would be Ross' boss for Ross' ICA functions. Ross would let either one of us know, if the other's demands were too much or if he had a conflict in which case we could all meet and discuss it. Well, we never had to meet, ever. Ross was very smooth. He was darn good. We had a happy relationship. I knew perfectly well what he was up against and he knew what I was up against, so we didn't have to quarrel. We also had Carter Ide who had worked for me in Copenhagen. So we had only three people in that Mission who had had any contact whatsoever with large-scale economic aid.

Aid to Pakistan hadn't started as large-scale economic aid. It had started as a Point Four small technical assistance program. Small in money, large in numbers. But John Foster Dulles was off on his "build a wall against Sino-Soviet imperialism", and they had decided in Washington to provide military aid to Pakistan. It dawned on somebody that this might mean the need for some economic assistance, as well, since they didn't really have very much means to mount and support an army. The US sent a special survey mission out headed by Heinz of the pickle family.

Q: When is this? This is 1955 you arrived?

Library of Congress

BELL: In early 1955. That mission came back and said, what Pakistan needs is \$60 million. When I went to Pakistan, I had the \$60 million to spend and no plan, no program, nothing. I remember asking the Secretary of the Pakistan Economic Ministry, Said Hassan, to give me his ideas of what priorities they had. (They were making up a development plan.) Oh, he said, I've got a long list of projects. Take any one you like. Which ones would you like? There was a list of names—Multan power dam, such and such, this, that and the other. No details, just names. I said, you must have some priorities in your own mind, don't you? Oh, he said, no we need everything, we need everything. Which in a sense was true. He says, the United States wants to help us. We want to have a big program. You want to have a big program. I said, wait a minute, wait a minute. What I want to have and what my country wants to have is a good program that will really work to help develop so you can support this military program. That's the size we are interested in. Not just big. Also, I said, I can't guarantee you that at some point in time my country's interest will not be so defined. It happens that they are running parallel with yours now. But they may not, and if they don't, I'm working for Uncle Sam, not you. And I'm sure not going to tell you if they change. He looked at me and all right, we'll start over again. Well there was an obvious need, still there was no rational way to use the money.

No clearly rational way to use the money. So, we sat down and tried to figure out what to do, Ross, Carter and I. We had some collaboration, very important and growing collaboration, with David Bell and a group from Harvard that were being financed by the Ford Foundation to serve as staff to an embryonic Pakistani Planning Board. We put our heads together with them and eventually we came up with, after about five or six months, we came up with a five-year plan which we went back to Washington with and said IF (about six ifs all of which were no way certain): no flood, no famine, no war, no disaster of any kind and political stability, all these different things, we've got about a 50-50 chance of making this work if you put in about \$200 million a year for at least five years. That's big money. You know we were supposed to do it all with \$60 million. They liked the idea, the plan. They weren't so enthused about the amount of money, but we did put in close

Library of Congress

to \$200 million the next year, if you counted, as you should, the agricultural surpluses. We were putting about \$100 million worth of food into that country. You could get some notion of the nature of the problem when I tell you that in Pakistan they had a research and experimental farm much like we have, at a place called Montgomery in the Punjab where they see what you can do, you know, how much acreage, how much food you can grow. And they had shown that on that particular farm, you could increase the production of wheat by about 400%. All you needed to get to eliminate a requirement for wheat imports was about 12%. This was scientifically possible. In the United States, you figure, if your research farm does 400%, 200% is a feasible target, half. So let's say we only need 12%, that should certainly be possible. But it took 10 years before they got that requirement all the way down. Ten years. I wasn't there the whole 10 years, but it did. The obstacles, the obstacles. You began to be aware of what some of the obstacles were to economic development. The biggest problem, human resources and institutions. Not money. Money you need, yes. But, its not much use without human resources and institutions and you can't shift them from factories or plants to recipient country. They have to be grown, trained, cultivated and then motivated to want to do it.

Q: You mentioned, last time, something along those lines that in AID it was an effort just to transfer the Marshall Plan experience to the developing world. But, this new recognition, was that something that people like you and David Bell came to in Pakistan in those days?

BELL: That's where it came to me and I think to David Bell, as well, because I know Dave told me that I showed him how to be tough with a country when you needed to be, which I thought was a great compliment. That was the first time it really dawned on me that the success of IRP was due to the Europeans and that third world nations did not have the requirements needed to achieve development so rapidly. Development is not recovery! I hadn't really thought much about it. Why? I was absorbed with Europe. The last thing I had in mind was going to Pakistan. I wanted to go to Athens. On the annual submission of preferences for assignment,—where you like to go? Somewhere warmer I said, Athens

Library of Congress

or Rome. I went to Karachi it was warmer. It was 123 degrees when we landed there. 83 degrees was the highest it had been in Copenhagen in three years. So we got warmer.

We estimated that out of the 80-some million people then in Pakistan, there were perhaps 2,500 who were politically articulate. And of those very few had any idea of economics. You get a notion of their concept when the Prime Minister (Suhrawardy) at the time, when they finally finished the first draft of the five-year plan by their Planning Board with the Harvard group's help, said, now we don't need the planning board anymore. I said, you are absolutely wrong. The only function of a planning board is to make you aware of the consequences of your political decisions before you make them. Now, you may have to do something for political reasons that you are told is going to be counterproductive. Everybody understands that. People do it in politics in real life all the time. The advantage is that you know what you are doing, or that you have some notion of what you're doing. The plan is just helpful information. He had the concept it was like a floor plan for building a building. All you do is order the materials and do it. Really, that's what he thought.

Suhrawardy had an interesting time. He was not the Prime Minister when I went there, but he was Prime Minister for about the last year I was there. He was not a person that had been expected to acquire office, nor was he very well liked in the foreign community. In particular in the American community he wasn't very well liked. He was a little short guy. He looked sort of like Alfred Hitchcock. He loved western women. He loved to dance with western women. He'd get very close, which didn't endear him to the hearts of either western women or men. Practically no one had ever had anything to do with him, but there were two people in the American community who did. (He was the Minister of Law at the time.) One was me and one was Burt Marshall. (C. Burton Marshall, who was then in Pakistan working for the CIA.) What I thought was a strange assignment. Not as a spy or intelligence agent. He was trying to help them write a constitution, an American model, which they didn't want to do and never did do because the only model they knew was the British parliamentary system. A country with 2,500 politically articulate people can hardly run a British parliamentary system effectively! It was just impossible. Anyway, both Burt

Library of Congress

and I had had Suhrawardy to our houses, nothing great but we had had him. So we were exceptions to his general dislike for Americans when he took office as Prime Minister. He wanted to keep allied with America because he knew he was getting money out of it and it was good for Pakistan. It was their only protection against India the way they looked at it. But he wanted to have good relations. Burt Marshall and I actually left at about the same time, were transferred out of there. He went back home.

Q: When was that?

BELL: In 1957.

Q: So you were there three years almost?

BELL: Two years. Suhrawardy gave a farewell party for the two of us. He had about several hundred people. Big party. Big splashy party. The Ambassador was there and the whole group. He (Suhrawardy) gave a little speech bidding us farewell in which he said I'm bidding farewell to the only two Americans I trust. Jesus! You know this is guaranteed to make you popular with your own friends. Neither of us had ever done anything to merit what suggested a sort of cozy relationship. I made some speeches in Pakistan which were sort of interfering in their internal affairs having to do with the lack of an agriculture policy. The lack of an adequate program to deal with their food shortage. Saying that their real enemy wasn't India but salinity and water logging in their irrigated lands. He was furious with that speech. He really was mad. That was about the time that Hollister came out on a visit. We had briefed Hollister to the effect that the President of the country and the Prime Minister of the country were seldom in agreement on anything. Well, the President had the first reception for Hollister, a dinner, and at that dinner he told Hollister, your man here made a great speech, great speech. Hollister didn't know what he was talking about, of course. He'd never heard of the speech. We didn't clear it with Washington. The next day we met with Suhrawardy and he tells Hollister, your boy here is making very bad speeches, causing lots of trouble. I told him that everything I said was true. No its not, he

Library of Congress

said. They weren't doing anything in East Pakistan about agriculture. He said, yes they are. I said, no they aren't. He said, I'll get the Governor over here. I said okay. A few days later he had the Governor of East Pakistan over to prove I was wrong. I was right and the Governor admitted it. He didn't like that very much but at least he knew I told him the truth which worked most of the time. It was an interesting experience.

It was fascinating to me too, that the occasion for providing the economic assistance in large-scale, the rationale for it was that it was necessary as a form of defense support to enable them to carry out the military program. And, your only logical conclusion when you looked at their economic dilemma and tried to make a plan for the future was that the worst thing they could be doing was wasting money on the goddamn military. So you found yourself advocating we change Mr. Dulles policy. Well, you know there wasn't a prayer of changing Mr. Dulles policy. It has never changed yet. It carried right on through to Vietnam.

Q: Were there significant differences of opinion within the Embassy over the policy?

BELL: I think most of the Embassy recognized that there was this sort of anomaly in our policy where we were pushing for this and forced to do that, which was making this harder and harder, which it did. Of course, the Pakistanis were particularly skillful, especially General Ayub, who took over the government in coup d'etat in 1958. He was a very sophisticated man who had been a Brigadier in the British army and was a typical British officer really, of Pakistani origin. Smooth, intelligent, educated, well-informed. He would do the most beautiful briefing for anybody from the United States of significance that came out, in which he gave a rationale for Pakistan's military program, its force composition and disposition on precisely the same kind of rationale that you would hear from General Gruenther about NATO. A deterrent force.

There is no way in the world the Pakistanis could hope to beat India outnumbered as they were five to one. And with India having the industrial base and Pakistan none, but they

Library of Congress

could hold until they got help when the Indians launched their attack. Of course, that help was to come from Uncle Sam. Whereas Mr. Dulles' idea was their enemy was Russia. They never thought their enemy was Russia. They never remotely thought their enemy was Russia. Never pretended that it was Russia. But if it made us happy to say that, okay, they wouldn't argue. They were desperately worried about India. You know that it wasn't that long since the partition in 1947 when their estimates ranged from # a million to three million people killed in mass fratricide of both sides—the Muslims and the Hindus killing each other off. They were scared. They were scared of them and are still scared of them. The Pakistan army was in some ways an admirable outfit, but in modern terms it was a joke. No reserves, no reserves. They didn't have enough supplies to fight more than about three weeks if they had a war. It was a joke. What a joke, we're putting all these millions of dollars in. Who's fooling whom? I don't know. I thought it was a stupid policy.

Q: Well you must have continued to deal with Pakistan when you came back? Wasn't two years a little short for that job in Pakistan at that time?

BELL: I don't know. I was the first one that really had that job in the sense of the big economic program. It was long enough to suit me, but I didn't ask to be taken out. I was pulled out and brought back to be the Assistant Administrator for Near East and South Asia in ICA. Where (I must say I can't remember what it was called it changed names so many times) I was responsible for not only Pakistan but for Israel through India, a sixteen-country program. I remember telling Jim Killen, my successor in Pakistan, the story I told you a minute ago about writing back and saying this is the damnedest mess I ever saw, I said if I don't hear from you in about three months saying it's the damnedest mess you ever saw I'm going to be very disappointed. Because, there's so much left to do.

Loy Henderson told me I'm sorry about this, but I was going to have you come back and be Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. I said, I'm not qualified. Yeah, yeah, he said, but this is such a great opportunity for the Department. We really need somebody over there that understands our problems. He had been a Near East hand before and

Library of Congress

he thought it was a great thing. I got over there, I went okay, it's new and it's interesting. Never disliked trying something different.

I found the NESAs office, that's what they called it Near East South Asia, had a reputation as the worst office in the place. I became aware of this after a while and I looked at it and I thought well, I don't really think this reputation is justified. But reputations are taken as fact if they are not countered some way. I had a lot of fun with that because I told them (my staff) (I had staff meetings regularly) that everybody tells me that this is the worst office in the place and I don't believe it. From now on we're the best office in the place. Tell everybody. If I want you to change what you're doing I'll let you know. Right now what I want you to do is to tell everybody this is the best office! How it has changed! It's better! You knew perfectly well that if you were getting a memorandum from an office reputed to be the worst, you're going to look for all the errors in it. If you get one from one reputed to be the best, you're going to say what good ideas they've come up with now. Your whole attitude changes. I said even if you don't do a damn thing differently, if you can just get the image change it is important. Not that we won't change things that need change anyway, but image is what we're talking.

Fortuitously, at just about that time came the annual drive for United Givers Fund. You know how they do those things. I told them at that meeting, I want this week, ten days before time, everybody in here to contribute something. Even if it's only the price of a cup of coffee. I see you drinking it all the time. I don't give a damn how much you give, but I want to be able to say we got 100% and I want to be first. Well, we did. It turned out we exceeded their quota, as well, which surprised the hell out of me. I went down to the Deputy Administrator's office and said here's our thing, he said what? You've got it already?! Sure, we got a good office down there. And we started peddling this stuff and people began to do better work because they stopped thinking of themselves as inferior. They weren't really inferior. They just had gotten to believing the propaganda and coasting

Library of Congress

a bit. I don't think they were being stimulated properly. We got it moving along pretty well and I enjoyed it.

Q: Did you have a lot to do with Congress in that job?

BELL: Oh yes. Yes. My concern with Congress in that job was essentially that I would be responsible for defending the Near East part of the program. I think I mentioned before there was a discussion in the Agency about how aid levels were justified. Congress was saying they didn't have any basis but guesswork and I allowed as how in a meeting that that wasn't so and we could defend it. I was asked to demonstrate same which I did with some help at a subsequent time and Smith (then ICA Administrator) liked it very much and had me do it for Dillon. They decided between them that, yes, we would do this before Congressional committee. House Foreign Affairs Committee, I believe. The one Vorys was on—the Authorizing Committee. John Vorys, Republican from Ohio was the senior Republican, I believe. I mention him because after I got through this sterling exposition which we worked so hard on, he said I've never been so confused in my life. But it served its purpose whether he was confused or not. He may well have been. At least it was sort of like the confusion which goes on about a lot of things, they were persuaded that we thought we knew what we were doing, even if they didn't understand it. It wasn't just pulled out of the air. It was pretty hard sometimes because a large factor, political judgement went into it, any case. Like your friends in the Sudan, you start looking at national accounts analysis on the Sudan aid and you end up with the errors and omissions columns bigger than the gain component. They don't have that ...

Dillon was Under Secretary for Economics Affairs at that time. He was a great guy to work for because he gave you lots of responsibility and lots of freedom but he was always available when you needed him. He kept a lot of guys that thought they were pretty smart jumping at the same time. He had John Leddy. He had Graham Martin. He had Charlie Whitehouse. He had Rob Brewster. A whole group of pretty sharp people who had to run to keep up with him. He was very good. It was an interesting job.

Library of Congress

Q: Which job?

BELL: The foreign aid coordination job.

Q: After being Assistant Administrator?

BELL: When I went to work for Dillon (after 15 months in ICA). I went to be his Deputy for Foreign Aid Coordination. He was the Coordinator of Foreign Aid which was a task imposed by executive delegation. The President had delegated to him certain Presidential authority written into the aid legislation. So that in this capacity he acted for the President, not for the Secretary of State. So that when I worked for him we were actually working for the President, not for the Secretary of State. We were not there to confine ourselves to a State Department position. A very important distinction. So that if there were issues, which there were all the time, the State Department's view would be represented by whatever bureau was concerned, Far East or Near East or whatever, Europe. And, you would serve as a sort of moderator/judge to make a balanced recommendation as to what ought to be done, taking into account State's views, ECA's views, Defense's views, Treasury's views, Agriculture's views. We had, Christ, something like eight or nine different Government agencies, all of which had some voice in the thing.

Q: It sounds a little like the NSC function, but the NSC wasn't functioning in that regard then?

BELL: Not on this, no. You were planning for the next year. You were engaged in allocating what you'd gotten for the current year and finishing up what had been started before. We were responsible for planning the budgetary presentation. Coordinating all the elements to get this program through the Bureau of the Budget. Then we were responsible for planning the Congressional presentation through both Authorizing Committees and Appropriation Committees in the two Houses. And, then dealing with Conference Committees as need be. The object was to present coordinated executive branch positions

Library of Congress

which had been worked out in the departmental committee prior to that time so you didn't have to go chasing around your tail or get put off by the Secretary of this saying one thing and the Secretary of that saying something else. Planning a Congressional presentation was really fun. It was just like planning a play. We actually used to train witnesses. I don't mean literally, but try to accustom them to what to expect. Because for a great many people this was a really strange experience. They were all brought up when America the beautiful where you had a lawyer and he has a lawyer. But when you're a witness before a Congressional committee, boy you're open game, that's all. No protection whatsoever. They can say anything they damn well please, and you're to just sit there and take it. You train them to expect this.

I remember Walter Robertson was Assistant Secretary and as part of the training program we'd have mock sessions. We'd take the part of the committee members and he'd be the witness. He'd give a little statement and we'd go at him. We started to ask him questions about Tibet. Well, what's that go to do with it? You can't say that Mr. Secretary. You've got to answer the questions. What's relevant is what the guy asks you. Not whether you think it's relevant to the issue. That's not very good. Well that's the way it is. Get used to the idea. Don't think these guys are friendly. You may find them friendly on the Authorizing Committee but when you get to Appropriations, they are decided unfriendly. They've got to go back home and say why they spent all the money on those goddamn people over in Europe or Asia or what. They don't get many votes for that. Crowds don't cheer, hurray you gave Israel \$3 million this year. Isn't that great? It was interesting and we developed a book really on all these Congressmen. What their pet notions were. For example, John Rooney who came from the Brooklyn district. What was Rooney's great interest? Aid for Israel. If Rooney asked you a question about Israel, say something nice about Israel. How much they need the aid. I remember one time he pointed out in the presentation book what he wanted the witness to say. You know he's trying to help himself, he was our friend. He was willing for us to act, he really didn't care what we did in Israel. He just wanted to sound good to his constituency. Politics is different from diplomacy. It's a different world. But, I

Library of Congress

would say of the Congressmen that I was favorably impressed with most of them. I think they really try to do a decent job. Actually, it almost is as impossible as being President.

Q: Were you satisfied with the way the State Department personnel presented themselves to the Congress?

BELL: I thought in all they did pretty well. Some did better than others. Some are naturally good at it. Dillon was nearly perfect I think. He was the best I've ever seen. Dillon would sit there and look at the Congressman asking a stupid question with his big blue eyes agape as though he was hearing for the first time something wonderful and turn it around to say if I understood what you said, this is a great idea Mr. Senator. He had Monroney from Oklahoma absolutely convinced that Monroney had thought up the whole idea of one of the international funds which came along after. Actually, Monroney didn't even know what he was talking about. Dillon was good. Most of the witnesses were pretty good. I think that Congress would do better, the committees would do better, if they were less concerned with titles of witnesses and more concerned with what their jobs were and they'd find out a hell of a lot more. Drop the level of inquiry. Get the guy that really knows. There's an assumption that if you get a big shot it's going to be better but half the time you're talking to someone whose answers were stuffed in his head the night before or handed to him on a piece of paper at the time.

Q: What was your opinion of the AID personnel? You've seen the Washington personnel. You've seen the regular Foreign Service personnel. Now you'd had direct experience on two assignments with AID personnel. Was there much difference?

BELL: Well, I think you have to say there is a whole category of AID personnel (as distinguished from the old European Recovery Program). A group which had its origins in technical assistance, who are very different. They're basically technicians, sort of one-problem oriented people. The malaria specialist, the highway builder, the fertilizer factory man. They tend to be one track and not to be very useful beyond that. But you get the best

Library of Congress

malaria guy you can get. He doesn't know or understand anything about India, Pakistan, Muslim religion or the economic situation. He only understands malaria. Those people are just different. It's a different world. The program and planning people in AID, I think it's fair to compare with Foreign Service types. Maybe their administrative people too. I would say they were spottier. They had some brilliant people and some terrible people. I sent home I think five from Pakistan the first six months after I was there, including one that was a brother of a Congressman and made them all stick. That helped morale a little bit. It didn't pay to goof off.

Q: So right from the beginning the AID agency was used for political appointees, political dumping ground in a sense?

BELL: To some extent I think that's true. At the same time, as I said, they have some people in there that were really, really remarkably good and broad gauged and first rate. But I would say if you took all the personnel and strike a figure that probably you'd have to say that the Foreign Service was more sophisticated and on a whole better qualified. But I don't know what you'd prove by that.

Where they were the best was when they had ECA. When it was just ECA. That's when it was really a crackerjack organization. I think the best I've ever seen in Government. But that didn't last but about two years. They were best because they had an emotional, moral commitment. It was a revolutionary thing doing something really great and novel. And you had great people from industry, academia and from everywhere who wanted to come in and do the job and get it done and get out. We weren't looking for anything except do that job. And they were free from the Budget Bureau and the Appropriations Committee for two years, using counterparts and it makes a hell of a difference. To do anything sensible, you must know, where you have to have money the procedure is so damn slow. If you're talking money that isn't normally available. You need a new building. How long will it take to get one? You're lucky to get it in ten years. By the time all the various bureaucrats and the Department and the Government and the Congress have finished with it. When you

Library of Congress

don't have that? Of course I don't think you can run the Government that way. But I do think from time-to-time it would be nice if you could just abolish an agency and start over and let the weeds of bureaucracy grow and then abolish it again and again.

Q: You did then two years working for Douglas Dillon, right?

BELL: Well, no. It went on longer than that. I worked for Dillon until after the election.

Q: 1960 election?

BELL: Yeah, we knew that there was going to be a new President, Nixon or Kennedy. And we knew also, anybody that ever looked at the thing knew perfectly well that whatever new President came in was going to reorganize the AID program. One of the first things you do when you're President is reorganize the AID program! So we believed that the program had a lot of merit and there were still a lot of things that might be done to improve it. I said, we'll sit down in my office and we'll prepare a set of recommendations for whoever gets elected President. Totally apolitical, not apolitical in the sense of Congress executive, but apolitical in the sense of Republican or Democrat. Which really didn't have anything to with the issues anyhow. We'll give him the best recommendations we can as to what ought to be done with the thing from the viewpoint of people who have been doing it, who understand it, who know what the problems are. We did. We had a paper prepared. We prepared a paper I should say.

Then the election came and Kennedy was elected and we found that Kennedy's people had somebody working on a similar project. That somebody was George Ball and a man worked for him named George Springsteen and a couple of other guys, Bob Shetzel. We got in touch with them and said we have this study if you'd like to be made privy and we met with Ball at his house. He was very interested in seeing it. From then on we sort of had a working relationship with them until the Inauguration. Ball turns out to take Dillon's job, or he came as an Economic Under Secretary but to have Dillon's Foreign Aid job. I was still there as the Deputy, sort of the transition swing man. I had lots of friends

Library of Congress

in the Kennedy group. I mean I was and am a Democrat. I wasn't active in politics or electioneering or anything but that's where my sympathies were. I certainly wasn't for Nixon. My desire was to get the hell out of aid work. I was filled to the teeth with this stuff. I mean it's a long time to be dealing with all those people in Congress over and over and you know you get weary with it. I wanted out, that's all I wanted. You can't go yet, you can't go yet. Where was I going to go?

I was reasonably sure that I could go some place if I played my cards right because I had been contacted by some of the people in the Kennedy group before the Inauguration and they asked me if I would be interested in being Under Secretary for Administration. It became clear to me that these people, at any rate, had a notion that what we really needed to do was clean out the State Department and get rid of all these dumb jerks, whoever they are. I said no. Why not? First place, I don't agree with that attitude. I've worked here for umpteen years and these people are my friends and many of them I admire greatly. They're not jerks. Every President makes this same mistake. I don't understand. They've got real skills here. Just use it. I just couldn't live with myself to go in there and try to get rid of people that I respect. I said, no way. I said what you want is a real son of a bitch. They asked for a recommendation. I said, I'll think about that. I thought about it and I said you know, I tell you just the guy. He knows his stuff. He wouldn't mind a bit. I said, Graham Martin. And I told Graham this afterwards. He said, when can I meet them? But he didn't get it. At any rate, I was friends with some of those people and they used to, Ralph Dungan in particular, used to call me often about what I think about this guy or that guy. You know, purely personal thing. I was usually fairly candid. If I can't say anything nice I try not to say anything.

Q: Is that the job that Crockett got?

BELL: Roger Jones came in at that time. Crockett took it over later. Anyhow, they wanted to reorganize the AID program. The people wanted to reorganize the AID program despite my saying you don't need to reorganize it. They wanted to rewrite the legislation. I had

Library of Congress

arguments about that with both Ball and Chester Bowles who was then Under Secretary. Bowles I had had many arguments before when he was in India because of India-Pakistan stuff. But he liked me and I liked him. Anyway, Bowles said we have to have one it doesn't matter whether we need it or not. I made some remark like this to President Kennedy at one point: We don't really need this new legislation. He said, what do you need? I said, all we need is two good men for each country in Washington and two good men for each country abroad. He said, how many is that? I said about 400. Hell, he said, that's more good men than I'll get in the whole damn Administration! He's probably right.

Anyway, they were going to have new legislation. So I wrote up something, a proposal. I called it a battle plan. If you going to do this, let's do it all out. A battle plan, set up a talk force to look into these three or four different aspects and come up with a total new package. Present it to the Congress and let me go. Well it was bought.

The President bought the idea and he named Harry Labouisse to be the guy in charge of carrying this out. Harry Labouisse was then the new man in charge of AID. Do you know Harry Labouisse? He was a Foreign Service Officer, a very fine man, who had served in Paris for a long time. He also served as Coordinator of the UNRWA.

Q: Yeah. I knew his name from that.

BELL: I visited him when he was doing that out in the Middle East. He was married to one of the Curie girls (famous for radium). Very nice man. Harry viewed this with some alarm. He told the President he would do it but he had a condition that I had to stay and be his Deputy Chief of this task force. Which I didn't really want to do. I mean, I didn't want to stay. I wanted to get out. But I didn't have any choice and I ended up being Deputy Chief of the task force which meant I did most of the early work. Harry would back you up. I had to start it really is what it amounted to. A lot of people worked on it. It was a really interesting time because there was what I called a floating crap game like Nathan Detroit of Guys and Dolls. In and out of the White House all the time were these characters who

Library of Congress

would drift into Washington to opine about the AID program. Guys like Galbraith, Dick Neustat, Max Millikan, Walt and Gene Rostow, whole groups of people. You found yourself constantly in the position with them of saying that won't work because. We thought of that before. Because almost everything had been thought of before. I remember telling Galbraith, I said, your analysis is great but your prescriptions are terrible. It's a problem all right, but that won't solve it. Walt Rostow told me one time, you sound like a professor instructing his students. I said, well I've done this stuff. If you'd done it you'd be saying the same thing.

Q: Where the did the idea come from for the appointment of business executives as AID Directors which was a big thing in 1961?

BELL: I don't know who thought that one up.

Q: What do you think of that?

BELL: Not much. Not much. I was trying to remember when that was. I didn't remember with any pleasure. I don't know whose idea it was.

Q: There were a lot of them as I recall.

BELL: Sudan, Sudan. When were you there?

Q: 1963-64. Roy Gramlich was his name.

BELL: I sent a Mission Director to the Sudan in 1957-58, Bob Kitchen. The first black man to ever be a Mission Director. He had been in Washington and he came out to the Mission in Karachi and worked on TDY for us for a couple of months. Then when I came back to Washington he was there. He was a pretty smooth article. He did pretty well where I saw him. I don't know about his later experiences. He went to the U.N. and did something.

Q: How did you get your appointment as Ambassador to Guatemala?

Library of Congress

BELL: After a while the legislation was produced and presented and, I do want to mention one thing in that connection. It was the fundamental rewriting of the AID legislation. Fulbright was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at this time. At the conclusion of the formal hearings you get to the point what they call a mark-up session, I'm sure you're familiar with, where the committee actually looks at the written down proposals for legislation and votes on them. They have a big book which the Printing Office has made up for them which shows in parallel columns the old legislation, the new legislation, the Executive Branch position, comments, suggestions and whatnot. This is the session in which normally the Executive Branch is not permitted to have any representation. But Dillon was working hard on Fulbright to let us have somebody in there to answer any questions they might have. Fulbright was, of course, I shouldn't say Dillon was working on him but Dillon certainly had some effect on him. Dillon was, by that time, in the Treasury Department but he and Fulbright lived across the street from each other, and were close friends. Fulbright finally said that he would go so far as to say they could have one person from the Executive Branch sit with the committee in the Executive Session for markup. As far as he was concerned, that person had to be me. Because he said he wanted some one person who could deal with both the military and economic side and he knew I had worked on both because I had been up there enough for him to know that very well. They (Dept.) said, hurray, hurray.

I got sent up to this task and I felt reasonably well prepared for it because we had at least tried for a year to anticipate every goddamn thing you could think of they would be interested in and have a position on it. But you never succeed entirely. Anyhow, the Senator from Vermont, Aiken, Republican, he decided to give me the first blow and he started asking some questions which had something to do with agriculture. I can't even remember what the question was, but it had something to do with agriculture. I opined as how I thought the Executive Branch would react. I was opining without this being something we had reached a position on. We had never discussed it. It was one we hadn't anticipated. I was reasonably confident I was right. He said, well, do you think the

Library of Congress

Secretary of Agriculture would agree with that? I said, I think so. He said, can you find out? I said, yes sir. It was pure happenstance that about three days before I had met Orville Freeman who was the Secretary of Agriculture at a cocktail party and we had had quite a long conversation because I had worked for Eugenie Anderson who was from Minnesota and whom he knew well. So I got him on the phone. I called down there and said, I'm calling from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing and I'd like to talk to the Secretary, and got him. He said, what's the problem? I told him, they've asked this question and this is the answer I've given. He said, that's fine. I said, they need a letter from you saying so. Fine, be up there in an hour. By God it wasn't an hour and here's a knock on the door and here's a guy from the Secretary of Agriculture with a letter to Senator Aiken. I never got asked another time to support what I said. It was worth a million dollars. Pure chance. I could imagine, you know, if I hadn't met him and had the conversation, calling up saying I need you to write a letter to the Senate saying so and so. But he did.

Senator Symington told Mr. Rusk that I saved the bill for them which I knew was just flattery and being nice. But I did have a lot of conversations, including a long exchange with Senator Fulbright over the absence, he thought, of any rational program for Africa. I used the illustration of saying, well we have now in Dakar a Consul General trying to cope with what are five new states, none of which have any records we are privy to and most of which don't know what they want to do anyway. I said, God knows we are groping for an African policy. Soapy Williams is working hard as hell trying to figure out what to do. Everybody's trying to figure out what to do. It's an upheaval situation. I said, I'm sure if you have some ideas as to what we should do, they'd be delighted to have them. I'll be glad to report them back. We didn't get too much more once you get them asked to say something. I had Fulbright as a professor in law school and also went with him and Dillon to a bank meeting in New Delhi which was very interesting. Shortly after I went to work for Dillon, we went to ten different countries on that trip. Mrs. Fulbright, the Senator, Mr. Dillon and his wife and then various passengers en route, including Pat Robertson's father, the

Library of Congress

old Senator from Virginia at one time. It was very impressive because the two men were very congenial. As I say, they were close friends, they lived across the street from each other and their wives were congenial, very nice people. Everywhere we went here is this Democratic Under Secretary. I mean a Republican Under Secretary and the Democratic Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and every place they were giving the old one-two. Tunis, Spain, Greece, Turkey. It was beautiful. The last words he said when he got off the plane were, take care of Doug, he's one of the few good Republicans. Mrs. Dillon said, before we met the Fulbrights we didn't know Democrats were people. That kind of an atmosphere.

Q: The good old days of bipartisanship.

BELL: Fulbright was an interesting man. I remember he thought he was going to be Secretary of State or I think he hoped to be. But he wouldn't have been a good one I don't think. He hates administrative detail. He wants to play golf. A good philosopher, but not an administrative man at all. At any rate, by this time they were ready to let me go. And the question again was, where was I going? It had become clear that I had a chance at an Embassy some place. Galbraith by that time had been named Ambassador to India and he wanted me to go to India as his Deputy. I said I've been in Pakistan and I don't want to go to India. It's very important, he said. Much more important to be Deputy in India than to be an Ambassador in one of those little African countries. I said, that may be so but number one I don't want to be Ambassador in a little African country anyhow. I said, I know it's important in India but you don't pay any more for it than a DCM anywhere else. I think they might just well pay more, you know, in a big place like that. I do. DCM has a hell of a big responsibility in a large place. At any rate, he finally was persuaded I wasn't going to say yes. Then he said, well tell me, who's the next best guy in the Foreign Service? I said, that's a silly question. Number one, I'm not the best guy in the Foreign Service and number two, I wouldn't answer a question like that. It doesn't make any sense. But Bowles asked me if I was interested in going to Iran. I told him no. I said, I want to go some place close if I can. I got kids to go to college. I don't want to be somewhere it is going to cost me. I don't

Library of Congress

have anything but my pay. I don't want to be somewhere it's going to cost me a fortune for me to come home or for them to come out. I just can't afford it. I want to be somewhere close.

Also I was a little excited when I thought about Latin America because I thought for the first time we were going to have a policy in Latin America one could respect. So I indicated that I would like to go to Latin America and I looked around at what was available and Guatemala looked to me like a good choice. That looked like it was all set up. Bob Woodward saw me one day just before I was getting on a plane to go to some meeting and he said, well, that may be changed. I think you're going to go to Venezuela. So I met with him afterwards and said I really prefer to go to Guatemala. Money was the reason. Venezuela was a very high-cost post. Maybe it was stupid, but at any rate I said I prefer to go to Guatemala. So they finally said okay. You can go to Guatemala but just one condition. We want you to drive.

Q: What?

BELL: They wanted to get some emphasis put on trying to complete the Interamerican Highway. The emergency project of World War II of which the link in Guatemala had never been completed. It had not been finished and so I was to drive over it to emphasize how important it was. I was perfectly willing to drive. I like to drive. It ought to be interesting and it was. So I went to Guatemala. I wouldn't say ideally equipped for it in retrospect, but interested and eager. I found myself welcomed at the frontier, much to my surprise, by the Mayor and some dignitaries from the town of Huehuetenango which was on the road thirty or forty miles ahead. They informed me they had been waiting for quite a while and no one had told me I was even going to be met much less by any foreign dignitaries. I was wearing an old red shirt and pants and I had a station wagon which had just come through about forty miles of very dusty country without any air conditioning. I had the back open and we were all very dirty. They said we've got people waiting there's a big reception.

Library of Congress

So we went and I had to make some remarks on the radio in the hall and on the radio in Spanish. My first Spanish speech.

Q: I recall you had some Spanish back in the 1930s. What had happened to your Spanish?

BELL: Well I never had great Spanish. I could read Spanish without any problem but my speaking was pretty limited. It was student Spanish what I had. I hadn't lived anywhere and spoken Spanish. My mother and father spoke Spanish. They used to do it when we were kids so we wouldn't know what they were talking about. Any rate, I did say something to the effect that I was at least the dirtiest Ambassador they had ever seen. Oozing dust, I felt like "Pigpen" in the comic where every time you touched yourself a big cloud of dirt would fall down.

Then we drove on into Guatemala and I met the DCM for the first time. It was interesting. Bob Corrigan was his name. He came over to talk after a few days and I had to talk to him about the AID Mission Director because the AID Mission Director wanted to leave and had to be replaced. He wanted to leave. Nobody was pushing him. He retired I believe. I was talking to Corrigan about it in the course of which he somehow got, I guess, I don't know whether he got the idea or it had been in his head all the time, as to whether I had plans to replacing him. Bob, I said, you don't know me, I don't know you. I start out with the assumption you know your business and your job. I haven't any reason to doubt that. I said, I have no plans to replace you. I hope I never will. It's up to you, lets work together. He said, fine. Very helpful.

Q: What was the main focus of US policy towards Guatemala at that time? What were we trying to do there?

BELL: Well, I guess you could say the whole focus of US policy in Guatemala was the Alliance for Progress. Emphasis on the Alliance for Progress. If you leave out the Alliance for Progress and the issues that grew from that, there weren't really any issues between

Library of Congress

the United States and Guatemala. Guatemala's relationship with the United States has always been a pretty friendly one. The Guatemalans, who are as you know just south of Mexico, look at Mexico as the colossus of the north and the United States as a protector of people who lie south of the colossus of the north, or as potential protector. Their major imports are from the United States. The major exports are to the United States. I mean to more than anywhere else. Contrary to a large part of Latin America, most of their professionals went to the United States for training rather than to Europe. You don't find French restaurants in Guatemala like you do in Peru. Friendly to the United States by and large, despite all the stuff you read about United Fruit Company and whatnot. And despite the 1954 CIA invented coup d'etat. Basically friendly. The US had a policy of we want the Alliance to succeed. You know we had this declaration of Punta del Este when all the nations except Cuba subscribed to this notion of economic and social progress, justice and whatnot and better tax systems and all sorts of reforms that are going to bring new health into the system.

One might think from reading that that there was a unity of a lot of really revolutionary people in Latin America. When I think the fact is that most of the people signing that had no intention of engaging in all of those reforms at all. They are happy for others to engage in those reforms but not me so to speak. Some at least face-saving gestures of adherence were necessary if they were going to get this dream wealth from the United States, aid, money. We had put up, we got it in the Eisenhower Administration an aid bill, a special bill, we got \$400 million for earthquake relief in Chile and \$100 million for a token of United States willingness to join with Latin America if they would bring out a coordinated development program.

Q: Was that influenced by the Marshall Plan Approach?

BELL: Yes, to some extent. The idea was at least there was an assumption there of some sophistication which would be justified to some extent in some of the countries but not in all of them by any means. Everybody talks about Latin America like it's one country

Library of Congress

which it isn't. Any more than Africa is the same. The Guatemalan's wanted to get aid. The President of Guatemala who had been elected in a "honest election" a man named Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, he and the Minister of Defense at the time I presented by credentials wanted to know when they were going to get some jets, aircraft. The President made claim sometime afterward that he felt that they weren't getting as much aid as they had a right to expect as partners in the Alliance for Progress. It was sort of pointed out to him that Guatemala had yet to show in a practical way what they were doing to achieve the goals of the Alliance for Progress within Guatemala's own borders. Like reforming the income tax. He said, well we're going to get one through. They eventually got a tax bill through which was a joke as much as anything.

Then the President got the idea well maybe we were down on them because we hadn't sent them a Peace Corps. They wondered why they didn't have a Peace Corps. I said, Mr. President we sent something to the Foreign Office three or four months ago saying the opportunity existed but we've never had anything back. Well, you'll get something back. He didn't care what the Peace Corps did. He wanted to be sure that he was doing everything he could to get some more money. No suggestion in his mind, no remote idea in his mind of effecting any basic reforms in the society and I don't think anybody else's much either.

Q: Hadn't Guatemala helped us in the Bay of Pigs and prior to the Bay of Pigs? Was there some reward he expected for that?

BELL: Yes. Well, there may have been. As far as I say, the fellow who, well it was a man named Roberto Alejos who was a businessman in Guatemala and one would say he was a successful crooked used-car dealer who parlayed himself into the position of some wealth including owning a fairly large finca, a plantation, farm, hacienda, whatever you want to call it. A finca in Guatemala is like a 1850 Mississippi plantation with the social structure pretty similar. He made his finca available to the CIA representative in Guatemala in order that it could be used as a place to train Cubans for the Bay of Pigs invasion. The story which broke in The New York Times and Ambassador Muccio read it

Library of Congress

in The New York Times to his consternation finding that the CIA man sitting just above him in the Embassy building had been engaged in all this activity without his knowledge all that time. Alejos was a good friend of Ydigoras and there was a certain hanky panky going on between them. I shouldn't say I can prove it but everyone thinks there was and I believe it. Ydigoras wanted Alejos to be his successor as President. Whether they expected a reward, they certainly thought of themselves as having done favors for the United States and Ydigoras was very plain spoken about that. He also was prepared to continue such cooperation.

They were glad to give us bases if we wanted some bases and go in and finish the job. They thought the only thing wrong with it was that we hadn't continued. That was their view about the Bay of Pigs. It wasn't that they condemned it. They condemned failing to go in and fight, abandoning the people. I always said that the Bay of Pigs was like the nursery rhyme "Mother may I go in to swim? Yes, as my darling daughter hang your clothes on a hickory limb! But don't go in the water." It was the policy we had that was stupid, dumb and stupid. Anyhow, they expected something but they were playing the game as far as we were concerned. They were going to go through the motions of showing what they thought we wanted them to do.

Guatemala is a very odd country, very odd country. It's not going to be brought fully into the 20th Century for many, many decades in my opinion. The basic thing about Guatemala that makes it different from I think any other Central American country (the one that's most like it is Peru except Peru's on a larger scale). The basic thing is that it has two cultures. It has what they call the indigenous culture, the Indian group, which is about 55% of the population and the Ladino or westernized group which is about 45% of the population. The Ladino culture has within it various levels of economic and social power ranging from almost none to quite a bit. Whereas the indigenous culture has no levels except bottom. They are all poor and they were only removed from legal slavery by about 60 years. The indigenous culture had existed since before the Spanish came. They accepted the Spanish culture and they accept the present day rule much in the way that there is a

Library of Congress

cellophane overlay over a map. It says this unit here and that one there but underneath the Indian structure is unmoved. He continues with his ancient traditions and his ancient ideas and he worships his ancient Gods. If necessary, right in the same church.

One of the great tourist places to go is in Chichicastenango at the Church of Santa Tomas where you have the witch doctors on the steps outside the church and the priest inside. You have on the hill the sacrificial alters which are both pagan and Crosses where they kill chickens and burn sugar and pray. They believe in multiple gods, a few more like Mary and Joseph and Jesus don't matter and more. They have lain largely dormant in terms of activity, political activity of any kind and powerless to engage in anything much. Some thoughtful Guatemalans who puzzle about this are worried about what will happen if they ever get aroused. They are afraid to excite expectations because they are unable under their existing system to satisfy the expectations of the Ladino class. The Ladino class is essentially about twice as productive. You've got this big mass of people hanging like a millstone but you're afraid to do anything about it for fear. It's a mess. Largely managed for a very long time by if you have any trouble, knock 'em down, beat 'em up, shoot 'em, put 'em in jail. Don't give them any, civil rights is a joke. You don't have any civil rights if you're in the Ladino class. If you're an Indian, you don't have anything. You can tell one from another very easily because the Indian class, the indigenous, they wear the native clothes. They have plaids and costumes that if you are really skilled at it, you can tell what province they come from, much like you would a tartan in Scotland. The Ladino class wears western clothes. The government helps the poor people a great deal by having a monopoly on the production of azuardiente which they sell in convenient octavos, 1/8 of a fifth size. It's convenient because it's cheap enough that they can buy it and potent enough that it can get them drunk. It's a sort of government-induced drunkenness, I think. I suggested to it several times that they should stop that but they didn't pay any attention to it.

Library of Congress

Q: What was the role of the American corporations during your Ambassadorship in Guatemala?

BELL: Well, the role of the American corporation in Guatemala is defined differently depending on the perspective of the person talking about it. If one tries to look at it as if you were from Mars, you can see that there is some validity to both points of view. From one point of view of the American entrepreneur's point of view, American corporations in Guatemala are epitomized by the American fruit company. The United Fruit Company being the biggest and for a long time perhaps the only large-scale American investment. From the point of view of the United Fruit Company, they came in and purchased land. Large quantities of land at fair prices which they proceeded to build plantations for growing bananas which necessitated not only clearing the land and preparing it for cultivation, but also preparing the roads to it, railroads to it and from it. Housing for employees, American and native, school systems, providing whatever there was in the way of urban facilities. We're talking about raw land being converted into plantations with housing and equipment for operating it. They bought large quantities of land on the Pacific coast as well as on the Atlantic coast because they were having a great deal of trouble with particular diseases that seemed to be prevalent on one and not the other.

They built the railroad in order to market their product from the mountains and from the hills and from where it was grown down to the sea where ships that they brought in, using facilities that they built, to America for sale of bananas. They provided, from their point of view, a large amount of employment, continuing employment as well as initial construction employment and the operation that paid reasonable share of taxes and paid wages to its employees which were at least as big and most of the time larger than they were earning from other enterprises in the society, okay.

From the Guatemalan point of view they would say, yes much of what you say is true, not all the Guatemalans but those who would object. What it amounts to is that the position of the railroad and these plantations has given you an undue political influence which

Library of Congress

enables you to get what you need from our government. Bribery or whatever other means you may use and you aren't paying wages like what you would pay in the United States which, of course, they weren't, same thing. It makes a good target. It makes a good target to hit for anybody that wants to agitate about foreign investment. The people who profited the most, I mean profited in the big sense, from the investment, of course, are not among this group who are complaining. The people who are complaining are people who are claiming that even though United Fruit may have done better by them than Joe Zilch in Guatemala, they aren't being done very well by at all. They aren't making a hell of a lot of money. They are working for little wages and basically their labor is subsidizing cheap bananas for big profits or both for the fruit company. Most of this friction had taken place long ago. I mean it wasn't a matter of any great current problem when I was there. We weren't constantly having to go in or worry about the fruit company being attacked or the railroad being attacked. The railroad was perfectly willing at this point in time to be nationalized if they wanted to nationalize it. They didn't care. The people had come to the conclusion that the Peploma Power Company was owned by Americans too, Impreso Electrica. But Impreso Electrica had made an offer at any time they wanted to sell the company to the government and on time, no down payment. They only had three foreigners working in it anyhow. The electric company had a better record than the fruit company in terms of, you know, local operation.

Q: Did you work closely with the American corporation executives? The leftist historians today see that period as one in which the American Government and the American corporations went hand-in-glove.

BELL: I tell you the only time I had one occasion in the nearly four years I was there, one occasion to speak to the government on behalf of United Fruit. Just one time. That was regarding this: the fruit company had decided that where it found that they had a variety of banana plant that resisted disease and still grow on the Atlantic coast, so that they would not need all the land that they had on the Pacific coast, Pacific highlands. Which was better for them because it's closer on the Atlantic coast to the ships. You know, harbors

Library of Congress

you can use on the Pacific side. So they wanted to sell the holdings on the Pacific side. They offered them for sale to the Guatemalan government or to any Guatemalan who wanted to buy them. That was what they wanted to do. They were being attacked on this. The government was very troubled by this because the government read it as this means the fruit company is going to go out of Guatemala. They wanted a guarantee that they would not reduce the volume of exports, which they had no intention of doing anyway. They came to me and they said we absolutely want to guarantee this. We don't care. We want to get rid of the land. They're always complaining about we're holding all this land, give it to them. We're not saying sell it to Americans, we'll sell it to you.

So I went and talked to the government about that and they eventually said, okay. It was fascinating that their concern was that they might go. Not that they were there but that they might go. Ridiculous. It's just like the Guatemalans use Belize. You know, British Honduras own Belize now. Every time they have a problem domestically they can't deal with they start talking about the British and Belize and Belize Es Nuestro, Belize is ours. A fellow in the British Embassy there used to say the only answer is to say, Si Belize Es Nuestro, Yes, Belize is ours. And he did that very effectively. They haven't got a damn, not a person, not a penny's worth of claim to British Honduras, except under some archaic notion of where the Writ of a Captain General in Guatemala ran as compared with the Captain General in Mexico City during the time of the Spanish Empire when neither one of them had anybody down there.

Q: What did you spend your main amount of time on in Guatemala?

BELL: The main amount of time in Guatemala was spent trying to get them to do something about the Alliance for Progress objectives. That was number one and then I spent a lot of time the first six months I was there trying to persuade various Guatemalans that I didn't want to be partners in some coup d'etat. Amazing to me that I think I'm the only man in Guatemala that wants it to be an independent country. Ask them what would they do if they were in power and none of them had any real idea. You know, its shove them

Library of Congress

out of the chair, let us get in so we can get the gravy for a while. This is in accordance with the standard tradition. You run for office, you get elected or you get in somehow, and then you start stealing. Everybody expects you to do that. As long as you don't steal too much. The opposition starts from day one saying they're stealing too much. Not that they're stealing, but that they're stealing too much. When the public becomes convinced that they're stealing too much, then you have a coup and you get your turn. The only thing approaching a revolution they had was in 1954. A real revolution, they still haven't had it. All the words are in the various historic constitution documents just like they are in many Latin states but as far as a real revolution, it hasn't occurred. Talking about coup d'etat is a sort of national pastime. It was fascinating to me. After coming from a place like Denmark where everybody's so sophisticated to Pakistan where they are so primitive, the notion of coup d'etat was sort of surprising.

Q: Well you had one didn't you in March of 1963?

BELL: Yes we did. It was very interesting too. The preface to that, there was supposed to be an election and the question was who was going to run, who was going to run for office. And there was a man named Jose Arevalo who had been President of Guatemala back in 1944 and whose prot#g#e was Arbenz. Arbenz was a communist and he's the man that was overthrown in the coup of 1954 with US assistance. Arevalo had gone to either Chile or Argentina where he had been in exile from Guatemala for a long time which doesn't hurt your reputation in one of those little countries if you're a figure in Argentina or a big country, that's nice. It's such a small puddle. Arevalo was reputed to be going to run for President and that scared the military greatly. That scared the military greatly and it infuriated those who didn't want Arevalo. He was also a military man but not because of that he didn't like him he was a conservative, very conservative fellow. Whether Arevalo was ever going to run or not no one really knows.

I was put in a very awkward position there because a story was printed in the local paper Prensa Libre, a daily newspaper in the capital, to the effect that Arevalo and Theodore

Library of Congress

Moscoso had had a meeting in Mexico. Theodore Moscoso was then the head of the AID agency, a Puerto Rican who had achieved a certain fame as a liberal, great friend of Betancourt in Venezuela and whatnot. Not a bad fellow but very Latin. I went back to Washington on this and said, is this true because I understood our policy to be one which we were not in favor of Mr. Arevalo and could not imagine why we would be in favor of Mr. Arevalo. Another of his claims to fame was having written a book called "The Shark and the Sardines" which the United States was the shark and the Latinos were the sardines. He had every President from I think way back near to Grover Cleveland to Kennedy personally involved in the march of Wall Street into Latin America. A real incredible work. I went back to Washington and said, did this meeting take place, what's the story here, what's happening, why is Ted Moscoso an AID official, involved in this anyhow? I got back a flat denial there had been any such meeting. I made a statement to that effect in Guatemala that this wasn't true. There had not been any such meeting. Without going any further than that. A long time later when I was getting ready to leave Guatemala as a matter of fact—at least two years later—the fellow who wrote that story came to my farewell party. He said he wanted to talk to me about something and I said, okay. We went to a side room as you do and he said I just want you to know that that story I wrote was true. He said I know it was true because I was there. But he said, I thought you were a friend of the country so I never wrote any more about it. It was fascinating to me. I still don't know what the facts were. I don't know whether Moscoso met with him or not but I believed Zarco and I don't believe Moscoso's denial. I think it was outrageous for him to be messing with the thing to start with. But he was apt to do things like that. Maybe not intentionally but at any rate.

So Arevalo was regarded by many people as a threat. Ydigoras thought boy I've really got this worked out. I can name my successor because the military won't stand for Arevalo. They'll have to go with my man. My man Roberto Alejos. Well the military looked at Alejos with disgust. They regarded him as a low form of life. As one Guatemalan said to me, he's asking us to choose between a communist and a crook. I said, why don't you run a

Library of Congress

candidate of your own? It's a free country isn't it? You can run a candidate. Back some other person if you don't like the ones that are running. Well there was a group there of Guatemalan businessmen who had begun to get interested in what was happening and who were trying to bring some pressure to bear on the government to change some of the ways it did things. I talked with some of them. They talked with me, I guess, down in Antigua one day.

One of the great curses of the country or of many Latin American countries is that the best educated, most powerful people in the country (not necessarily the most moral) but they are like any other group, there are good ones and bad ones), regard politics as "too dirty" to engage in. So the history has been that you don't get into that stuff. You simply pay whoever's milking you enough to keep him quiet and to let business go on. A form of taxation if you like. And if it gets to be too much then you find somebody else and get A thrown out and let B run it. But you don't get involved in government. I said to all these people, you take more interest in your goddamn horses and cows than you take in your country. I said, you wouldn't dream of doing that with your cows. One of these guys had 12,000 cows (Santa Gertudius) and he flew his own plane everywhere. If you want to clean the government up, you've got to participate. You can't do it any other way. Now I'm working on getting them to become responsible citizens, not very fruitfully, strike a few blows here or there.

Well the military (this is retrospective at this point) I think simply felt too inexperienced in running an election campaign to feel any confidence that they could win. Whereas they were very confident they could take power. Some of them really didn't want to have a military government. They just wanted to have a government that wasn't crooked or communist. Among that latter group was a fellow named Peralta, Minister of Defense Colonel Peralta, who eventually led the coup. They decided on taking power before the election which was not done in consultation with us, although I would say it was clear enough that the United States Government was not supporting Arevalo. And it was fascinating. The *W-ash-in-gton Post* on the morning after the coup had headlines saying

Library of Congress

“Armored Tanks Provided by American Military Assistance Thundered Down the Aveneda de la Reforma Last Night, crashed into the Presidential Palace, a coup d'etat clearly the result of American military aid.” The storyline. Written by a guy who subsequently won a Pulitzer Prize, not for that article but for Latin American reporting! He'd never been in Guatemala. He wasn't in Guatemala.

Part of the problem for America, I think, not confined to Guatemala but an illustrative example, is nobody no American press or news agency asked anybody in Guatemala. The New York Times was suppose to cover more than anybody else, had a fellow named Paul Kennedy stationed in Mexico City who was assigned to cover Mexico to Panama. Obviously, Mexico was the important country so he spent most of his time there. Two weeks a year he would make the tour. Call on the Embassy and call on his local contacts, all of whom were locals, natives. At one point in time (this was before but still illustrates the same point) they were having some trouble in Guatemala with student riots and overreaction on the part of the government. And it was sufficiently exciting, Time and Newsweek and US News and World Report each had an article on Guatemala in the same week. I read them all three and I sent a message to Washington saying I had read all three and none of them seemed to describe the country I was in. Not a one. They were all written from the bias of whatever perspective they had to start with about a country they knew nothing about. Ignorance, ignorance.

Anyhow, what happened that night the night of the coup The Washington Post story suggested a violent military conflict. What happened was that two officers, Colonel grade, got in a Chevrolet car about 10 O'clock in the evening, they drove to the Casa Crema, the President's residence, and asked to see the President and he received them. They said, Mr. President you're through. What do you mean? You're finished. Your term is over. So he said well, we'll see about that. So he picks up the phone and calls for the Commandante of the Guardia del Norte which was right smack across the street as close as that house. The Commandante of the Guardia del Norte says, that's right Mr. President, you're through. Then he telephones the garrison at Mariscal de Zawala a little out of town

Library of Congress

about four miles. Same thing. Then he calls the Air Force. The Air Force says the same thing. Well he knew he was finished. They were all agreed. He says, okay. No shots fired. Then these two guys leave him there. They're not worried. Where's he going to go? They come to my house and they say the President is finished, will you let him come into Miami? Will you receive him in Miami? I said as far as we are concerned he's the President. We're not party to your activities. Hell, of course we're getting on the horn to Washington, the telephones' happening, sending urgent messages. The next morning about 8 o'clock Ed Martin was on the phone, I was on the phone, we're on the phone talking about this and they come and tell me, there he goes. He's on a Guatemalan plane being flown to General Somoza in Nicaragua. Where he remained for a while and then he moved to Costa Rica or some place. He eventually came back to Guatemala many years later. But nobody was shot. No shots fired at any time. What are the facts?

Subsequently, it was disclosed in an article written by a woman named Georgie Geyer, who writes for the Chicago papers, that this coup was the result of a plan that was gotten up in the White House (I'm not kidding) by Kennedy and Dick Helms and Ed Martin and I. And that I was the agent for having it executed. My picture was put in a magazine in Guatemala. An agent of the CIA, whatnot, after I had gone. What was very interesting about it was that those people, those four people, were in a meeting in the White House. Kennedy, Martin, Dick Helms and I did meet in the White House. We did not meet to discuss the overthrow of the Guatemalan government. What we met to discuss was the forthcoming trip of President Kennedy to Central America. The idea for the trip had originated with President Ydigoras, actually, who when Ed Martin came (Ed Martin was then Assistant Secretary for Latin America). He had come down to Guatemala and I had taken him to see the President and the President sprung this idea on him why doesn't President Kennedy come down. We know that he can't go every place so all the Central American Presidents will meet in one place with him. Here if you like or anywhere else. Ed was taken with the suggestion. It seemed like an interesting idea. The President had agreed. It had been agreed there would be such a meeting. They finally decided Costa

Library of Congress

Rica was a better place to meet than anywhere else, you know, no controversies in Costa Rica. Like now, more civilized than the rest. I had gone to Washington and the reason I was meeting with the President was he was supposed to be briefed on what to expect from the Presidents when he met with them. Because when he met with them in Costa Rica he was going to meet with them as a group then he was going to meet with each one individually afterward all in the same place. He wanted to know what they were going to bring up? In that briefing there was certain discussion of the election, you know, and the problems of the election. There was no decision to overthrow anyone at all. I tried to think how in God's name they ever got hold of the fact for the meeting because I'm certain Ed Martin (and I can't believe Dick Helms would and I'm sure Kennedy wouldn't have and I knew I had never discussed it with anybody. I kept wondering whether or not it was Moscoso. Now that's a totally unfounded suspicion but I kept wondering just the same whether he had somehow knew there was a meeting. He could have known there was a meeting, it's possible.

Q: Did the Kennedy trip ever take place?

BELL: Oh yes. Very successful.

Q: When?

BELL: In mid-1963. It was terrific actually. He came to Costa Rica. Costa Rica, San Jose's a nice town and there was a big open park area near where the Embassy residence was and it was packed with students, packed with students. Just jam-packed. There must have been 10,000-15,000 out there. You know, students in Latin America, you never know what the hell they are going to do but Kennedy with that talent he had for disarming people, he near drove his secret service guys totally nuts. He just walked right out into the middle of the crowd and started shaking hands, talking to them. They just ate it up. We said, he could be elected President of Costa Rica today. No question about it. He got a terrific bang out of it. He really felt good. That's the last time I ever saw him. He really enjoyed

Library of Congress

that day I tell you. It was a big success, the meeting, you know politically wise. Public relations is what it amounted to. There wasn't any great pact signed. No summit meeting accomplishments.

Continuation of interview: July 19, 1988

Q: Ambassador Bell, to finish up with your tour as Ambassador in Guatemala, during those years were there any interagency rivalries to speak of?

BELL: Well there was a ongoing competition for intelligence reporting which was sometimes irritating and sometimes amusing. The military had originally the Army Attach#, the Navy Attach# and the Air Attach# and then later they had the Defense Attach# which was supposed to foster integrating the military components, but actually simply added one more customer in Washington. And then they had the Military Assistance Advisory Group which reported to the Commanding General of Southern Command in Panama. The Commanding General in Panama was no more interested in being scooped by G2 in Washington or the Air or Navy or CIA than they were interested in being scooped by each other. Of course you had the CIA to report intelligence and you had the State Department reporting various degrees of intelligence. It took a lot of effort to try to force them into what I would call all addressees forms of communication. So that they would all receive this material simultaneously and, hopefully, with some degree of coherence and some similarity of emphasis. But never entirely successful. What the CIA people reported of course you never really knew for sure.

Before I went to Guatemala there had been some discussion of this because Mr. Muccio who was my predecessor in Guatemala had been the lucky Ambassador who discovered through The New York Times that we were training in Guatemala through the CIA people to invade Cuba and the operation was being run by his supposed subordinate on the floor above him in the Embassy building, a CIA man. He got a call from Mr. Herter wanting to know what was happening. That's how he found out about it. Well they had

Library of Congress

a hurrah in Washington. I was told, before I left that that had all been straightened out and the CIA had promised to be good and not do that anymore without the Ambassador knowing. Actually, the CIA had been blamed improperly in my opinion. The person who should have been blamed was the Assistant Secretary of State Tom Mann who was on a committee that decided whether or not you would conduct these kinds of operations and who had participated in the decision to conduct such an operation in Guatemala and had participated in the decision that the Ambassador did not need to know that which I think was unforgivable.

Whether that happened to me or not, I still don't know. I don't know of any instance of it happening. The Station Chief there was a very agreeable person who seemed to cooperate, professed to cooperate. As far as I know, did cooperate with me.

We had the normal problems of some friction between the Economic Section and the AID Mission but we were able to get that hauled away pretty well because of I'd had enough experience with that on both sides to be able to instinctively know what was what. I had more trouble, I guess, with the AID regional office in Guatemala than any other Government agency. The so-called ROCAP, Regional Office Central America Panama. An office which in many ways I thought I had suggested in earlier conversations with Ted Moscoso who was then running the Latin American part of AID. But the fellow who was in charge of it, a man named Henry Duflon had been Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower or something, political appointee. Duflon was very aggressive and he was determined to spend as much money as he could in Central America, theoretically promoting Central American economic integration, but in my opinion frequently just wasting money. So we had some friction. They were headquartered in Guatemala and it wasn't too easy.

Q: How would you evaluate your staff over those three years?

Library of Congress

BELL: I think I had a good staff. I was very pleased with most of them. Thinking back on it, the fellow who was my Deputy Chief of Mission when I arrived, Bob Corrigan, went on to be an Ambassador in Africa. His successor, Peter Vaky went on to be Ambassador I think to three countries, Columbia, Venezuela, and he worked for Kissinger and he and Kissinger fell out. He became a Diplomat in Residence for a while. Then Frank McNeil who also turned out to be a maverick, was a junior officer in the Political Section when I was there. He was the Ambassador to Costa Rica before he and Elliott Abrams fell out which I think is to his credit. Jack Binns who was a junior officer trainee there later became Ambassador to Honduras. Marvin Weisman who was an AID Mission Chief during the latter part of my stay there went on to be Ambassador to Columbia. So we had about five or six guys who went on to at least be given positions of trust. I thought most of them were pretty good.

This isn't the place where they send everybody who's the best officer they can find, but we didn't have anybody I thought was terrible. They certainly all were willing to do their best near as I could tell. I thought the military were spotty. Some of them I thought were very good. Some were terrible. The original Army Attach# was a dead loss but he left and we got a good one. The Air Attach#s were both good. We had a funny assignment. They were Air Attach#s for Central America but they always lived in Guatemala for some reason.

Q: Do you feel you had influence in Washington on debates, not just on policy questions but in terms of your reporting having an impact in Washington?

BELL: Some. It's hard to tell, in the first place you have to think about it in perspective. Guatemala was a small, not a particularly important country. We had no real issues with them at the time. The major problem in Guatemalan international affairs was a self-created problem of Belize to which they from time-to-time laid claim. Usually like the Indians and Pakistanis over Kashmir as a means of diverting attention from internal problems they weren't dealing with. They went to some length, I became convinced after a time that there was a possibility of maybe exercising good offices or arbitrating this problem

Library of Congress

away between the British and the Guatemalans. And that idea was not received with any kindness in Washington. I was told several times by various people sending me articles they had written or new messages that this had been thought of before and “we” didn't want to be involved in it. And yet my efforts pushed them hard enough that they eventually did after I left appoint somebody to try to serve as a mediator who didn't succeed. I always thought I could have succeeded if they would have let me, but they didn't. Maybe I wouldn't have anyhow.

I did have some luck in policy decision making, but it was more fortuitous than anything else. During the time I was there, the President had sent Maxwell Taylor on his mission out to Vietnam to, you know, look at what was going on. And one of the things they came back with was the idea that you had to have some kind of civic action programs or some kind of plans for anticipating difficulties and working to prevent them. I was very, very surprised one day to receive a long telegram saying that Guatemala had been placed, I think the words were, within the cognizance of the “special group” we were to come up with an “internal defense plan” and well, it sounded a bit silly because we had so small a threat at this particular point in time. The guerrilla threat in Guatemala seemed to me not very significant. Most people thought maybe there were 100-150 fellows running around. Not that there weren't problems if they could agitate them, but they really weren't a significant force. My initial inclination was to go back to Washington and say, what nonsense.

I figured that wouldn't do much good and besides if you looked at it right it was an opportunity. So I figured here's an opportunity for us to say what we think our policy toward Guatemala really ought to be since nobody in Washington was really telling us much about it. Other than: sit there. So we went back with an internal defense plan which was mostly about economic aid and trying to get some of the military to work on civic action projects rather than run around. We began to develop a theory which I have sense expanded somewhat: the fact is that the major problem with the military in most under-developed countries is lack of mission. Here was Guatemala threatened by absolutely nobody and there is a military which is the almost only avenue to upward mobility. If you aren't born in

Library of Congress

the right circles the only chance you have is through the military pretty much. People going through it and becoming officers and then finding themselves sort of nonessential. Well you want to do something. It's like your appointed committee which will get a purpose for itself whether it's rational or not. Anyhow I got to go to Washington and present this to the special group with Harriman and you know the whole batch and they thought it was a good plan. It sounded good I guess because it was doing something. So we started on that.

So they did listen to that. They listened to me another time which was interesting and I'll tell you this because it's got a little question in my mind about it ever since. Pan American Airways had done something. They had picked up a passenger in Guatemala who was supposed to be going to I can't remember whether it was Costa Rica or El Salvador, at any rate for some reason they landed in Nicaragua where the passenger was picked up by the Somoza police. He was a wanted man in Nicaragua. Political thing. And they wouldn't let him go. And Pan American, let's see, Guatemala sued Pan American and it went through the courts through all kinds of due process for years and they finally got a judgement against Pan American for a lot of money. They were going to hold their plane until they paid it. And I got a long telegram saying how I should go in and tell them nonsense, let that plane go. In other words, to hell with the law it's Pan American. I wrote back a fairly sharp message to the Secretary saying I'm not going to do that. It's absolutely contrary to our interests. It's absolutely contrary to what's right and I simply will not do it. I never got an answer. Never got a response. It was just like I hadn't sent it. We didn't do anything.

I was in Washington I guess some months later on consultation and I going down the hall I ran into Len Meeker who was then the Legal Adviser. He stopped me and he said, you know your telegram to was absolutely right. I said, what telegram the Legal Adviser's office? He said, the one about Pan American. I said, really how did you get it? He said, the Secretary appointed a committee to look into it and I was the chairman. We decided you were right and so told him. I said, well it's fascinating. Nobody ever told me. I have always thought that was held up somewhere in ARA, which wasn't about to give me the satisfaction of getting away with it and acknowledging that I could say no. But I was quite

Library of Congress

serious about it. I would have resigned. I mean I think you are some places where you can say well it's a matter of judgement as to whether you do it this way or that way and you can be overruled and you do it. But to my notion, this was a matter of principle. It sounds stuffy but I got away with it anyway.

Q: What about the Alliance for Progress. In your judgement was that a big success?

BELL: Well, no it wasn't a big success. It had a passing maybe more than passing beneficial effect in having been initiated and pursued for a while. I think I was as perhaps as naive as anybody else about it. I had higher hopes for what would come of it than ever came of it and confess to disappointment in that regard. But I thought the Alliance for Progress was significant in the political sense of for the first time saying in a clear and unequivocal fashion that the United States is abandoning its traditional policy of "evolution not revolution". Because God knows revolution is needed in a lot of those places. And to say evolution not revolution simply means the same old situation as far as the people in the country are concerned. But it wasn't all that revolutionary and I don't think the motivation was quite as clear as mine—a belief in the need to improve the rights of people. The motivation, I think, was much more one of feeling we've got to stop the spread of communist, or that was regarded as the better selling line. Well the Alliance for Progress was not necessarily going to stop this drive for communism. It's not going to stop the drive for change. It is a drive for change.

I remember we went to a ceremony in the Paten region of Guatemala with Colonel Peralta after his government had taken over and they had finished up the water works project that had been abandoned for about 15 years up there. We went up to the dedication ceremony—everything is dedicated through long speeches and songs in Guatemala. The mayor of the town's turn came to thank the government, which he did, and then he went on to give a shopping list of about 15 other projects they'd like to have and the more he went on, the more annoyed Colonel Peralta got. I was telling him the old story about what have you done for me lately and trying to maybe convince him that this was a sign of confidence

Library of Congress

in his government. That they would even have the nerve to suggest there were some things to be done, because most of the time they wouldn't have. It is a force for change. Not everybody was thinking about getting change. And, of course, the enthusiasm on our side dropped off. Johnson was not really interested in the Alliance. He was interested in improving relations with Mexico which he understood pretty well. Nixon had a plan for Latin America which sort of disappeared in thin air. He sent Rockefeller off on a mission. The first thing Rockefeller did was stop in Haiti and embrace Papa Doc Duvalier which got it off to a splendid start! But the report they filed was an excellent report and it warned that the whole place was going up in flames if something isn't done which, of course, Nixon ignored. In fact, he tried to keep it classified. Then his big change was to say we'll recommend that you'll have an Under Secretary for Latin American for Affairs instead of an Assistant Secretary. And we'll change the name of it some way. I've forgotten the words. But total cosmetics.

Then, of course, many of the Latins (like in Guatemala) hadn't really subscribed to this thing as endorsing revolution but rather subscribed to it as a means of getting some additional resources. So, you know, it was a mixed bag. But the objectives it sought to address are still the problems. They are still the problems that plague them all over the damn continent and unless they are addressed, there's never going to be such a thing as peace, peaceful existence there.

Q: The critics of our Latin American policy over the years say we end up embracing these two-bit, tin-horn dictators in country after country. Do we and why?

BELL: Well I think we are so scared, we are so scared of violent change that we endorse anybody that has the power to maintain apparent calm. And that normally will turn out to be a military dictator. Why we're so frightened of any kind of experiment I don't know. The only country in Latin America which has succeeded, and it's about to collapse, in an experimental approach is Mexico. They adopted a one-party political system which worked pretty well for about 50 years and is now on its last legs I think, but I've been saying that

Library of Congress

for 10 years. May not be. We're always trying to say the solution to their problems is to adopt an American-style constitution. Well they've had the words and most Latin American constitutions are parodies or paraphrases of the American constitution. Far more than the French. And yet it's meaningless. That isn't what the thing is all about.

There are so many things that have to be done before you can really have a sound democracy. There is a great book written by Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Sigmund called "The Democratic Experience" in which Reinhold Niebuhr in the first half of the book tries to outline what were the component parts leading to the development of what we think of as Western civilization and our values. In the second half of the book, Sigmund tries to see what are those conditions exist or can be created in third world countries and they are missing most of the places. You can't make the jump. They don't need to copy us. They need to develop their own system. Hell our system worked because it was pragmatic. There's not a goddamn thing democratic about the United States Senate. A vote in Nevada is worth 34 votes in California or something, seventeen, whatever the ratio is. But nobody is trying to change it because it works. It's pragmatic it works reasonably well. At least to the satisfaction of the public.

Q: It reminds me of something you said earlier about the AID programs and trying to transpose the Western European experience on the rest of the world.

BELL: You can't do it.

Q: The Alliance for Progress was just that wasn't it in a way?

BELL: To some degree, yes, to some degree. What you essentially had in large parts of Latin America had and still have to a very considerable extent is a kind of what I call a plantation type of economy not too different from Mississippi 1850. Large fincas or haciendas. Essentially self-supporting. Have their little enclaves of dependencies and not at all responsive to central government and where there is a caste system as clear as it can be, enforced. Now it's altering as you know as cities grow and areas around places

Library of Congress

like Rio and Buenos Aires and of course the whole economy has changed in Columbia for different reasons. But I don't imagine the rights of the workers have changed much. It used to amuse me, Congressmen get very enthused about programs like buying sugar because the money goes to the country instead of through AID. So you subsidize sugar. But what they don't seem to be able to understand is that the price the worker gets for working in the sugarcane isn't changed one goddamn bit by what price they sold the sugar for. Any more than if the coffee prices go up the coffee workers get more money. They don't get any more money they just get their same starvation wages. If you had your American instincts, your American experience, if that was part of your cultural makeup, and you go down to any one of these countries to live you'd be a revolutionary in my opinion or else a dictator. I don't know.

Q: Was there anything else about Guatemala before we get into the STRIKECOM?

BELL: I guess not, I guess not. I think I've probably said enough about Guatemala.

Q: Let's see now. Your tour in Guatemala just ended naturally and you chose I think for mainly personal reasons to get an assignment in Florida and the POLAD at STRIKECOM was the only Foreign Service job in Florida, right?

BELL: Essentially that's correct, yes. I could have stayed in Guatemala longer but I declined. I asked for the job as POLAD in what was then STRIKECOM/CINCMEAFSA which was Commander in Chief, Middle East Africa South of the Sahara and South Asia which was a lengthy way of saying he was responsible for countries which hadn't been assigned to any other command, in which we had no troops and no hopes of war, no desire to have military action.

Q: When was STRIKECOM formed?

BELL: It was formed I guess about two years before. Probably about 1963 somewhere in there. I'm not certain about that, but I believe that's right.

Library of Congress

Q: They had not had a POLAD?

BELL: No, they had a POLAD before. He was Hank Ramsey. Ramsey was happy to get out of there. He said he was bored with provincial Florida. The original important mission in the military's mind was a STRIKE mission which was an acronym for Swift Tactical Reaction in Known Environments or something of this sort. But it was intended to focus and concentrate on joint training between tactical air forces and ground forces, a military type of training. And the second half, the MEAFSA half, was simply thrown on as a "well we don't know where else to put it" kind of thing and nobody thought of it as particularly significant.

When I got to Strike, Vietnam had happened and the practice of joint tactics and experimentation between ground forces and air forces was taking place OJT in Vietnam. So there was damn little left for them to do in Tampa about that and that pushed more and more effort into looking at the MEAFSA part, if simply for no other reason than to keep occupied. You've got 1,200 officers and men there in a headquarters and they've got to do something and the military is good at keeping you doing something. So it was ironic and amusing to me that they had more people in the Intelligence branch of Strike Command studying what was going on politically and economically in Africa than they had in the State Department and maybe as many as they had in the Missions too. And some of them were pretty damn good people, you know, they were doing good hard fact finding. In fact it was fascinating to go to the Commander's briefing every morning. 9:00am Pronto you went to this little theater and you had slides and a Major or a Colonel with a pointer to point out all the hard words for you in case you didn't know how to say them and give you a briefing on everything going on in the world just about. From what was happening in Vietnam to what was happening in Lower Slobovia and pictures. An interesting thing to me about the Strike assignment was wondering who cared in Washington whether you were there or not; and what were you there for. Obviously, the office which had agreed to your appointment supposedly cared. That was called GPM, I think, at that time, Politico-

Library of Congress

Military Office, which had some military officers and some civilian officers who were much preferred to be engaged in high-level policy discussion about big stuff like nuclear treaties or important things like that. You weren't really interested in what you were doing in your little POLAD job somewhere very much unless it happened to be one where that was the question. And they left that more or less to the geographic bureaus who were concerned who in this case were Africa and NEA. And Africa and NEA weren't really too interested in what you were doing either unless there was some particular advantage that they could see or maybe something you could do for them.

But I think the attitude of the regional bureaus toward it was more or less similar to their attitude toward any bureau or office of the Department other than regional. I remember when Mr. Hull came in as Secretary and he found the regional bureaus not really responsive to his enthusiasm for trade agreements. He set up a division called the Division of Trade Agreements which as far as he was concerned it was the significant part of the State Department most of the time. And as far as the regional bureaus were concerned it was unimportant. Certainly no self-respecting Foreign Service Officer would want to be in Trade Agreements if he could be in European Bureau or Far East or something significant! And I think they've developed a very fine technique by and large of tolerating what they can't stop but essentially reducing it or nullifying it by inattention or disregard. I mean they're polite enough, good morning, how are you and they'll circulate you a paper if they have to but that doesn't mean it intends to have you have anything to do with it.

I remember when I worked in the International Communications Office and Aviation and my boss was an "outsider" named Tom Burke. (He wasn't a Foreign Service Officer.) They were having a lot of argument with the Latin American Bureau about the way we were degermanizing aviation in South America through secret processes, secretly I should say, not secret processes. Tom would sometime win fights over how the messages going out were going to read but he was never able to stop the transmission of letters by pouch from Latin American Bureau to their buddies in the Embassies which would say, you know, here's how we'd like you to answer this. They went on all the time. I guess you'd call that

Library of Congress

a forward channel instead of a backchannel or a forward backchannel or something. Official-Informal. Well it's a game I guess. It's too bad because I think there is a great need for them to have a broader view of what the problems are and to accept the idea that generalist can't do it all alone. Nobody can know everything. You can't do everything. But they are very jealous of their historic supremacy (or so remembered!).

Q: Many Foreign Service Officers it seems when they become an Ambassador they take an entirely different view to the cooperation of other agencies and working with other agencies and they are able to do it, yet in Washington it doesn't seem to be possible for them to do it.

BELL: It's more apparent to you perhaps in the field. The essentiality of realizing you're really only going to be about 10% of the total American representation and your guys aren't really all that smart. They aren't that much better and in fact they sometimes aren't near as good as the one in the other agency. Your job is how do you make this orchestra function? How do you harmonize? How do you orchestrate the parts? You'd better know what they all are and how they function and be able to understand their motivation. You may not have to be able to play the piccolo but you must know it's supposed to be played and where it's supposed to come in. I remember when they set up the MAAG and the senior officer in the MAAG, the MAAG Chief, was an Air Force officer and he was complaining because to me because he said he didn't have "command authority" over the Air Force Section Chief and the Navy guy. I said, so what? He said, how can I manage them? Gene, I said, I don't have command jurisdiction over 90% of the people here but I have responsibility for them. I said, you have to learn to manage or lead without command authority that's all, that's all. Well he thought that was insurmountable. Maybe it was if you're trained to command authority as a technique. (I used to think though at Strike Command thank God the military are that way that they won't do what they're not commanded to do. Because if they were inclined to take over, they could do it God knows.)

Library of Congress

Q: What was the state of State/military relations during your time at STRIKECOM?

BELL: On the whole pretty good. The STRIKECOM people used to get worried about (and I imagine still worry about) dangers of overzealousness in promoting the rights of blacks in Africa which might lead them to have to fight the South Africans. A prospect which they had no love for. Many people would say they like the South Africans. I don't think they like the South Africans worth a damn. Any more than many of them liked the Israelis but they regard them as the only force in existence that was equivalent to the Israelis. And they would say all these blacks there are urging us to get in and fight. Why the hell don't they fight if they want to fight. Well that's easy to say. But they were not warmongers is my point.

In fact, I saw no instance at any time that we were dealing with in STRIKECOM with 64 different countries, most of which were really not significant to us. In none of those instances were the military people in favor of a military intervention by us in any fashion. They weren't and the idea they're pushing for it is nonsense. As it was nonsense in Vietnam. It wasn't the military. They didn't get us into Vietnam. They just had to bear the burden when we did.

I don't know, I think there is a tremendous need for more communication between the military and the civilian policymakers. Yet it seems sometimes it's almost impossible to get it. The War College is one avenue for trying to build cooperation and I think it's a good one but it needs to be wider. There needs to be more people affected, at earlier times, and there needs to be more emphasis laid on cooperation at the top where too often it looks like it's a war for who's going to make the policy. Well, of course, you get zealots like Richard Perle in the Defense Department you've got problems. But when you've got guys like Paul Nitze you didn't have any reason for not having cooperation. Paul Nitze is a very sensible man.

Library of Congress

I remember one time we were having a meeting, a Secretary Staff meeting or somewhere, there was complaining about Dick Bissell, (Dick Bissell was then in ECA and had gone to London and was talking to the British and he hadn't consulted with the European Bureau); somebody was saying to Mr. Acheson, you're going to have to do something about Dick Bissell. He's out there talking to the British and we don't know what he's saying. Mr. Acheson said, Dick Bissell, I've known Dick Bissell since he was in knee pants. Mr. Acheson recalled efforts earlier by the State Department to overcome the intrusion of the Board of Economic Warfare, but ended up saying, if you can't be as good as they are, don't complain to me. Paul Nitze was saying at this point, one of the best things that could ever happen to the State Department is to have a place like ECA which is competing in policy. How can we as a country argue that you need a monolithic policy determination in the State Department? But some do! They want it to be like the Politburo or something. They shouldn't be so goddamn afraid of a debate, you know. They might win some of the time and if they can't win why should they? But, I don't know. It's easy to say.

Q: Did you do a great deal of traveling as POLAD?

BELL: Yes, I traveled a great deal. I think I made nine or ten major trip.

Q: With the CINC?

BELL: With the CINC. Most of them with the CINC. One time I went with Charlie Stone who was the J3. We went to the Congo. This was the third time in the Congo, now Zaire. We were trying to influence the mercenary policy. We had two C-130s and there was trouble going on between the mercenaries and the Congolese in the Katanga province way over in the, I guess it would be the southeast part of the Congo. So we would think of that as point B and then if you think of point A as being far to the west in Leopoldville in Kinshasa. Then two little points up here. We would fly planes from Leopoldville up to here and down to here and back to Leopoldville. Just keep flying them, you know, with troops in them. Which would give the mercenaries the impression they were coming over here and

Library of Congress

they finally just quit without any shots being fired. The impression or illusion of American support if you like. The support was there in the form of the airplanes but that's all.

I never went to South Africa. We never went there but went to Malawi, Malagasy and oh I guess 20 or more different states in Africa and, of course, India, Pakistan and Iran. We didn't get to Iraq, no programs in Iraq. We went to Jordan, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Q: How long did STRIKECOM last?

BELL: I don't remember exactly when they changed it. I guess they changed it to Readiness Command sometime after, hard for me to say. I don't know. I have to relate it to years. I left there in 1969. I guess it was in the early 1970s they changed it. I don't know. Something like that. We traveled a lot. It was very interesting because here I must say most of the time we got good reception from Embassies and good cooperation. It varied with the personalities. I guess the guy who was the most popular Ambassador with Strike Command was Mac Godley in Kinshasa. Do you know Mac? Very outgoing husky fellow, lots of good liquor and not about to back away from any kind of argument. They liked him a lot and respected him. He was a good man and knew what was going on. No bullshit.

Of course the military, as I'm sure you have appreciation of, they've got the damnedest complex about whether civilians like them or not. It's an almost typical American attitude. Americans tend to look at foreign policy as to whether countries like us or don't like us as if that were relevant. And the military tends to look at civilians as to whether they like the military or don't. If they think you don't like the military the hell with you. Don't expect nothing. But if you can once convince them that you somehow are almost military. I found it very useful to keep mentioning, I've been to the War College, I've been to the War College, my father was in the Army, to try to get over some of this suspicion. And once they accept you their attitude is very different, very different. But they have to gain that. General Conway had a positive attitude from the beginning. He was very smooth, smart man and I like him a lot. Did you ever know him?

Library of Congress

Q: *No.*

BELL: He's a very interesting man. He and I retired the same day. And then he decided to go back to school. He's older than I am and he went back and got a Master's over at South Florida and then he taught a little military history there and at Tampa University and down at MacDill. Then he went off to Duke and he got a Doctorate. Doctorate at nearly 80 years old. He was a short man, very, very strong. A great tennis player and doubles champion for some years in the Army. Loved nothing better than to get some unsuspecting young fellow to play him and beat him. I remember him beating the pro at the club at the Nile Hilton Hotel in Cairo and enjoying that tremendously. Then we went up to Addis Ababa at 9,000 feet and he played some young guy in the Peace Corps and trounced him pretty well. He was Commander of the 82nd Airborne for a while and "endeared" himself to the troops on New Year's Day by rousing them at 5:00am for a 15-mile run. They're supposed to be ready to go anywhere in the world on 2-hours notice and he was going to find out. He led the way. He ran the whole distance himself. He never asked them to do what he wouldn't do. He was a funny little guy. He said when he was at West Point they used to make him stand on the mantel and say they couldn't see him otherwise. Nice man. A very cooperative man. We went to Washington numbers of times. I took him over to meet Mr. Rusk and Mr. Rusk was very supportive I must say that for him. (He and I had had many arguments.) He said, well Jack's down there. You need anything he can't get he can call me. Which was laying it on a bit but he was simply giving a boost to the idea of cooperation. It helped me a lot, you know.

Q: *Well it seems with you long and distinguished career that after Guatemala and even after STRIKECOM where you came for partly personal reasons that the Foreign Service could still make good use of you. What prompted your retirement?*

Library of Congress

BELL: What prompted my retirement was very simple. I'd had as many years in Class-1 as I could have without having to retire and I wasn't promoted to Career Minister for whatever reasons.

Q: I find it very strange that with your background and experience and appointment as Ambassador that you didn't make Career Minister.

BELL: Well I thought I should have made it but I didn't. It's hard to know, it's hard to know. You can ask yourself what the criteria are and they are so vague they don't seem to make much difference. It's whoever they want to promote I guess. I suspect that they always have probably more that they think might be qualified than they're going to select. I don't think that being a maverick, which I have been at times, would endear myself necessary to Foreign Service Officers who as I said are frequently trained so much on what not to do that they are not trained adequately on what to do. Shouldn't all Ambassadors be Foreign Service Officers? I say maybe. Some should and some shouldn't. Career service inevitably trains a person to be a good top second man. He's so dependent on approval from his peers for promotion that he can get to the point where he won't commit any error of commission. Error of omission he's more likely to commit. I was never one to stand by idly with my mouth shut when I could open it and sometime that's a good idea and sometimes its not. Sometimes you say things you regret and think you were probably wrong to have said but I couldn't stand not to.

Q: During these years were there other officers in Class-1 who were not Career Foreign Service Officers who were making Career Minister?

BELL: I really can't say. I don't remember well enough. I suspect there may have been some but by and large you will find majority, I'm absolutely sure, are people who are career from the beginning. Of course, I always felt that there was a lot more competition in the Washington arena than there was in the Foreign Service as far as getting ahead because the Foreign Service to some degree you'd go ahead if you keep your nose

Library of Congress

clean. In the Washington arena in the Civil Service that didn't apply at all. You had to do something. You had to have opportunity in the first place but you could stay there and paste stamps for the rest of your life. You wouldn't get promoted for doing it. You were paid on the basis of what you did not how long you were there or what school you went to. I don't know I guess I had a sort of maybe a chip on my shoulder anyway. Certain amount of envy of people I met in the Service who had had it seemed to me every advantage. I grew up enough to realize that many of them who had had all these advantages were really first class. But I also retained the recollection that a good many of them weren't. Although all of them were convinced that they were. It was interesting when I went through metamorphosis where I became one of those FSOs. People would begin to know you that didn't know you were there before. I remember ones pretty clearly who knew me all the time and ones who didn't know me until later and I can't help but be influenced by that. I don't know. The Service suffers from too much inbreeding. Maybe it's archaic. I don't know. Maybe it's not. But it seems to me its participation shrinks and shrinks in the real world,

Q: Is there anything you would have done differently in either career matters or policy substantive matters than the way you did do it looking back over your career?

BELL: Well I haven't really devoted much thought to that. I would say I don't have any big decisions that I regret either on taking the position or taking an action. I am sure there's an infinite number I could have done better than I did. William Cochran, who is I guess now dead but a retired Foreign Service Officer many years, wrote an article in the Foreign Service Journal, I believe, called "Moments of Truth in the Foreign Service". It was very interesting. He cited as an example of what he was talking about, you get an instruction from Washington directing you to make representations on something or other and you go to the foreign office and you meet with the Foreign Minister and you say your piece and you come back and then you write back to Washington reporting what you did. He said, you should start writing that in the car coming back from the meeting because every minute longer that it takes, the better your performance is going to be, the more effective

Library of Congress

your presentation was and the less impressive his counterarguments were. (Today you could get videotapes it might be better!) But you seldom are going to go back and say just as I made my critical statement the Foreign Minister yawned or there was a loud explosion in the street outside. I don't know if he understood what I was saying or not. I don't have any regrets about it. I enjoyed it on the whole very much. Felt I was lucky. You wish you could have done some things better. I guess my big regret is something I probably never had a chance of effecting anyway, but thought I did at the time and that was trying to argue against helping the French in Indochina. An argument which we lost. Which led down the trail.

Q: You argued in favor of helping the French?

BELL: Oh no, quite the opposite.

Q: We didn't help them did we?

BELL: Sure, we sent the military assistance into Saigon. 1950, four years before Dien Bien Phu. Four years.

Q: And we helped them right up to Dien Bien Phu?

BELL: Yeah, yeah. We had turned the Dutch down. I had been involved in that and I was in the French although without the same result. We turned the Dutch down on their plea for military aid to go back into Indonesia. Told them that Colonialism was over. But 1950 when the French came in, we said, yes we'll help you. The reason was very simple. The reason was that in 1949 intervening that two requests Mao Zedong had taken power in China and the image in Washington's mind had changed to a Sino-Soviet monolith. So that the whole business of looking at Indochina and recognizing Ho Chi Minh as a nationalist communist died and all of a sudden their great hero is Diem because he is Christian and he is not a communist.

Library of Congress

There is a typical third country situation. You've got this right wing radical and this left wing radical group each one saying "we're for the people". And the poor damn people—the victims all the time! But we were going to ""Stop communist". I remember arguing with Dean Rusk about this very vigorously. He said it's not going to be another Munich, this was his line. Another Munich we've got to stop them here right now. No more Mr. Nice Guy.

Q: What were your main arguments to go against our ally?

BELL: That we were backing Colonialism. The French were only in there to make money for Michelin. The French had finally got out because they were losing more officers in Vietnam than they were graduating from their military academy. And they were losing money on their rubber plantations. It was a no-win proposition. But I can't remember precisely. We had lots of arguments but we didn't win. They said no, we're going to send a Mission out there and the very first Mission that went out there went from our office. (We were the home office for Military Aid.) And they were greeted as they came from the airport into downtown Saigon they were greeted with gunfire on the street which indicated that everything wasn't all sweetness and light in dear old Saigon!

Q: Weren't there those who were even trying to get Ike to use the Atom Bomb?

BELL: Nixon supposedly. I never heard him say it but I didn't hear what he said anyhow. That's the general belief. The French got beat. We got beat and we could have obliterated Vietnam I believe that to be a fact but I don't see what that could have conceivably brought us but disaster. We're so goddamn scared of the word communism. Amazing how it's a Pavlovian, you just say communism! and everybody quivers. When will we grow up?

End of interview