

Interview with James E. Hoofnagle

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JAMES E. HOOFNAGLE

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Jim Hoofnagle at his residence in Sarasota on March 3, 1989. I am going to ask Jim to give us a brief bio-background on his origins and his education, how he got started in government and particularly how he got involved in the information side of the government programs.

So, Jim, if you will start here and follow that outline. If I have any questions I will raise my finger and ask.

Go ahead.

Biosketch

HOOFNAGLE: Lew, I am a native Virginian. I was born up in the southwestern part of the state. When I graduated from high school I went to the University of Virginia.

I have a B.A. degree and M.A. degree. The M.A. degree is in political science.

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While at the University of Virginia I was in charge of a program of recruiting speakers to come to the university to speak to certain classes, particularly those in the political science field.

In that way I ran into an assistant secretary of agriculture who said, "What are you going to do, Jim, when you graduate, from the university?" I said, "I am going to work for the Atlantic Refining Company in Philadelphia."

He said, "My goodness, what are you doing taking political science and going into oil?" I said, "It's the only job I have been offered." He said, "Why don't you come and work for me." I said, "Fine. When do you want me to come?" He said, "Whenever you are ready."

So it wasn't long until graduation came along. I hadn't heard from him, so I went to the Atlantic Refining Company in Philadelphia. One day I got a cable saying, "Where are you? We have been looking for you."

So, in that way, I went to work in the Agriculture Department in Washington. Basically in Agriculture I was all the time either in personnel or the Production and Marketing Administration. I worked there until 1952.

Entry into Usia

At that time it changed to a Republican administration. I had been so closely identified with a program plan for Cash Subsidies, called the "Brennens Plan", I figured that my future there would not be very bright under the Republicans.

So I indicated to some of my friends that I was interested in moving to another job. I got an offer one day asking me to come over and talk about a job in the Foreign Service. It was AID. I went over and talked with a fellow named Mark Gordan, a friend of mine. He said, "We would like for you to go as deputy director in Pakistan for the AID program."

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I checked with my wife and she said that was out because we had two small children.

1952 General Manager, U.S. Information Program; Germany

So I dropped it there. A couple of days later I got another call. This was somebody who had heard about me turning down the job in Pakistan, and offered me the job of general manager in Germany for the U.S. Information program.

So, in 1952, I left the Agriculture Department and went to Germany as the general manager of the USIA program in Germany.

I was there for four years and then came home and —

Q: May I ask you, what were some of the highlights of your activities as general manager of the USIA operation in — I guess that was under HICOG.

I have talked to a couple other people, notably Ed Schechter, who has a great admiration for the job you did there. I would like to get some highlights of what you saw as your problems there and the way you solved them, and generally what were you up against.

HOOFNAGLE: Well, it was the first job I had in which the sheer magnitude of everything was just astounding. When I went there in January of 1953 there were 3,000 Americans in the program. It included a lot more than just a simple information program, but it was basically a public relations information and cultural program.

We had about fifty, sixty, seventy different installations throughout West Germany. What we had to do was to cut this down and cut it down fast, because although it was supported by the Germans there was just no way to continue such a large operation.

This was a very tough task, because you had to tell people they were through, but everybody understood why they were through.

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That to me was a big challenge. The most interesting phase of it was that there were hundreds of young Americans who were there as city officials — in every town in West Germany — we were able to pull out some of the best and the brightest from such a large pool of talent.

If you look at the list of USIA people you will see that an awful lot of them were those that were rescued from what we called the Land (pronounced Landt) Residents' Officer Program.

Q: That was the time I was in Japan and we had a lot of positions to fill in Japan. I know we got about six or eight of them who came out of the German program. I imagine those are some of the people you're talking about.

HOOFNAGLE: Yes.

Q: One was Pat van Delden and one was Morrie Lee, Paul Bethel and several others.

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. They could never have been recruited under ordinary times, but bear in mind that this was just at the close of the war; they were well educated, interested in going to Germany and I assume to Japan, the same way.

So we built an awfully good staff from that. That was a fascinating time and cutting the program down was really an interesting experiment, particularly in human relations.

Q: You were operating to a large extent under occupation funds, I understand.

HOOFNAGLE: Yes.

Q: Did you have any appropriated dollars or was it all occupation funds?

HOOFNAGLE: The appropriated dollars were primarily for the American salaries. I was always on American funds.

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Q: All the operational costs, other than the salaries and support of the Americans were on occupation moneys (so called Garioa Funds)?

1956: Assistant Director, USIA, for Administration

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. So then I came home and spent four years as assistant administrator of USIA, the position which you took when I left. While I was in Germany, the first four years, I became deputy director of the program, deputy PAO. Then, when I went back after four years at home, I went back as PAO in Germany.

Q: Getting back to your period as assistant director, did you have any special crises or problems that you had to work out in the four years you were in that operation?

HOOFNAGLE: You mean the first four years?

Q: The four years that you were the Assistant Director of USIA for Administration. What were some of the highlights there?

HOOFNAGLE: I don't know about the highlights. I can tell you some of the lowlights.

Q: All right. That may be high.

HOOFNAGLE: We had a fellow in the program — you probably know him — James McFarland. We called him the vegetable McFarland, to distinguish him from one of the nice McFarlands.

Anyway, when I came home — when I was getting ready to go back for the second tour of four years in Germany, I went over to appear before Rooney's committee.

Anonymous Poison Pen Letter

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When I sat down at the table, Mr. Rooney said, “Jim, I hear you are going back to Germany.” I didn't know how he knew it, but I said, “That's true, Mr. Chairman. I expect to go back in a few months.”

He said, “Yes. Do you want to read this letter?” He handed me a letter and I read it. It accused me and people like Ned Nordness, Micky Boviner, Walter Roberts and others of rigging assignments. He said I shouldn't have been reassigned to Germany. The letter, of course, was unsigned.

Just as the hearing started I took the letter and handed it back to Ben Posner, who was sitting behind me. Ben sent it down to my office, they had it copied, prints taken, and returned it to the hearing room.

I was concerned, I thought, “My God, if Rooney asked me for that letter, I don't have it here and there will be hell to pay.”

Anyway, Ben Posner got it back to me before Rooney mentioned it, but Rooney did later mention it and I just handed it to him.

Q: Did Rooney have any idea from whom it came, I wonder?

HOOFNAGLE: I don't think he did.

Q: The same guy pulled another stunt similar to that on another post about four years later, just about the time I was leaving the job. He was fingering somebody on the Israeli program at that time, but then by that time we knew who it was. Rooney did much the same thing for us at that time.

USIA Career Foreign Service Established

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HOOFNAGLE: During the tour as assistant director, to me, the highlight was the beginning of the career FSO program for USIA officers. You completed it.

Q: Well, it was actually completed after I left. We had gotten as far as the career information — no, we had gotten as far as the FSR Career Reserve (FSCR), but we didn't get the actual FSIO congressionally enacted FSIO (Foreign Service Information Officer — Career Status classification until about five years later. We got it finally in 1967 or 1968 under Leonard Marks.

HOOFNAGLE: I thought, that is probably the biggest contribution I made. I think everybody recognizes that at that time we didn't have any other choice.

Q: No, we really didn't.

HOOFNAGLE: So we couldn't just ask them to make FSOs of us all.

So in the second tour of duty I had some unusual experiences but they were mostly related to other things than the actual operations themselves.

1961 with Ed Murrow as the Berlin Wall Went up

For example, in August of 1961 we had a European PAO conference in Bonn. At that time Joe Phillips was assistant director for Europe. He and Ed Murrow came over to the conference and then Murrow decided to go on to Berlin.

So on the afternoon of August 11 I went to Berlin with Phillips and Ed Murrow. They put us up in the U.S. Military hotel. That night I turned on the radio and all I could get was that something was going on between East and West Berlin line. I didn't know enough about various places in the city, but it sounded disturbing. I got Joe Phillips up and he apparently detected the same thing. So we got Murrow up. Then we loaded up and went down to the U.S. headquarters. It wasn't called the embassy.

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Q: It was a special mission.

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. Anyway, we found that there was a wall going up. The East Germans were building a barricade.

So then we started having conversations with the officials in the Berlin office. Allen Lightner was there. Murrow became so enamored of this development that he spent three days in Berlin. He had planned to spend one night. I finally said to him, "Mr. Murrow, you're not a journalist anymore — you've got a job in Washington." I don't think he liked it very much, but anyway after three days he did go.

He talked with the president while he was there. I didn't hear the conversation. He talked with Pierre Salinger and several other top officials. Most of my time was traveling with him over to the east. Joe Phillips' job was to prepare the reports on the situation for Washington.

Murrow and I went over to East Berlin five times one day, and each time — you didn't know whether you were going to get shot or not —

Q: He went over to East Berlin?

HOOFNAGLE: Yes, over to East Berlin. A couple of times the East Berlin police and soldiers said, "Halt;" we didn't halt. Murrow didn't seem to be bothered. It bothered me and, most of all, it bothered the German driver.

Anyway, Murrow was just so fascinated. I mean, there was no point in going over to East Berlin.

Q: Was there anyone he was trying to talk to over there, or was he just going over to look?

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HOOFNAGLE: He was just going over to look. There was no one there to talk to. In fact, most of the time we didn't get out of the car, but we were flying the flag all the time, you see, so we were relatively safe — I hoped, anyway.

Q: Did you have a VOA group or correspondent group, in Berlin at that time? From what I understand, VOA actually got broadcasts of the — probably recorded — but broadcasts of the hammering and the noise going on in putting up the wall. These recordings were played back from VOA in Washington as soon as they were transmitted back to the studios of the Voice.

HOOFNAGLE: We had some of that. It wasn't from the Voice. We had a radio station, RIAS (Radio in the American Sector), and RIAS was doing that job and they did a marvelous job. Those people worked night and day. They were just shell-shocked, there was so much work to do.

That is the kind of thing that we experienced. Let's see —

Q: Didn't the — am I mistaken or did the government of Germany change while you were there, in that one party was voted out and another came in? Was that when Willy Brandt became prime minister?

HOOFNAGLE: He became what they call Oberbuergermeister of Berlin, yes.

Q: Yes, but I thought the whole ruling party —

HOOFNAGLE: Well, when we first went there it was Chancellor Adenauer —

Q: Yes.

HOOFNAGLE: — and he was out before I went back the second time and Erhard was in, and then later Willy Brandt —

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Q: Willy Brandt became the premier, and then he was in turn voted out, but that was after your four?

HOOFNAGLE: Yes.

Q: So Willy Brandt was there most of the time you were in Germany —

HOOFNAGLE: Yes.

Q: — for the second tour?

Anecdotes of the German Tour

HOOFNAGLE: Now, I have six stories about the presidents.

Q: I would like to hear them.

(A) Lyndon Johnson's Boots

HOOFNAGLE: Well, Lyndon Johnson came over right after the wall was up. So, of course, Berlin was where we were going. Johnson was riding with Willy Brandt in the car and showing his boots — German, big boots — Lyndon Johnson admired the boots. He said, “Where do you get a pair like that?” He said, “I can get a pair like that for you right here in Berlin.” It happened that it was on a Sunday, so the store had to be opened.

Lyndon Johnson's feet were different sizes — one was a size larger than the other one. So he had to buy two pair of boots, but he refused to pay for the second pair of boots. He only wanted one pair of boots.

Well, the escort officer who was with him suddenly stepped in and said, “That's quite all right. I'll pay for it.” So the escort officer paid for the president of the United States' second pair of boots.

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(B) Ted Kennedy's Ride Through Berlin

When Ted Kennedy came once — all of these were people coming to see the Berlin Wall — we were riding along with Kennedy in the back seat. The crowds were saying “Der bruder, der bruder, der bruder”.

So he mentioned to whoever was beside him, “Oh, that's marvelous, isn't it?” Well, “der bruder” is brother — they were calling him the brother of John Kennedy.

(C) Lyndon Johnson Again: Sunday in the “China Shop”

Another Lyndon story is that when he was in Berlin he said his wife had told him to get a place setting for 36 of china. Again, it was Sunday and they had to open up the factory.

We went to the factory and he asked the price — what would 36 cost? When they told him he said, “Oh, I can't afford that.” So the manager there said, “Well, we've got seconds that are much cheaper.” So he said, “I'll take seconds. Give me a set of 36 seconds.”

Well, of course, you don't make seconds. They are accidents, so they didn't have a set of 36 seconds. Well, the search went on to get seconds and suddenly Willy Brandt heard about it and walked up to him and said, “Mr. Vice President” — “this is a gift from the city of Berlin.” He said, “Okay, I'll take the first quality.”

Those kind of incidents you remember, when you don't remember important things.

Q: That's right.

(D) John Kennedy and the “Ich Bin Ein Berliner” Speech

HOOFNAGLE: The other story is on John Kennedy. The night before he went to Berlin to make his famous Berlin speech, the speech had been written and we had run off about

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a hundred or a thousand copies and more were being produced immediately, when they were stopped.

Word came from upstairs in the hotel that the president was changing the speech. Fortunately, we hadn't distributed any. The president wanted to make his own change in the speech.

You may remember — this was part of the speech — about “Ich bin ein Berliner”. Well, he put that in there — it is grammatically incorrect and it was put in on his own, a genius of a thought, but incorrect. You don't say “ein Berliner,” you say, “Ich bin Berliner”.

So that was an accident which was a great stroke -

Q: It certainly was.

HOOFNAGLE: So that takes me through Germany, doesn't it?

1964: Return to U.S. - Senior Seminar at Fsi -Deputy Director General of Foreign Service

I came back to the U.S.A. then at the end and went to the college — the senior seminar in foreign policy. Then I went with the State Department at the request of Joe Palmer. Joe Palmer was director general of the Foreign Service. I didn't know him personally but I was recommended by Crockett, who was under secretary.

So I went with Joe Palmer and was Deputy Director General under Joe Palmer, and then Palmer was moved into the African area. So I was there as Acting Director General. I couldn't be appointed director general because at that time I wasn't an FSO, and one of the requirements of being director general is to be an FSO.

At that time I became interested in becoming an FSO because it was clear that this had blocked me from being the Director General, because Crockett would have been quite willing to make me Director General.

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Anyway, I stayed in that job for about a year and then John Steeves — whom you worked with — came back from Afghanistan.

Q: John Steeves?

HOOFNAGLE: John Steeves. Poor John was in trouble immediately, not for anything he did, but just trying to work with the people who were — Crockett at that time was leaving, you see, and so his replacements came in.

I couldn't get along with either of them fighting, so I decided to look elsewhere and I was assigned to be deputy assistant secretary for management in the State Department.

I was in that about a year and then I realized I just had two or three years left to complete my career. So I started looking for a retirement spot, and in fact that's what it was. I was assigned to Ireland. I went to Ireland as a DCM.

Deputy Chief of Mission: Ireland

The first ambassador was a Democrat from the city of Chicago, a real estate man. He was 73 years old, so when he saw how I was working he immediately gave me authority to run the Embassy. He didn't know anything about government, and less about the Foreign Service.

Often he would call me up in the morning and say, "Jim, do you think it's all right if I don't come in today?" He had only one instruction for me in terms of operating the office — "Don't get me in trouble."

We had a problem that was only going to give him trouble. I was under instructions before I even left Washington that we had to have landing rights for our airlines in Dublin, Ireland. We were giving the Irish landing rights in this country and they weren't giving us anything but Shannon.

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So here was our ambassador saying, “Don't get me in trouble”. So what I had to do was just work slowly, but not create any furor. I think the Irish finally caught on to what I was doing, and it was the ambassador who was holding things back.

Anyway, Ambassador Sheridan left and John D.J. Moore, a Republican, came in and then we started to work to get the airline landing rights changed and we did get that done. We got landing rights in Dublin.

Q: What was it — the Irish were not letting the American lines land there or that we were not letting the Irish lines land in New York?

HOOFNAGLE: They would not let us land in Dublin. We had to stop in Shannon.

Q: I see.

HOOFNAGLE: Shannon was the only place where we had landing rights. Of course, the reason for that was that that would be taking business away from the Irish airlines. In those days, if you wanted to go to Dublin on an American airline, you flew to Shannon and picked up the Irish airline.

Anyway, that was the biggest battle there. It was a marvelous time — I mean, pleasure. It was no hard job. It was fabulous, the things you did there — the horse shows, events of all kinds. You could just go day after day with pleasure to all these events. It is a nice cultural town, too. So we really enjoyed Ireland.

Retirement

Q: After that you came back and retired?

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HOOFNAGLE: Yes, I came back and retired. Actually, I came back and retired at 59, but the basic reason that I came back was that I had a son at West Point who just said he couldn't stand it anymore. He had had too much concern with the Vietnam problem.

So we came back a year early, or almost a year early.

Q: So you were out there how long, just one year?

HOOFNAGLE: Two years.

Further Reminiscences on Germany and Ireland

Q: I would like to go back to your second German experience. What were the major objectives in the country of the USIA at that time? What were you trying to accomplish in the German USIA program?

HOOFNAGLE: We had been very fortunate up to this period of time in having tremendous working relationships with the Germans, because naturally the conqueror of Germany is going to have it easy.

So there were no problems then, but then in the second tour things began to show up, to unravel.

For example, RIAS in Berlin. It was clear that the German government didn't want anymore to continue to support us running RIAS. So what we did was that USIA sent over a team of people to sit down and negotiate an agreement to change RIAS into a German station. I forget who the lawyer was who they sent over.

Q: Chayes, wasn't it?

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. Anyway, he came over. His problem was that he thought he spoke German and didn't, so that — you know, when you negotiate with the Germans, I wouldn't

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dare negotiate with the Germans in German, but Shea felt competent in German and I could see that his German wasn't good enough, so we had a lot of trouble with that. We finally got him over it. He began to realize he didn't speak fluent German or understand.

That was one of the problems.

Q: Was that the first time, when you were asking the Germans to assume a substantial portion of the cost of operating RIAS —

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. They had already been bearing a large portion of the cost. This was to take over everything, yes.

Of course, what we would donate to them is the whole equipment — the whole RIAS station and so on. That is the kind of problem that came up.

Everywhere, in the Amerikaheuser and so on there was this growing restlessness, with the contributions and the lack of any integral role in the place. It was an Amerikahaus, pure and simple.

I don't know how many we have now, but when I left we had twenty.

Q: You don't know how many we have today, either?

HOOFNAGLE: It must be much less, fewer than that, I am sure.

Q: A lot of them are gone completely — don't even have an American Director. They are still operating, I think. I don't know if they are still called Amerikaheuser or not.

HOOFNAGLE: Well, I don't know whether this has been very helpful to you or not.

Q: Did you have any hand in the conversion of any of the Amerikaheuser into German support?

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HOOFNAGLE: Oh, yes, in both tours of duty I did in Germany. For example, in Munich we agreed to using German funds, which was not under the control of the city government but under our control, to erect a Munich Amerikahaus.

The Germans thought that was a great thing, except for the facade. They thought it was just a plain facade [of the building] and they wanted it to fit in with the Munich background. So they put up 150,000 marks for the facade of the Munich Amerikahaus.

Saarbrücken is another place where we had an awful run-down place and the people in Saarbrücken invited me down for an event.

The mayor asked me, "What do you think of our Amerikahaus here?" I said, "I think it is awful." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, it's just small and it is run-down and it is not in the right place."

He said, "Where would you like to have it?" I had already been alerted to what some of the possibilities were by the Amerikahaus director. I walked over to the window and said, "Do you see that plot over there? Right there is where we would like to have it."

The city built it. It wasn't that simple, of course, but that is the way it worked out.

Q: At the time that the Germans first took over some of the financing of RIAS, I think I heard that it was all on the Q.T., that it was a very highly classified operation. Did that take place while you were there?

HOOFNAGLE: That it was —

Q: — that it was a classified matter, not public knowledge, kept very quiet.

HOOFNAGLE: I don't think it was public knowledge, but I made no effort to keep it quiet.

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Q: Some of the people who were there seemed to think that it was kept confidential more by the German than the American government for a time. I think it was Gerry Gert whom I interviewed that made that command.

HOOFNAGLE: Gerry would be an authority on it. He was right there in the midst of it. That was a little earlier than I was there. I came in 1953.

Q: Were you still there when Sorenson finally forced the big reduction on the European program, or had you come back home by that time?

HOOFNAGLE: That came as I was leaving.

Q: Now, he was the one who was responsible for sending my group over to try to see where we could cut the European program. He was very unhappy because we, in his estimation, didn't cut it far deeply enough. I understand that later he managed to get much more cut than we had recommended.

HOOFNAGLE: Well, the German program, compared to others, was bigger, but it also was better — not because there were any smarter people there but because we had more resources — tremendous resources, you see.

So that would be my answer.

Q: How long did you — were they still operating on Garioa funds by the time you went back for your second tour, or was that all terminated?

HOOFNAGLE: That was being terminated about the same time.

Q: Do you have any other comments generally about your agency career and what you thought of it?

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HOOFNAGLE: Oh, I enjoyed it. It was a great career. I can't think now of anything I would rather have been than my foreign service experience — I mean, by my foreign service overseas.

Q: *Overseas.*

HOOFNAGLE: Yes. Of course, I was very fortunate in having just two very fine countries to work in —

Q: *Yes.*

HOOFNAGLE: — Ireland and Germany. Even so, I just think it was great for the family, too.

Q: *Yes, I imagine it was — a lot of excellent, interesting opportunities for the family in those countries, I'm sure.*

HOOFNAGLE: Yes.

Q: *I suppose you traveled pretty extensively all over the country while you were there?*

HOOFNAGLE: Oh, yes. In Ireland there is not a hamlet that I haven't been in.

When I was in Ireland the astronauts came back with the moon rock and so we got an exhibit of the moon rock. The Irish were extraordinarily interested in the space program, and so I took — the Ambassador doesn't like to travel — so I got the chance to take the moon rock exhibit all over Ireland.

We would take about three days and one of the Irish employees from the office would come up with the exhibit. He would set it up, we would have a reception, we would have the mayor there, to give a speech and then we would open the exhibit. Then we would go on to another Irish town.

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One of the towns I went to was Tralee. You, of course, know the “rose of Tralee.” So when I was there the mayor said, “We are having the rose of Tralee this summer and we would like to get a flag of each of the states where we have a rose of Tralee girl coming from the United States,” and he said it was about six or eight.

I said that I would be very glad to see if I could get them for him, when did he want them and so on. It turned out that he wanted them all to be exactly the same size, every state flag to be the same size.

I wrote the letters to six or eight state capitals, to the governor, and asked them for a flag, a certain size flag — I think it was four by eight — and damned if they didn't all come through, and they all came through with exactly the right size —

Q: There is one thing about Ireland I have never known — a lot of things I have never known — but do they conduct their business in English or do they insist on Gaelic?

HOOFNAGLE: English, oh, only English. Most of them can't speak Gaelic. Only in the west do you find the Gaelic speakers.

Q: So as much as they hate the English for having overrun Ireland, they still use the English language there?

HOOFNAGLE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Their whole economy is tied to English, you know. Until a few years ago did they not have free exchange of the Irish pound and the British pound. It is a great country. If I had the money I would spend one part of the year in Ireland, one part in Florida and one part in Washington, D.C.

Q: Quite a number of USIA types, and I think probably some State Department foreign service people, have retired in Ireland, I know. One of our people, Harry Casler died about a year or two ago.

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HOOFNAGLE: I knew Harry Casler. He was there when I was there. We knew the American residents in Ireland because we had a record of all of the Americans who were there. So I would invite them to a cocktail party whenever I would have a large party. I would include people like Harry Casler on the guest list. He would come every time.

Q: You had another one over there by the name of Delaney Terret — I don't know if you ever —

HOOFNAGLE: Yes, oh, yes.

Q: I don't know whether Delaney is still living or not.

HOOFNAGLE: Harry Casler is dead.

(Audio difficulties.)

Q: Well, I guess if that's it — you don't have anything additional to add? We will conclude the interview by thanking you very much.

HOOFNAGLE: I was glad to. I hope I haven't broken up your schedule.

Q: Oh, no.

End of interview