

Interview with George F. Muller

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

GEORGE F. MULLER

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This is Thomas Dunnigan, interviewing George Muller on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies.

Q: George you had an interesting background and an interesting way into the Foreign Service. Would you mind telling me something about that?

MULLER: Well, very briefly, I was born and raised in Vienna, Austria. After taking my high school Abitur, or Baccalaureate exam, I enrolled in the Vienna Consular Academy, which was then a well-known preparatory school for the foreign service. It was frequented by students not only from Austria, but also from many parts of the former Austro-Hungarian empire. (Two fellow students of mine who later joined the American Foreign Service were Hans Imhof and Anthony Geber.) I had always intended to pursue a diplomatic career and hoped to enter the Austrian foreign service, even though I was not in agreement with the direction Austrian politics were taking at that time.

I also enrolled at the University of Vienna in a course of law. In Austria you could do that, be at two institutions at the same time, because the exams were staggered.

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Hitler annexed Austria in March of 1938. During the summer of 1938 I received a draft notice from the German army. Being strongly anti-Nazi, I requested a postponement of military service ostensibly on the grounds that I had to go to England to study English, to prepare myself for a career in the Foreign Service. This was granted.

With that excuse in hand, I left Vienna in August of 1938 never to return until after the war I saw clearly coming. I arrived in the United States in June of 1939.

I must say I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the Friends Service Committee in New York. They found for me not only a summer job in New Hampshire, with a professor of the Harvard Business School, but also a scholarship to the College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, where I arrived in the fall of 1939.

Much to my surprise, after being interviewed by the Head of the French Department, who was perhaps excessively impressed with my academic credentials, I was made a senior. I graduated in the Class of 1940.

While at Wooster I saw on the bulletin board an announcement that the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Medford, Mass., had scholarships available and I applied. I had an interim reply from Fletcher and decided it would be best to follow up with a personal interview.

So, during Spring break 1940 I hitchhiked to Boston. I presented myself to the Dean and, lo-and-behold, eventually I got the scholarship at the Fletcher School. I also began to learn a lot about the United States on these long, 24-hour hikes from Ohio to Boston.

The only problem was that the scholarship covered tuition only, so I had to find a room-and-board job. Again I was very lucky; with the help of the Friends Service Committee, I landed a room-and-board job with a wonderful New England family. We became good friends. As it turned out, I stayed with them close to 4 years.

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In the meantime, I tried to enlist in the U.S. Army but they wouldn't take me because I had arrived in the States on a student visa and not as an immigrant. Until that could be sorted out, I was treated as a non-immigrant alien and had to get periodic extensions of my student visa, which in turn meant that I had to apply to the German consul in Boston for an extension of my German passport, an uncomfortable business, because on two occasions he urged me to return to the Fatherland by way of the Pacific. After Hitler's declaration of war against the United States a few days after Pearl Harbor, I was classified as an "enemy alien," but was not interned—and that also got the consul off my back.

I should explain that 3 departments had 3 different interpretations of what kind of an animal an Austrian was, legally. The State Department said we were "enemy aliens" because of the de facto recognition of the annexation of Austria. The Department of Justice said that we were "friendly aliens." The War Department said we were "neutrals."

To maintain my student status, I had to keep on studying whether I wanted to or not. So after taking my Masters at Fletcher in 1942, I went on toward my Ph.D.; at the same time I was Research Assistant to the Dean.

The status of the Austrians vis-a-vis the draft was finally ironed out in late '43. I was at last drafted into the U.S. Army in January of '44 and served in Luxembourg and Germany.

After returning from overseas in '47, I finished my doctorate at the School for Advanced International Studies. Dean Hoskins, previously at Fletcher, whose assistant I had been, had started this new school under the sponsorship of Christian Herter. He invited me to finish my degree there. It was then still an independent graduate school and is now affiliated with Johns Hopkins University.

Q: This is now SAIS.

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MULLER: Yes, and in homage to its generous sponsor, it has recently assumed the name of Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

I applied for a job at State and entered the State Department in 1949 as an Intelligence and Research Analyst for Austria, in what was then OIR, now INR. Subsequently I became Chief of the Central European Section which included both Germanies, Austria and Switzerland.

Q: Which was a tremendous responsibility in those days.

MULLER: It was a good-size section doing both economic and political analysis and maintaining close relations with the desk officers. In 1954 I entered the Foreign Service as a "Wristonee" and remained in the Service until mandatory retirement in 1979, upon reaching the age of 60.

Q: In 1954 you entered as a "Wristonee." Did you stay in your position in INR?

MULLER: I stayed in my position in INR until I was posted to Berlin in 1958.

Q: Describe your job in Berlin. What was the position you were sent there for?

MULLER: I was posted to Berlin to succeed Karl Mautner, whom I did not know very well at that time. As an old Berlin-hand, Karl had been the U.S. Liaison Officer with the Senat and Governing Mayor of Berlin since the end of the war. After many years he was supposed to return to the States and I was sent out to take his place. (In Berlin, the Senat is the governing body, not a part of the legislature.)

After consultations in Bonn, I arrived in Berlin by car on January 15, 1958. Had I been on the military train, I would have had a long ride because that night we had a "train crisis." The Soviets had held up one of our trains because of allegedly incorrect documentation.

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Martin Hillenbrand, the number two in Berlin, was in charge since Mr. Bernard Gufler, the Minister, was on vacation.

Marty had been up all night. As I presented myself, he said, "You've got 3 days to learn all about access to Berlin because our Access Officer, Bill Kelly, has been assigned on TDY to Indonesia." Kelly was one of the few Indonesian language officers in the Service, he had previously served in Medan and there was some crisis down there.

So, instead of replacing Karl, who was once again extended, I first became the Access Officer. Since the Soviets were frequently harassing us, crises with the trains, Autobahn and air access were practically a daily occurrence in Berlin—or at least a weekly occurrence. My INR background, while useful, had not prepared me for these frequent pin-pricks, nor for the complexities of the access situation.

Q: Well we were at that time moving under increasing Soviet, I guess "pressure," one would call it. In the Khrushchev days there were ultimatums, I know, and various threats.

Then you took over the Liaison job I gather when Karl Mautner had left.

MULLER: Yes. Kelly came back, having done nothing for 90 days in Indonesia, he told me; his temporary duty to Jakarta had been predicated on the assumption that there would be a Sumatra independence movement, but it folded. The machinations of the Embassy, at the time under the control of an "activist" political appointee, earned us Sukarno's enduring hostility and may well have been responsible for his leading role in the Third World Movement.

I finally took over when Karl left, I believe in June '58. I spent mornings in the U.S. Mission, and afternoons in the U.S. Liaison Office located in the West Berlin Rathaus (as were the British and French Liaison officers) just around the corner from the office of the Governing Mayor who was, of course, Willy Brandt. So I got to know Brandt quite well. With my British and French colleagues, I met regularly with the Berlin Chief of Protocol, as well as with

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Brandt's Chief of Staff. In addition, I maintained contacts with the District Mayors in the U.S. Sector of Berlin, but my door was open to anybody, including on frequent occasions members of the Berlin legislature. I tried to keep my finger "on the pulse" of Berlin opinion.

The ultimatum you talked about was announced by Khrushchev in September of '58. We then entered a period of considerable tension. Khrushchev gave the Western powers 6 months to get out of the city of Berlin, after which there would be established a so-called "free" City of Berlin, on the model possibly of Danzig or some other "free" cities. Our historic experience with "free" cities has not been exactly promising.

The City Government, the Western allies, and the population of Berlin were determined not to let this happen; not to be pushed out. But as I said, it was a period of very high tension because nobody knew exactly what the Russians had in mind.

The first serious event after the Khrushchev speech was a convoy incident at the Berlin end of the Autobahn leading to West Germany. As I mentioned before, the Soviets were masters at finding fault with Allied documentation. In the past, when they found real or alleged errors, they would permit convoys to return to base—after holding them for some time—to get corrected documents. What made this crisis serious, in the context of the Khrushchev "ultimatum," was that the Soviet checkpoint officer would not permit the convoy to either proceed or return to base. This was a "first" since the days of the blockade, and we didn't know what it meant. The convoy commander reported that the Soviet checkpoint officer had said he would hold the convoy until "hell freezes over" or until he could inspect the vehicles. No, inspection was an absolute no-no; we steadfastly resisted any kind of inspection because we were not going to make our convoy movements dependent on the whims or the goodwill of Soviet checkpoint officers.

So, we had a crisis on our hands that day in November, I believe it was the 10th. The Charg# from Bonn, Bill Trimble, happened to be in town. Findley Burns, who had succeeded Martin Hillenbrand as the No. Two at the U.S. Mission, was in charge in

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Mr. Gufler's absence. The question was: was this the action of an excessively zealous checkpoint commander; or were the Soviets probing; or was there some more sinister purpose to their action, like a new blockade?

What made the crisis potentially more significant was that we were unable to communicate with Soviet HQ in Karlshorst/East Berlin. By way of background, these communications were at best tenuous. There was only one military line to Soviet HQ and that was from British HQ near the famed Olympic stadium built by Hitler. We had to have an interpreter go through several switches, but if the Soviets didn't want to be reached, they simply didn't answer the phone or had some soldier say that there was nobody around. The usual way to resolve an impasse was to set up a meeting at Political Advisers' level. This time our efforts to do so were to no avail.

Mr. Trimble, Mr. Burns and I met with the Berlin Commandant, Maj. Gen. Barksdale Hamlett, at the latter's residence in the late afternoon. In the meantime, the general had ordered the Berlin garrison into a state of alert. The GIs were called back from the movies, for instance. The motors of our tanks, stationed on Huettenweg, not far from the Autobahn, were revved up. The general called in the tank task force commander, Major Tyree, and instructed him to hold himself in readiness; if necessary, he wanted to extricate the convoy. We were of course certain that the activity at U.S. HQ would be reported to the Soviets.

At this point Mr. Burns suggested that he and I go over to Soviet HQ in a last effort to resolve the crisis; until we reported back, military action would be held in abeyance. Mr. Trimble and Gen. Hamlett agreed. Findley then asked Mr. Trimble if he could use the ambassadorial Cadillac, flags flying, to impress the guards at Brandenburg Gate with the importance of our mission. When we told the driver to take us to Karlshorst, he said he wasn't sure the Caddy could make it; it had transmission trouble. So we also took Mr. Burns' official car as a backup.

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We arrived at Soviet HQ in the early evening; the place was fully lit and we were immediately ushered in to meet the Acting Political Adviser, a major, whose name I forgot. It was obvious that we had been expected. After going through the ritual of assuring the Soviets that the convoy contained only what was on the manifest, the Soviet major told us the convoy would be released. Needless to say, we returned happily and wrote the telegram to Washington saying that this particular crisis was over. (I might mention parenthetically, that Gen. Hamlett was reprimanded by his superior, Gen. Hodes, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Europe, on the grounds that he did not have the authority to mount an extrication operation—although this was in his contingency plans. Happily, Gen. Hamlett survived the reprimand and rose to 4-star rank as Vice-Chief-of-Staff, U.S. Army.)

I should perhaps add a word about the inspection of the vehicles, which was one of the things that we constantly had to worry about, and had to coordinate with our allies, the British and the French. As I said, we had an absolute prohibition on the Soviets inspecting our vehicles.

The Brits did not. The reason was that the British lorries were much higher than our trucks. Whereas a Soviet checkpoint officer could look into our trucks and see—the Soviets were always checking for East German refugees or fugitives being smuggled out of Berlin—whereas a Soviet checkpoint control officer could visually inspect our trucks, he could not visually inspect the British trucks. So the Brits permitted them to climb up on the back and look in.

This is the sort of thing that, as Deputy POLAD, I was charged with trying to work out with the British and the French. But of course we also met with our Russian counterpart from time to time, until the Wall crisis. The original Soviet POLAD, Colonel Kotshuiba, had been very difficult to deal with—at least until he had downed a few Vodkas. His successor, Lt.

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Col. Markushin, was more relaxed and spoke passable German, so I could converse with him before or after the official part of meetings.

Q: Did your Berlin contacts foresee or did they fear another blockade?

MULLER: Yes, we were concerned about that.

This is perhaps one of those situations when you plan for the last emergency because you don't know exactly what the next emergency would be like. Against the possibility of a blockade we had accumulated vast stockpiles in Berlin, in cooperation with the Berlin city government. After the Khrushchev ultimatum we brought our contingency planning up to date.

The situation was quite different from that when the blockade occurred in 1948 because Berlin was now an economically growing city. It was not just a question of maintaining a then-starving or near starving population. This was now a question of keeping things going at a high level of industrial activity. So it was not merely a question of supplying food in case of blockade, but also a question of raw materials, heating materials, etc., etc. We were planning for that.

One of the concerns we had in our contingency planning was the S-Bahn, the rapid transit railway that crosses from East into West Berlin. One mustn't forget this was the remnant of a once very large city. Under the post-war arrangements, the right-of-way of this rapid transit system was in East German hands, it belonged to the Reichsbahn. The East Germans had traffic police patrolling the right-of-way from time to time in West Berlin.

One of the contingencies we were concerned about was the possibility that, using the S-Bahn, the East Germans would infiltrate large numbers of paramilitary forces, under one guise or another, into West Berlin to stir up trouble. Of course we also considered other contingencies, possibly involving East German military forces taking over checkpoint control from the Soviets.

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Q: While you were there, Francis Gary Powers was shot down in his U-2 over the Soviet Union. There was a great hullabaloo that followed. Did that affect the situation in Berlin in any way?

MULLER: It affected it only indirectly in that the summit between Eisenhower and Khrushchev was canceled. We had all expected some alleviation of the Berlin pressure from those discussions.

But actually, before the shoot-down of Gary Powers, there was one other event that I think I should mention. Just a few days before the expiration of the Berlin ultimatum issued by Khrushchev in late 1958, we celebrated, quite purposely and very determinedly, the anniversary of the termination of the airlift. I remember Ambassador Bruce came up from Bonn, as did the British and French Ambassadors. We had a large ceremony at the Airlift memorial in Tempelhof.

Q: This was the 10th year wasn't it? It was ten years after the end of the airlift.

MULLER: Yes, it was 10 years exactly.

Q: That would have been a good reason to celebrate.

MULLER: It so happened it fell just a few weeks before the expiration of the so-called ultimatum. The Khrushchev deadline came and went and nothing more happened. So we felt that we had won that round, at least.

Q: As I recall, one of the stipulations to the end of the ultimatum was that we would have a Foreign Ministers conference in Geneva which took place that summer of '59. I happen to know because I was there. Also, when we told the Russians we would be agreeable to that, the ultimatum disappeared.

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MULLER: That's it, the ultimatum just disappeared. I might add, another important event was a huge demonstration on the First of May 1959. May Day being an important Social-Democratic holiday. Willy Brandt addressed this immense gathering in front of the old Reichstag. The banners proclaimed "Berlin remains free," and Brandt said, "We are already a free city, we don't need to be a "free" city. That was his slogan.

Q: George, of course the major thing that happened during your time in Berlin was the erection of the Wall in 1961. Did we foresee that in any way or did we foresee the Soviets shutting off East Berlin from the West?

MULLER: We did not foresee the erection of the Wall. Afterwards the canard was spread, and I think it was spread by the Soviets, that the Allies knew about it. In fact, one of the Berlin newspapers had a headline "The Allies Knew It." But I can assure you that we, at least at my level, I was at that point Chief of the Political Section, did not know anything nor did Mr. Lightner, the Minister who was in charge of the State Department component. Nor did anybody else. With the wisdom of hindsight some analysts claimed we should have drawn appropriate conclusions from large quantities of building materials the East Germans assembled close to the Sector borders. I never saw such reports.

What happened was that there was an increasing stream of refugees coming West, not only from East Berlin but also from all parts of the GDR, the German Democratic Republic. One could sense that something was brewing, that East Germany was stirring. We tried to keep our ears to the ground as best we could.

To forestall any kind of movement against West Berlin, President Kennedy gave a speech on the 25th of July, 1961, in which he reiterated the firm U.S. commitment to the freedom of West Berlin and the people of West Berlin. Now mind you, West Berlin, he did not say anything about East Berlin.

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We didn't particularly care for the way this was presented because we had always felt there was a unity to the whole city, to the fabric of the city, despite the East having effective control, of course, over its sector. There still was, first of all, a great deal of movement through the city. People from the East could still go to the movies in West Berlin, they could go to the theaters; Church meetings, so-called Kirchentage, and important political meetings, with people from both parts of Germany, took place in West Berlin.

So West Berlin was a meeting place of considerable importance. We felt that just to reiterate the freedom of West Berlin, while of course very important—that was after all the mission of the allied military presence in West Berlin—nevertheless, something should have been said about vestigial allied rights in East Berlin. In fact, we had patrols going through East Berlin, army patrols. It was U.S. policy to encourage visits by us, by the Western diplomatic establishment, to East Berlin, including such things even as the opera. This was part of showing the flag and demonstrating our presence, observing the quadripartite status of the city as a whole.

As I said, the refugee stream increased. On Saturday, August 12, I had a call (of course I was in the office), from the Chief of the Senat Chancery, Heinrich Albertz, who subsequently also became governing Mayor of Berlin. He then was Chief of Staff to Willy Brandt.

He asked whether the U.S. could make emergency rations available for the refugees because the processing at the Refugee Reception Centers could not keep pace with the stream of people coming in. People were starving in the receiving lines. So I got on the horn to our military and we made some K-rations available; I don't know how much the refugees liked the K-rations, but we delivered them.

Then later that evening, around 11:00, I was at home at that point, Mr. Albertz called me again and said, "We have noticed something very odd and that is that the S-Bahn (the

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rapid transit trains) are going into the East but don't come out. The railroad seems to be stopping.”

He and I talked about the possible significance of this, bearing in mind, that one of the contingencies we were worried about was the S-Bahn as a kind of Trojan Horse bringing East German thugs and paramilitary forces into West Berlin, but there was no indication of this.

The next thing we learned was that the East Germans had blocked all the crossing points within the city with barbed wire entanglements, and were not permitting anybody to go from West to East or East to West. Now, this kind of blockage had happened before when there were currency conversions in East Germany, so we, at the Mission, were not quite sure what the East German objective in doing this was.

There had also been reports that the East Germans were going to reissue identity cards all over East Germany with the objective of limiting the access of people from, say, Leipzig to Berlin. The cards were to be issued for zones, going in concentric circles toward East Berlin, so that with one card you could perhaps only go from Dresden to Leipzig but not to Berlin. You would need another card, and so on, to get into the city.

Q: That would be to staunch the refugee flow.

MULLER: Exactly. Previously, the crossing points had been closed when there was a new issue of ID cards.

So there were all these reports, many of them confusing or conflicting. I would say at about 1 or 2:00 in the morning, I called Dick Smyser and Frank Trinkka, who were junior officers in the Eastern Affairs Section of the U.S. Mission. I asked them to go into East Berlin, in an official car of course, to see what the situation was at the checkpoints, at the Brandenburg Gate, and to pick up any kind of information they could.

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They came back at about 3:00 in the morning. They said that they were actually waved through quite easily, whereas Germans could not pass, but they also brought back a copy of "Neues Deutschland," the official organ of the East German Socialist Unity Party. It contained the text of a decree of the East German government stopping all transit between East and West Berlin, save for a few crossover points which would remain open; it also contained a communique of the Warsaw Pact declaring that the Warsaw Pact forces were fully behind this action of the East German government.

It was only then that we knew that a very dramatic step affecting the 4-Power status of Berlin had been taken.

Q: You were presumably on the phone to Washington with this information.

MULLER: The press was running wild, writing about the blockade. We decided to first get all the intelligence together. Commandants' meeting with the Governing Mayor was set-up in the course of the night. We decided to have a full report after having reported preliminarily the text of the East German decrees and official announcements. The meeting with the Governing Mayor, took place in the Allied Kommandatura at 11:00 in the morning of August the 13th.

Q: Very unusual to have a Sunday morning meeting.

MULLER: Indeed it was, the situation called for it.

Willy Brandt was at that point engaged in an election campaign. He had been campaigning in West Germany. Mr. Albertz, his Chief of Staff, had him taken off his train and brought by the fastest means possible to Berlin. Brandt hadn't had much sleep. He had been briefed by Mayor Franz Amrehn, who was the number two in the city administration.

The two of them, flanked by Albertz and one or two others, came and briefed the Commandants to the extent that they knew the situation. But I must say, it was a desultory

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meeting. Amrehn did most of the talking; Brandt said very little. No great decisions were taken, partly because we really didn't know exactly what to do, except to lodge a Commandants' protest. Which we then, immediately after the meeting, set upon to draft.

Q: The Soviets had not yet begun to put up the Wall, had they as such?

MULLER: No. Only East German forces were present. The first day or two they emplaced barbed wire entanglements, something akin to sawhorses, that were pulled across these various crossing points. These were reinforced, as the days went by, with more barbed wire; by mid-week they began to actually lay masonry, cinder block, right across some very important intersections, for instance at the Potsdamer Platz. They didn't bother about foundations, they just put the mortar on the pavement and set the cinder block on top of it. I should point out, though, that all this was done in the name of the East German government. Although the action could not have been taken without the approval of Moscow, the Soviets were not involved in the closing of the crossing points.

Q: This led to a great deal of activity from this end. I know you got a visit from the Vice President, General Clay and many other people came along. This would keep you busy, for awhile.

MULLER: That's absolutely right.

The problem was that when there had been past Soviet infractions or East German infractions against what we called the "status of Berlin," the Commandants had immediately lodged a protest. As I said, that Sunday we drafted the protest and we telegraphed a proposed text to Washington.

Either later that day or the next day, I'm not sure which, Foy Kohler, who was the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, called Allan Lightner on the phone from the Secretary's office. It had been decided that there would be no Commandants' protest at this time

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because this was so important an infraction of Berlin's quadripartite status, that the Allies wanted to make an Ambassadorial level protest in Moscow.

This however did not happen until Wednesday. The way it looked to the Berliners was: Here is one of the worst situations that we've had since the blockade, and the Allies don't do anything! The Berliners did not know, of course, that the Moscow level protest was being negotiated at the moment among the Western allies—its exact language, etc.

So Berlin morale plummeted terribly Monday, Tuesday and on into Wednesday. Wednesday Ed Murrow came to Berlin on what had been scheduled as a routine visit. He knew Brandt fairly well and Brandt told him that something needs to be done.

In the meantime, we had drafted our own recommendation that in view of the disintegrating morale of the Berliners, we should have a high level visit from Washington. We suggested either the President or the Secretary of State or somebody at that level. Murrow sent his message with similar recommendations.

Very soon after that we learned that Vice President Johnson would be sent to Berlin, and that the President had ordered U.S. forces in West Germany into a state of alert. In addition, a battle group would be dispatched to reinforce the Berlin garrison. The arrival of the battle group from West Germany was to coincide with the Vice Presidential visit, so that LBJ could receive the soldiers as they were driving along the Autobahn into Berlin.

I was the action officer for the Vice President's visit and, of course, it was a highly charged two days. A Saturday and Sunday, if I remember right.

The Vice President addressed a special session of the Berlin House of Representatives, reiterating the U.S. pledge to the freedom of West Berlin. The next morning he greeted the commanding Colonel and the soldiers of the battle group as they rode into Berlin.

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I monitored the progress of the battle group through military channels from the moment they entered the Autobahn at Helmstedt until their arrival.

Q: The Soviets had made no attempt to hinder them on the Autobahn, had they?

MULLER: No. The Soviets made no direct attempt to hinder them, but they did have a very involved checking procedure set up at the western end of the Autobahn before the Americans were allowed to enter. Unfortunately, a new precedent was created. The Soviet soldiers counting the American soldiers on their trucks, came up with a different headcount every time. Either they honestly miscounted or they purposely miscounted, I don't know. But the count did not jibe with the documentation that Colonel Glover Johns, I believe was his name, had.

His mission was to get to Berlin, and fast, and he didn't know whether this was a delaying maneuver or a mini-blockade. When the Soviet checkpoint commander requested, or demanded, that the U.S. soldiers dismount for a headcount, he, after some argumentation, gave the orders to do just that. We had never dismounted for a headcount before. After this precedent, when the Soviet count of our soldiers did not agree with a convoy's manifest, they would make the troops fall out, often in inclement weather. We had to protest against their playing games with the headcount procedure.

Other than that, the battle group arrived in good shape. The West Berliners greeted the soldiers with a great deal of joy. Their arrival was generally interpreted as further manifestation of the American will to defend Berlin.

In purely military terms, obviously, one battle group didn't make all that much difference. The total garrison of the Allied soldiers in Berlin was about 10,000, the largest contingent of which was American.

Q: Did the British or French strengthen their forces in any way because of the Wall?

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MULLER: Not that I recall. They put them on a higher state of alert but they did not augment them. Even so, being surrounded by, I think, 20 or so Soviet divisions the Berlin garrison would not have had much of a chance in case of armed conflict. But this was a question of perceptions and perception of the power behind the trip-wire; and the trip-wire was the American forces. Some Berliners said American wives and babies were just as important. It was our total presence that counted.

Q: Were there any inter-Allied differences during this period as to how to handle the situation?

MULLER: I guess there were, but I'm not aware of any major or fundamental differences. We always had some difficulty in getting the French to agree to things because they had to check with General De Gaulle, apparently personally. And, of course, it took some time to get to "Le Pr#sident" and for the French to get their instructions.

Subsequent to the Wall the Ambassadorial group was set up in Washington. It may already have existed in a more or less informal way before. It became a quite formalized mechanism and all decisions affecting Berlin had to be explored and discussed in Washington by this Ambassadorial group. The three Western Allies and the Federal Republic of Germany were the members.

Our representative on that was Martin Hillenbrand; actually Foy Kohler, the Assistant Secretary, but Marty substituted for him most of the time.

Q: Explain to me how the relations went between the Mission in Berlin, the Department in Washington and Embassy Bonn. Were they all mixed up in this, or were there clear lines of authority back and forth?

MULLER: They were all involved, but the lines of command were clear. I always think that the amazing thing is that, in the end, it worked. Much better than you would think if you

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saw a diagram of the thing. It worked and it worked partly because the people had the same ultimate objective in mind. They may have differed as to tactics and so on.

In Berlin you had 3 allied pyramids of command, at the pinnacle of each of which was the Commanding General—U.S. Forces, British Forces and French Forces in Berlin—who at the same time was the Commandant of these respective sectors.

These Generals were not only the commanders but they also carried a second hat as deputies of their respective ambassadors. Our General had a letter from the Ambassador designating him as “Deputy Chief of Mission” in Berlin, the Ambassador being the Chief of Mission in Berlin as well as Bonn. Allan Lightner, the senior State Department representative, was the Deputy Commandant in every respect. On the political side he had the unhappy title of Assistant Chief of Mission, even though he was a Career Minister and the job called for the rank of Minister. (When Arch Calhoun took on that job, he didn't like that title at all, so he simply called his office the Office of the Minister, which was much better.)

As you see the political and military lines of command were intertwined. We worked very closely with the General's office in Berlin. Under this 2-star General there was a 1-star General who commanded the Berlin Brigade. He was the troop commander. His job, of course, was to have the forces in readiness, take care of training, etc.

We reported through Bonn to Washington but in effect, simultaneously. So whatever reports we sent to the Embassy were also received in the State Department; we also informed Paris, London and Moscow.

Conversely, State sent instructions to both us and Bonn; when Bonn sent something out to Berlin it also went out to all posts concerned with Berlin matters, i.e. London, Paris and Moscow where Berlin working groups were set up. So it worked pretty well, the Ambassadorial group in Washington, which also had representatives from the Pentagon, the Berlin Working Groups in London, Paris and Bonn, all interacting with us in Berlin. Of

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course initially it took some trial and error, but after a while it became a well functioning mechanism.

Q: Now, one of the major problems that arose then was the tank confrontation. Were you involved in that?

MULLER: Yes, I was. When the Vice President came, he was accompanied by Chip Bohlen, General Clay, and General Howley, who was the first American Commandant. The Berliners were especially beholden to him because he really told the Soviets where to get off, in no uncertain terms, way back; and of course also to General Clay who was something of an icon.

Q: During the blockade he was a hero.

MULLER: During the blockade, yes. And Frank Cash, from the Berlin Task Force, and Karl Mautner also came.

I guess it was out of recommendations that resulted from that visit that President Kennedy decided to send General Clay as his personal representative to Berlin. In the sense that General Clay became kind of an American Super-Commandant, this created, as you can imagine, some difficulty, both in Berlin and Bonn.

It not only created difficulty protocol-wise, which obviously was secondary, but because General Clay, being a very prominent Republican and at one point rumored as Republican Presidential timber, had a very strong and forceful Berlin policy in mind, much more forceful than the President and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Yet the President was caught, as it were, by the recommendations of his special representative in Berlin. General Clay had a very short fuse. I remember one evening hand-carrying a message from Washington to him (he stayed at our official guest house on Wannsee) thinking he would want me to draft a reply. But no, he decided to call the Command Center where there was a scrambler phone, and he told "Dean" in no uncertain terms what he had in mind.

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Another problem was that Clay was not in the military chain of command. He could not directly order the troops around—frustrating for a 4-star general. As winter set in, he felt that we were not showing our presence enough on the Autobahn, the vital land access road. So he wanted more small convoys to go back and forth. The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Europe, in Heidelberg grumbled that this would disrupt the integrity of his forces. Eyes flashing, Clay told me that's the best damned experience a young second lieutenant can have, being in charge of a small troop movement. He eventually got his patrol convoys approved. His biggest concern—the concern of all of us—was to keep allied access to West Berlin open and to force the Soviets to accept responsibility for the actions of their East German puppets.

This was dramatized by the incident of Allan and Dorothy Lightner going to East Berlin—they were on their way to the opera—and being refused entry at the sector border. Again, I should emphasize that it was our policy to show the flag, to go to cultural and other events in East Berlin to make certain that not only the population but also that the authorities knew that we had these residual rights in East Berlin which we were intending to uphold.

Allan drove their own private Volkswagen; though not an official vehicle his low license number was clearly identifiable as that of the Deputy Commander. When they were denied entry General Clay ordered armed escorts to take them through the East Berlin checkpoint, and a few hundred yards into East Berlin, and then back again.

It was reported afterwards that on reading the report of the incident, President Kennedy said, "What the hell was Lightner doing going to the opera in East Berlin?" Which to me indicates that the President was not fully aware of what our policy with respect to showing our presence and circulating in all of Berlin, had been.

Subsequent to that General Clay ordered U.S. tanks to Checkpoint Charlie. The Soviets responded by bringing their tanks to the other side of the checkpoint. And so there were the two columns, 3 or 4 tanks on each side, facing each other across Checkpoint Charlie.

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Well, the press played this up as World War III practically about to start in Berlin; that this tank confrontation would develop into a major confrontation. I went down to Checkpoint Charlie, and I'm not the world's greatest hero by any means, but I felt quite secure standing there because I was so convinced that this was a carefully controlled situation on both sides.

But General Clay had achieved, which the press never recognized, he had achieved Soviet accountability and responsibility for what was going on in East Berlin. One mustn't forget that the closing of the borders was undertaken by the East German government claiming that they were acting on their own authority, disclaiming any kind of Soviet involvement.

The fact that the Soviet tanks responded to our presence clearly indicated that the Soviets were in control. We knew it, of course, but now it was there for the world to see. However, as I said, it was played up as a confrontation that could ignite World War III. After several days of the confrontation, I forget how long it was exactly, by mutual agreement the two tank columns left. Ours rumbled back to Huettenweg and the Soviets returned to wherever they were stationed.

Which leads me to comment that public opinion regarding the Berlin situation was the prisoner of three basic misconceptions. I think that goes probably as far as the high reaches in the State Department and the White House, and I'm including the President.

Misconception number one was: Berlin is a divided city and East Berlin is part of the Soviet sphere of influence and we cannot change that except at risk of war. In fact, the President had said on July 25th, "We only guarantee the freedom of the West Berliners."

That, of course, was true but we still had these residual rights for the city as a whole. Therefore, we did have responsibilities, if not for the people of East Berlin, but for the city as an interfacing network of communications with a myriad type of communications.

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It was not fully realized that before the Wall went up, East Berliners and, to some extent also, East Germans could come to West Berlin. As I mentioned before, important church and other meetings, political meetings, took place in West Berlin to which East Germans and East Berliners could go. The Berliners regarded this as the city's mission in the East-West struggle.

So, while Berlin was a divided city, it was not divided to the extent that the Soviet sector of Berlin was completely severed from West Berlin. It was still a living organism as a city, a meeting place of East and West. The emission on radio, television and so on from West Berlin meant an awful lot to the people of East Berlin. Therefore, they sought contacts, bought newspapers, went to the movies, that kind of thing. This human dimension was overlooked in the West, even in the Federal Republic.

The second misconception was: World War III would break out over Berlin. We at the Mission felt that Khrushchev was continually probing—probing allied intentions, allied steadfastness, and that he would continue to probe until we told him that we would resist any further steps that what Brandt called, the “salami tactics” had to stop. But we also felt that the situation was tightly controlled by Moscow—the appearance of Soviet tanks at Checkpoint Charlie proved this—and that Khrushchev would not go to war over Berlin.

The third misconception was that if we didn't make too much of the Wall crisis, this would defuse the Berlin situation. People in high places, and that includes such highly respected experts as our ambassadors to Moscow, “Tommy” Thompson, and to Belgrade, George Kennan, held this view. The argument went something like this: daily hundreds of refugees were streaming West; the lifeblood of the Communist state in East Germany was being lost, especially young people, people in the reproductive ages. Khrushchev (at the behest of the East German government) had to apply a tourniquet to stop this hemorrhaging—this was the Wall. Once the refugee flow was stanching, things would return to more or less normal.

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We at the U.S. Mission, to the contrary, thought that the Soviet objective was still to solve the Berlin problem their way, and that if he got away with this one, he would try again, perhaps something bigger. In my view our position was justified because only a few months later we faced strong Soviet attempts to interfere with our air access and then we had the Cuban crisis. While we can never prove the “what ifs” of history, I believe that if we had shown the same kind of tough, immovable resistance to the situation in Berlin, that we were forced to show, simply by virtue of geography and for other reasons, in Cuba, we might never have had the much more serious confrontation over Cuba. That's my speculation.

What I thought should be done, and I think Allan Lightner agreed, was to make a grave statement at highest levels, that a situation seriously endangering world peace had arisen through the Soviet-East German actions; that we should so inform the United Nations Security Council, and call a 4-power conference to deal with this unilateral violation of the quadripartite status of Berlin. My thought was that this conference should be held on alternating days in East and West Berlin. This would have demonstrated the symbolism of Berlin being one city.

The simile I used in a draft message that never saw the light of day because we were overtaken by Washington's decision not to react forcefully was that: if you're out on a boat with two people and one person is rocking the boat terribly hard, if the other person just tries to steady the boat, he is at a great disadvantage; but if he also starts rocking, then maybe the initial rocker will come to his senses and stop it.

Q: Before both of them drown.

MULLER: Before both of them drown, exactly.

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I have a picture that General Clay gave me, with his inscription to me reading: “with admiration for his sound judgement and bold spirit.” In thanking him, I said if I had sound judgement, I wouldn't have shown any bold spirit. He laughed.

Q: There's also an incident involving Howard Trivers, wasn't there?

MULLER: I don't remember too much about that.

Q: I know the one that got the publicity was Al Lightner, the opera trip.

Any other comments on your years in Berlin?

MULLER: Again, I don't want to say “we told you so,” but the U.S. Mission, not just myself, but Lightner and others on the staff also, felt that this wasn't by any means going to be the end of the Berlin crisis.

In late January and through February, 1962, we had the “corridor crisis,” a Soviet attempt to interfere with air access to Berlin. This was a totally new development, one that hadn't even happened during the blockade. This did not receive much play in the press, though it was potentially a far more serious thing than the tank confrontation.

By way of background I should say that air access to Berlin took place through three clearly defined corridors, from Frankfurt, Hannover and Hamburg to Berlin. Only the commercial carriers of the Western Allies (PanAm, British Airways and Air France) were authorized to fly into Berlin. The control mechanism for these flights was the Berlin Air Safety Center (BASC) which was a quadripartite organization—another one of those remnants from the days of the Allied Control Council for Germany. The four air controllers sat at a huge desk. The Western controllers would pass the flight plans of their aircraft to the Soviet controller who would routinely initial it; this meant that the Soviets were keeping their military air traffic clear of that aircraft.

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All of a sudden, the Soviets began to inform us through the BASC that certain altitudes at certain times would be reserved for Soviet military flights and that they would not guarantee the flight safety of aircraft in the corridors at such “reserved” times and altitudes. I should have also mentioned that the air corridors were not only delimited geographically, but also by altitude. They were really “air tubes” if you will; we did not fly under 3000 and above 10,000 feet.

(At one time we had tried to lift the height limitation on the Berlin corridors, which really stemmed from the days of prop aeroplanes. When jets came in, the normal operating altitude of a jet flying into Berlin would be much higher than 10,000 feet. When we tried to get this height limitation lifted we didn't get very far.)

We immediately realized that the “salami slicers” were at it again. If the Soviet reservation of times and altitudes would go unchallenged; if the Soviets expanded their “reservations” for hours or days, this could lead to a strangulation of air access. There were many daily flights in and out of Berlin. For political reasons, many Berliners preferred to fly, rather than to expose themselves to East German controls on the ground. So this was an extremely sensitive issue.

Obviously, the commercial airline companies were kind of nervous about this thing. We felt that we had to challenge these reservations with military transport aircraft, while the commercial schedules were somehow arranged so that they would not directly fly in defiance of these “reservations.” In this case I think it was a little difficult to get the British and French to go along with us, but we flew military transport aircraft (that is, unarmed aircraft, I'm not talking about fighter planes) in “violation” of these Soviet “reservations.” Pretty soon our two Allies joined us and we flew these challenge flights without Soviet approval—and without incident.

Thereby hangs the story of my trip to Rome. The Attorney General, the President's younger brother, Robert Kennedy and his wife Ethel, were due to come to Berlin in the

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course of a trip around the world. General Clay sent me to Rome where the Kennedys had been received by the Pope, to brief the Attorney General on the air situation because he knew that Mrs. Ethel Kennedy's parents had died in an airplane crash. We felt that the Attorney General and his wife should know what was going on.

So I went to Rome to the famous Hassler Hotel, atop the Spanish steps, where the Attorney General was staying. The Kennedys were to fly in on the command aircraft of Gen. Landon, Chief of U.S. Air Forces, Europe. I told the Attorney General that if the Soviets made a corridor "reservation," we would nevertheless fly, unless he directed otherwise. He asked me what Gen. Clay recommended. I said "to fly; the chance of Soviet interference was minimal." The Attorney General said, of course, we will fly as General Clay recommends. We flew into Berlin without interference. The Soviets, I'm sure knew whose aircraft it was and, I suspect, also who was on board.

Along with the party was Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and a number of people of the press corps. One of them came to me and said, are you the fellow who wrote this report from Berlin? He had just read a confidential report of mine, an assessment of the Berlin situation prior to the Attorney General's visit, the sort of thing every post sends out when a VIP is coming in. The fact that he was complimenting me on it didn't diminish my surprise that our telegram, along with other confidential papers, was lying around on one of the tables.

Mr. Kennedy then told me that he wanted to make a very short arrival statement on landing at Tempelhof airport and that he wanted to make it in German, but didn't speak any German. He, and principally Arthur Schlesinger, and somebody else on Kennedy's staff and I sat together and we drafted a 10-line statement.

It was then my task to turn this into phonetic German. If you know German and you've never done this before, it is a very difficult thing to put yourself into the mind of somebody

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who cannot pronounce, or cannot speak German at all, and put this into phonetic language.

I might say, that it was Bobby Kennedy who first said, "Ich bin ein Berliner." He asked me, "how do I say, "eech?" No, I said, it's "ich." I remember coaching him during a rather bumpy descent into Tempelhof.

Q: This is before his brother said it.

MULLER: Yes, this was in February of '62. When he arrived at Tempelhof, he read this short statement in this phonetic German. He said, "Ich bin ein Berliner." (JFK's famous speech wasn't until June 1963)

Q: So you had some paternity in that statement, very good.

So much for Berlin. In 1962 you were sent to the National War College.

MULLER: Yes, that's right. I might just add that eventually the Soviets ceased making these air corridor "reservations" and the crisis abated.

Q: It faded away.

MULLER: It faded away as had the ultimatum, possibly because they were beginning to prepare for Cuba. Had they installed the missiles, can you imagine the leverage they would have had, worldwide, including Berlin?

Q: Any comments on your year at the War College or not?

MULLER: No comment except that after having been in Europe all these years, I chose to go on the Far Eastern trip. It was all new to me and it was a delightful and interesting trip. Among other places, we stopped in Bangkok. I was so delighted with Bangkok I put it as

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one of the posts I would desire in the future, on my post preference report, also known as April Fool's sheet. Of course it never materialized until 5 years later.

Q: Well, you see, things are not forgotten.

MULLER: Things are not forgotten or else it helped that Ambassador Unger asked for me.

Q: That might have helped too.

When you left the War College, you were sent to the Department to the Political/Military Affairs Division. What did you do there?

MULLER: There were two principal sections to that office at that time. Jeff Kitchen carried the title of Deputy Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs. It was not in those days a bureau, this happened, I think after Ron Spiers took over. The office operated, more or less, as a personal staff of essentially senior people under the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who then was Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson.

We were divided essentially into two offices: Operations and Policy. I worked in the Policy Office and was responsible for a part of the world that included Africa and the Indian Ocean. One of my jobs was to develop contingency plans for possible crisis situations. I worked on those with the geographic desk officers and their counterparts in the Pentagon.

I guess my most significant work in those years was that I became the action officer for the "Concord Cruise." This was a cruise through the Indian Ocean of an aircraft carrier task force, that is, a carrier with an oiler and 2 or 3 destroyers sailing through the Indian Ocean, making certain port calls and then rejoining the 7th Fleet, from whence they came. The 7th Fleet was headquartered in Hawaii, but its main combat elements were in the West Pacific.

I am not sure about the origins of the concept, but it was favored by the White House and Ambassador Johnson was the man in charge at State. I was told to prepare papers

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justifying a U.S. naval presence in this immense body of water. The littoral countries were not considered models of stability; in the case of the Indian subcontinent there was a potentially explosive situation. The basic idea was to show the flag from Kenya to the Strait of Malacca. We chose the name "Concord Cruise" to denote the peaceful purpose of our presence. I developed the policy papers in conjunction with the various desks at State and in the Pentagon.

After the usual inter-agency wrangling, the first cruise finally came off in May, 1964. I volunteered to join it in Kenya and stay aboard for two weeks, as a sort of Political Adviser to the admiral in charge and to report back. (Ambassador Johnson had in the meantime been replaced by Ambassador Bruce, my former boss in Germany.) I joined the admiral at Nairobi and we then flew directly on board the carrier in a so-called COD (Carrier-On-board Delivery) aircraft. The ship was the Bon'Homme Richard (named after the ship commanded by John Paul Jones), also affectionately known as the "Bonnie Dick." It was the last of the Essex-class carriers that saw service in World War II, small by today's standards.

I got a good feel for carrier operations and the precision work required for launching and, especially, recovering aircraft. I also got a good feel for protocol aboard. My first formal meeting with the admiral was when I received an engraved invitation, requesting the "pleasure of my company" in the flag cabin, to which I was formally escorted by a young officer.

We did not enter the Persian Gulf, but while we were about 150 miles south of the Iranian coast the Shah came aboard in a COD aircraft. He stayed to observe night operations. I left the carrier with the Shah on the COD plane that took him to Zahedan, a sprawling town in southeast Iran, not too far from the Afghan border. In Tehran I briefed my old friend Martin Herz, who was Political Counselor, and then touched base with our embassies in Beirut and London.

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The most interesting aspect of this whole thing to me, other than the cruise itself—we also made a port call at Aden—was that, this is hard to believe, the main objection to the whole scheme came from the U.S. Navy. One would think that the Navy would have welcomed an expanded mission, but CINCPAC, then Admiral Felt, was dead set against it.

He argued that he could not afford a dissipation of his forces which had a certain, very specific mission under SIOP (Strategic Integrated Operations Plan), that is, in our nuclear planning. Felt said that he could not spare a carrier task force for what would amount to 4 weeks. Furthermore, we could not project many port calls. While it would have been natural to make a call at Karachi, since Pakistan was our ally in CENTO, we could not do so without making a port call in India, so as not to show preference between the two.

But there we ran into the “never confirm or deny policy” about the presence of nuclear weapons aboard U.S. naval ships. Since the Indians had said that they would never admit a nuclear-capable ship, a ship with weapons that had nuclear capability, this eliminated port calls in these two important countries.

There was also the fear that our ship visits would not be welcome in some of the countries along the African littoral. But our Charg# in Nairobi, who at the time was Jim Ruchti, also an old friend from Berlin days, came in with a strong recommendation for the ship visit. Accompanied by Ruchti, the Admiral called on Kenyatta and invited him aboard. But the Kenyan leader declined (Ruchti told me he didn't like to fly); instead, he designated one of his ministers. Much to my amusement this man, who was very leftist, after being piped aboard with all the Navy pomp, then got into the cockpit of one of our fighter planes. The navy is very good at public relations of this sort and by the time the visit was over, he was given huge color photographs of himself in the cockpit. He loved every minute of it, apparently forgetting that he had been sitting in the war machine of the class enemy.

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The reason we did not sail into the Persian Gulf itself was that it is not good navigational waters for aircraft carriers. But we had then 3 ships permanently stationed there, a flagship and two destroyers, the so-called COMIDEAST Force, and we were in contact with them.

The visit, in terms of the policies at that time, again the mid-1960s, was a success.

I should add, perhaps, that the Concord Cruises then became a part of U.S. policy. At least once, or sometimes twice a year, we detached a carrier task force from the 7th Fleet to show the flag in the Indian Ocean. When the war in Southeast Asia heated up, we made it a policy of sending replacement carrier task forces going to the 7th Fleet via the Indian Ocean. So that we still maintained the concept of a U.S. naval presence.

Part of the outcome of this was the establishment of a U.S. station on Diego Garcia Island, which served as a resupply point during the military operations in the Vietnam War.

Q: Which proved to be very important to us through the years. That sounds like a very interesting cruise, George. Did you have other duties that you would like to relate, back in P/M?

MULLER: No, I think that was about the highlight.

Once Jeff Kitchen, my immediate boss, Sey Weiss, and I went to Norfolk to visit a Polaris submarine. One of the first, if I remember right. I think it was the Andrew Jackson but I'm not quite sure.

This was a shakedown cruise and after we had dived down to a few hundred feet, it turned out that one of the missile silos had not closed properly and we were taking in water. The Captain gave the command to surface. I never realized how fast these things can surface. The angle was so steep I lost my balance. When the ship went up I flew in the other direction. It's almost like being on a bus during a sharp curve. It was amazing, it came up so fast.

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Q: I never had that experience, sounds interesting.

From your job at P/M, you were transferred, or seconded as the British would say, to the Pentagon, which took place I believe in 1966. I notice that you were Special Assistant to the J-3. Explain what that means.

MULLER: The Joint Staff is a large staff. As the name "Joint" indicates it has members from all of the 4 services and serves directly under the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It prepares all policy papers, contingency plans, etc., but does not have direct command authority over Army, Navy or Air Force components. Many of the important decisions are taken in the "tank," which is the big conference room, where the Chiefs of the 4 services and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs meet.

On the basis of a State-Defense arrangement there was a State Department Advisor to the J-3, that is the Director for Operations of the Joint Staff. There was also one in J-5, the Directorate for Policy and Plans, who was John Ausland most of the time that I was in J-3.

Obviously, Operations became very important to the military in the 1966 to '68 time frame when I was seconded to the Pentagon. My job was essentially to try to explain viewpoints; the Foggy Bottom viewpoint on urgent problems of the day to the Pentagon people; and to advise the military, if they wanted to achieve this or that objective, how they should go about explaining it in terms that the civilians at State could understand.

It so happened that the Deputy Assistant Secretary in Eastern Affairs whom I dealt with most of the time was Leonard Unger, under whom I subsequently served when he became Ambassador to Thailand.

There were no great individual episodes that I can recall except I was constantly trying to be a glorified liaison man between the Pentagon and the State Department, although my loyalty, of course, had to be to the J-3, who was then an Air Force Lieutenant General

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named John C. Meyer. I worked very closely with him and he, I think, appreciated what I did for him, like setting up meetings and briefings with the appropriate people at State.

Q: Well the years that you were at the Pentagon, '66 to '68, were the time of great struggles in Vietnam, which must have been the preoccupation of most of the people there. Did you feel there was confidence in the Pentagon at that time, that we could pull it off in Vietnam?

MULLER: That's a difficult one to answer. There was confidence up to a certain point, but after Tet, in early '68, even though the offensive was a military defeat for the North Vietnamese, it was clear that the political will on our side had been severely damaged, if not entirely broken.

The glimpses I got from General Wheeler, who was then the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, was that the President could not find a good way out of the Vietnam situation. I remember that General Spiveyn, who was then the Director of the Joint Staff, one day came in and said that he had just heard that the President was not going to run for reelection. We were stunned.

Then we sort of realized that we had gotten into a cul-de-sac out of which there was no good way. Nevertheless, it was felt that we had no choice but to keep on prosecuting the war. I sensed that General Westmoreland's continuous demands for more forces were becoming increasingly difficult to defend politically; the military were just not going to go along with that at some point.

General Wheeler was under a tremendous burden. I had nothing but the very highest respect for this man who, I don't think, was given all the credit that was due him. He was a hard working man, which eventually killed him.

Q: He was in a terribly difficult position between the military and the Vietnam force and the White House.

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MULLER: That's right.

Q: All of which had different opinions.

MULLER: Absolutely.

Q: Seen from the inside of the Pentagon, what was the effect of the growing anti-war movement demonstrations around the country. You certainly had enough demonstrations around the Pentagon, as I remember.

MULLER: Of course we saw Washington burning from the steps of the Pentagon. I was deeply disturbed as were others but those military officers, many of them of course very high ranking officers, had pretty strong disciplinarian views. I was a member of the Chairman's Mess and we had some rather freewheeling discussions at lunchtime.

Nobody really knew exactly what to do. Some condemned the outbursts of civil disobedience and wanted to use very strong methods. Others recognized that this was not the answer.

Q: Did you find that there was willingness to go along with the idea of a negotiated settlement? Remember when Ambassador Harriman was sent to Paris to begin negotiations at about that time. Or was there much talk of a negotiated settlement, did they always think that the settlement would come on the battlefield?

MULLER: I think they essentially felt that the settlement would have to come from the battlefield. There was not much hope that the Harriman and other negotiations would really lead to anything.

The main problem then, and I think until the end, was Laos. Because Laos was the highway through which the North Vietnamese reinforced their position in the south and supplied their forces in the south. Many of these forces were not just local insurgents

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but were obviously regular North Vietnamese soldiers. But since we tried to adhere to the neutrality of Laos and the others didn't, there was no way of stopping the North Vietnamese. Our DCM in Bangkok, Norman Hannah, wrote a book about Laos in which he sets forth this thesis very clearly. Laos was really the main problem, the channel through which Vietnam was brought to fall. In their 1972 offensive, the North Vietnamese deployed division-size forces—this obviously was invasion and not insurgency.

In addition to that, I don't think we would ever be able, not only in Vietnam but anywhere else, to maintain a corrupt government against the will of a substantial part of the population. That was also a factor in Vietnam. The corruption of the government, its inability to deal with the people.

Q: Your tour in Washington ended in 1968, you were transferred to Bangkok. How did that come about?

MULLER: As I mentioned, at one point I did say in my post preference report, that I would love to go to Bangkok. But it also happened that the Political/Military Counselor in Bangkok, Bob Foulon, was taken ill and our medical officer said that he should be transferred. Ambassador Unger put me on his list and Monty Spear was Country Director, so the assignment went through very quickly.

We arrived just in time to celebrate the King's birthday. My first official function was to go to his garden party and nothing could have been more beautiful than the palace roofs glistening in the setting sun and the orchestra playing the Merry Widow waltz. I had to keep in the background, though. The prescribed dress was white tie. I only had black with me. Thai protocol permitted me to come but I was told to stay in the background when Their Majesties passed by.

Q: I wouldn't give one here but in Bangkok I'm sure it was nice. You were the Political/Military Counselor there?

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MULLER: Right.

Q: Were you also what they called the Mission Coordinator?

MULLER: That was another job. At one point Bill Stokes had that job.

Q: I wondered if they were combined positions.

MULLER: No. We had, as usual, Counselors for Political Affairs, Economic Affairs, etc., but we also had a Counselor for Counter Insurgency, and one for Political/Military Affairs. Given these partly overlapping areas of responsibility, the Ambassador felt the need for a Counselor for Mission Coordination. Plus, we had, I think, the largest AID mission abroad, or one of the largest, in any case. To pull all that together, that was the job of the Counselor for Mission Coordination.

Q: Those years that you were in Bangkok, it must have been one of the largest Embassies we had.

MULLER: It was, yes, counting everybody.

Q: Of course, there was a heavy U.S. military presence in-country?

MULLER: Yes, at the height of the Vietnam war, we had about 50,000 U.S. servicemen in-country, mainly U.S. Air Force but also a sizeable army contingent which built the bases, built the roads, largely for us but partly for the Thais, under security assistance.

We helped the Thais with their technical infrastructure as a quid-pro-quo for their letting us operate from what they insisted on calling Thai bases. Although we were the operational element, there was also a Thai base commander and they flew the U.S. and the Thai flags jointly. There were 7 such in the country including the huge B-52 base at U-Tapao, which

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was for our strategic aircraft, plus a number of fighter bases up country from which the air war in Vietnam was prosecuted.

Q: Speaking of B-52s, those planes travel long distances at great heights, would they take off from Thailand to bomb Vietnam and then return? Or would they continue on to Guam or some other place?

MULLER: The Thais were very insistent that they be kept informed on what was going on at their bases. On the other hand, we could not give them information that might compromise a mission. Many started from the Philippines, made their run, and landed at U-Tapao. Others went out to sea from U-Tapao to sort of disguise their objective.

I think the main force of the B-52s used in the campaign came from the Philippines, a tremendous distance for just a relatively short operational time over target. U-Tapao also served as a base for the tanker aircraft used for aerial refueling of the fighter planes.

The main problem, and I guess why they needed a Counselor for Political/Military Affairs, was that we had no Status of Forces Agreement with the Thais. In any other country that I know of, where American forces are stationed, there is a Status of Forces Agreement. There's one with the NATO countries, there's one with Japan, and so on.

But not with Thailand. Our critical military relations developed slowly as the war in Vietnam developed. In many cases, they were founded on the handshakes and discussions between then-Ambassador Graham Martin and Field Marshal Sarit, who was then the dictator of Thailand. He had passed from the scene by the time I got there.

We had very little written record of how some of these operational arrangements came about. In many instances I was behind the 8-ball because my opposite number, Lt. General Kriangsak Chomanand, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff of their Supreme Command, had participated in discussions of which we had no record. Gen. Kriangsak (in Thailand

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you always address people by their first names, even in a formal context) was the one who handled day-to-day problems with me.

The range of issues covered everything that had to do with a large visiting military force, from operational matters to jurisdictional questions. If we wanted to make changes at one of the bases, this required concurrence of the Thai military Supreme Command. Very often our base commanders were so used to doing things their own way and do what made sense to them that they neglected to cut in the Thai base commander, for instance, if a new type of aircraft would be brought in, or a base enlarged.

Then the Thai base commander would complain or draw it to the attention of someone up his line of command, that the Americans had done this or that. Then it would get across from General Kriangsak to me and we would have to iron it out. This also meant that I had to have a very close working relationship with our military to keep informed what they were up to.

The Ambassador, very appropriately, insisted that he wanted one American military officer, a general officer, to be responsible for the combined presence, Army and Air Force, in-country.

Q: In other words, a commander-in-chief.

MULLER: As it were, a senior military commander. For most of the time I was there, this was Air Force Major General Ted Seith, who became a close friend of mine. We worked very harmoniously together. Ted had a very good understanding about the Thais' political concerns.

He would routinely inform me of changes in the disposition of our forces, or if a base commander encountered some difficulty with his Thai counterpart. If there were any changes, the Thais would always “approve” them, but if we didn't observe this ritual they could be very sticky.

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As an example, we had a huge base at Korat, which was especially built for the F-111s. When we withdrew the F-111s from combat in Vietnam, the base was closed, or partially closed; it had to be kept in readiness for possible reintroduction of the aircraft. These things had to be worked out with the Thais, and on the whole it was a very smooth working relationship.

Q: Smooth working but did the military attach#s get in your way or not?

MULLER: Very little. That's a very good question. Depending on the incumbent, they tried a little bit but they were told that the military attach# has certain functions, representational, intelligence collection, that kind of thing, but not an operational function. These were essentially operational problems since we were operating from these 7 bases in Thailand.

Also, stemming from the fact that we had no Status of Forces Agreement with the Thais, we had jurisdictional problems. For that reason the Political/Military section was, I think, unique in that I had 3 military officers on my staff, seconded by their respective commands to the Embassy: one army colonel, one air force colonel and one air force lieutenant colonel.

The air force colonel was a Judge Advocate officer (he later rose to become the Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Air Force). An air force officer was chosen for this job since most of our servicemen in-country were airmen. He maintained close liaison not only with the air force Judge Advocate General, but also with the Thai military judges.

The army colonel followed partly counterinsurgency problems. The air force lieutenant colonel followed operational problems, including daily targeting information we received through military channels. Based on the agreement and arrangements with the Thais, we, the Embassy, was given the task of vetting the targets of military aircraft in Vietnam, those aircraft taking off from Thai bases.

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Clearly, for reasons of timing and security, one could not check with the Thais but they trusted us that if there were targets that we thought would present a political problem for them, then we could stop that particular action from taking place. Incidentally, the army Colonel, Walt Adams, later became the commander of the Berlin brigade when he made General; he and an air force lieutenant colonel, were vetting those targets.

It took some time to work out these arrangements with our military because of their concerns for operational security, but eventually this is how the standard operating procedure worked: everyday when we got targets, we would pinpoint those targets on our maps and judge their political acceptability to the Thais, acting as it were for them on the basis of our arrangement with them.

Q: But these targets must have originated with General Westmoreland in Vietnam, through the military.

MULLER: Oh yes, through the military and were transmitted to us. But these 3 officers were integral members of the Embassy staff, just as I had to serve when I was in the Pentagon to the General there. I wrote their efficiency reports.

Q: As a point of interest, how large was your staff?

MULLER: Altogether 10 people. We handled the military assistance program for Thailand, that was 2 people. The relationship with SEATO was also in my section. At least one of my officers, possibly two staffed the Ambassador when he would go to the SEATO meetings in Bangkok in his capacity as permanent U.S. representative.

On the jurisdictional side it was very important, and we insisted, that our newly arrived forces would be properly briefed on dos and don'ts in Thailand. The Thais are very very sensitive, particularly on two issues.

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One is that the majesty of the King must not in any way be offended; “lese majeste” was a very serious felony. The other one was of a religious nature. We had a case I remember of two young Mormon missionaries who came to Thailand and visited, among other places, the ancient capital of Ayuthaya.

Ayuthaya has a long main avenue flanked by perhaps two dozen larger than life-size Buddha statues in sitting positions. One of the missionaries climbed on the shoulders of one of the Buddha statues holding on to its head, and the other one took his picture. The film was developed in a Thai photo shop, and the proprietor took it to the police; they were arrested for sacrilege against the holy image of the Buddha.

In Thailand it is a sin to be higher, to put yourself in a position higher than either the King or the Buddha. You must always be in a prone position before them. It is also considered very bad manners to pat somebody on the head. The western habit of seeing a child and saying, “good boy” and patting him on the head, is a no-no in Thailand, it's offensive.

So these missionaries committed several sins. Now, why was I involved?

Q: Yes, I would say, why wasn't the consular section?

MULLER: The consular section couldn't get them out. These missionaries got 6 months in a Thai jail, which, I assure you, is no fun. The courts were military courts and since I had the connection to the Deputy Chief of Staff of the High Command, I was asked to intervene with General Kriangsak to get the sentence reduced, or even removed. But we were not successful. As far as I know, they served their time. I was hoping to bring military pressure on the military court. But this was one case even the Supreme Command would not touch.

Q: This brings another question to mind. What happened when an American airman got into trouble off-base? Say with a Thai national, be he male or female, and was picked up by the Thai police. Since we had no Status of Force Agreement, how was that handled?

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MULLER: That's a very good question and that constituted about 90% of the work that this air force colonel Judge Advocate officer had to do. He went to see the military judges or if he was not successful, I would see General Kriangsak. Or we would jointly go over there and present the case.

On base, it was clear that we had military jurisdiction over our people. If something happened off base, it depended on the offense. In most cases, say barroom brawls, if we assured the Thais that we would punish the offender, and what the punishment would be they would turn jurisdiction over to us. They were pretty cooperative in this respect and they didn't particularly want to have to care for Americans in their jails. They knew we had different standards of incarceration and in fact, often tried to bend over backwards to be helpful. On the other hand, they could also be very sticky if they felt we were taking things for granted or infringing upon their sovereignty. Although they had managed to remain free while the British and French carved up the rest of Southeast Asia, they remained sensitive in jurisdictional matters because at one point the powers imposed certain limitations on their courts.

We had one very sad case of an air force lieutenant colonel who had calling cards in the form of twenty-dollar bills. On the outside they looked like a twenty-dollar bill, on the inside it said, "Colonel such-and-such, US Air Force, the last of the Great Spenders". That was his sense of humor and that was also his death certificate. He went to a bar, disappeared with a bar girl and was murdered, obviously because people thought that roll of fake twenty-dollar bills was the real stuff. But that made it easy for the Thais to track the murderer. They found him and within a very short period of time, perhaps 2 to 3 weeks, he was sentenced to death. I received an invitation to participate in his execution, by firing squad, which I turned over to the military attach# and said, that is something you can really do much better than I can.

Q: George, I think you're shirking your duties there.

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Now because of this large military presence, you said up to 50,000 Americans in Thailand, was there a great deal of criticism among the Thai public of this?

MULLER: Not too much. First of all, the military brought a lot of money into the country. Thai society is very open in many respects. Many of the Thai men have second and third wives. Prostitution, as we all know, flourishes. But the Thais don't like open affection or sexuality in the street. So as long as the boys behaved as they walked along, as they went to the museums or the markets and so on, what went on behind the bamboo curtain, the Thais didn't care.

On the whole, our presence, I would say, was understood and was welcomed. We had, of course, civic affairs projects going on near the various bases. There was no opposition to the U.S. presence of any significant size.

But talking about civic affairs projects, one of the great things that happened in Thailand was General Kriangsak's pet project to start a dairy or cattle breeding industry. Thailand had no cattle to speak of, it was small, scrawny and neither milk nor meat cattle.

Q: Well the climate wouldn't seem to suit it.

MULLER: Yes, but on the other hand there's cattle in India, there's cattle in Florida and so on.

A captain in the Army Veterinary Corps, somehow sold General Kriangsak on the idea of starting a cattle industry in Thailand. I think it was Kriangsak's great merit that he saw what impact this could have on the poor farmers up-country. He imported 3 prize bulls to Thailand which were kept in air conditioned stalls at the polo grounds. The semen of these bulls in dry ice containers were shipped to the villages.

General Kriangsak went out himself in his helicopter, sometimes accompanied by this veterinary officer. They picked bright enterprising young peasant kids 16, 18 years old,

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and they gave them a couple of cows and training in the methods of artificial insemination. After 2 or 3 years Thailand had the beginning of a cattle industry and the cattle survived, particularly in the cooler regions.

I think that if ever there was a man who had a mission come to a very positive fruition, it was that army captain who sold General Kriangsak on this idea.

Q: So now you can probably get Thai beef there.

MULLER: Now you can get Thai beef; actually you could already by the time we left. I'll never forget, in his office Kriangsak had a small shrine with a Buddha where he prayed; there was a picture of his wife and his two children; and there was a picture of his prize bull.

Q: That's very interesting. You had a number of high level visits, I gather during your time, didn't President Nixon come out?

MULLER: President Nixon came out, yes.

Q: And Vice President Agnew and other people.

MULLER: Agnew came to Thailand, yes. The first visitor of the new administration was Secretary Rogers, who came out rather early on, I think. We had a meeting with him, Bill Sullivan was with him, a number of other people, maybe Ambassador Godley came down from Laos.

Anyway, we had a meeting with the Secretary who was not all that enamored of this so-called alliance with Thailand which was based on SEATO, augmented and reinforced by the so-called Rusk-Thanat Communique, Thanat having been the Thai Foreign Minister at the time.

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The Rusk-Thanat Communique contained the essence of the special relationship between Thailand and the United States. It provided the political, diplomatic basis for our large operations but it also extended the security umbrella of the United States over Thailand.

My feeling is that Secretary Rogers had second thoughts about this, with a new administration come in, he was succeeding Secretary Rusk and, you know, new brooms and all that. I'm very partial, a great admirer of Ambassador Unger, but he was never more brilliant than when briefing the Secretary and convincing him of the validity of this special relationship.

I sensed an adversarial attitude on the part of Rogers and some of the others, and Unger masterfully turned this around.

Q: Did you have any problem with the other visitors that came?

MULLER: No, not really. I think there were so many visitors partly because Thailand was kind of on the itinerary of VIPs traveling to take a first hand look at the situation in Vietnam.

Ambassador Bunker came up quite often. We went to Vietnam to Ambassador Bunker's Southeast Asia meetings. Ambassador Godley from Laos came up quite a bit, as did Monty Stearns, his DCM.

From Washington, in addition to the Vice President, there was President Nixon. There was no meeting with him that included counselors. He met with the Prime Minister, of course, and with all the Chiefs of Mission in Southeast Asia.

My main memory of that visit is that he was in our "bubble," our secure room for about an hour, maybe an hour and a half, with the Chiefs of Mission only. The "bubble" happened to be on the corridor where my office was and I was refused access to the men's room by the Secret Service. So I was bottled up in my office for about an hour and a half while the President was next door.

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Q: The indignities of diplomatic life.

MULLER: That's right.

Q: Thailand sent units to fight in Vietnam, as I recall. Did that cause much of a problem or not?

MULLER: I'm very happy that you're mentioning this because this was really the main job of this army colonel, the one I mentioned earlier. He provided the staff work for the Thai division in Vietnam which we fully equipped and trained. If there was any difficulty, it was that the Thais always wanted more—better equipment, equipment equal to what the American divisions had, and of course they liked choppers and all those good things of warfare.

So that had to be ironed out. Plus we paid for the bonuses that were given to these Thai volunteers. I frankly don't know all the ins and outs anymore but I know that Colonel Adams was deeply involved in both the equipment and financing problems.

Q: Did they get into real combat there?

MULLER: Oh yes, they got into real combat. Also there was some Thai artillery in the Plain of Jars in Laos, which was a rather well kept secret for a long time. Those, too, were equipped and maintained by us. We also trained Thai forces in Thailand for their counter-insurgency mission.

This was the job of MAC-Thai, the Military Assistance Command for Thailand, of which General Seith, as I said, was the head. MAC-Thai had a training division and they were the people who went out to train Thai artillery and Thai infantry and so on.

The supply of equipment to the Thai forces was MAC-Thai's job under our Security Assistance program. We monitored this as well as the Thai Division in Vietnam. I should

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say more than monitored: the Embassy made a definite input in the development of the Military Assistance Program and the ambassador insisted on keeping fully informed.

Q: And of course, the Thais had their own insurrection to reckon with, didn't they?

MULLER: Yes, the monitoring and policy and operations interface for that was the job of the Counselor for Counter Insurgency. That section maintained close relations with the Thai counterinsurgency program as a whole.

Q: What was the reaction in Thailand to our incursion into Cambodia in 1970? Cambodia, I gather, is a sensitive subject for the Thais.

MULLER: I think they were all in favor of it. You mustn't forget that the Thai government was, I would say, a benign military dictatorship that was all in favor of prosecuting the war with all possible means. They were staunchly anti-communist. There was a parliament but it was not a parliamentary body in the western sense. The Thais had no problem at all, they had no objection to our move into Cambodia. If anything, they were concerned about the restraints under which we were fighting the war in Vietnam.

As far as their own insurgency is concerned, some of the people, again like General Kriangsak and the General who was in charge of counterinsurgency, they understood the problem that insurgency feeds on basic inequalities and basic difficulties of a socioeconomic kind. But how to come to grips with this is another thing.

The insurgency in the northeast of Thailand was essentially carried on by the hill tribes. The hill tribes have been in these often inaccessible hills for centuries. They had essentially a slash-and-burn economy. The Thais wanted to preserve their stock of teak and other timber. The hill tribes broke the Thai law with their basic habit of living, moving from one hill top to another, cutting the timber as they went along.

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So the Thais realized that they'd have to give them a substitute form of livelihood. But it was much easier for the tribes to grow opium and sell a kilo of opium, than to try to plant potatoes or whatever, and market that. Growing opium poppies was also prohibited, so they were again in violation of Thai law. The insurgency fed on that. There was also the ethnic factor; the Thais looked down on the hill tribes as inferior, so you had great divides that had to be very slowly bridged and eventually they were. Much of the credit for that goes to the King. Right now, I think the insurgency is no longer active.

Q: Now you mentioned the problem of drugs, raising opium which becomes heroin, a curse for all of us. I remember reading years ago about the involvement of the American School in Bangkok in that question. Did that come up during your time or not?

MULLER: In particular I remember one case of a girl under the influence of drugs; she walked off a roof and killed herself. It was not called the American School, I should say, it was the International School. It was administered by a Board on which Americans were predominantly represented, including our Counselor for Administration. He was very active and very helpful in this. However, the Thais could not show any preference for us so they insisted that this be an International School. It also had an international faculty, though heavily American. The student body was drawn from the international community.

Our son was there between the ages of 8 and 13, he never got involved in the drug scene, I think mainly because the kids that were involved were somewhat older. I thought the school was academically excellent; first rate, both as to program and as to teaching, discipline if you will. Our great disappointment was when we were transferred to Germany and he had to go to a military dependents school in Stuttgart. There was a decided drop of quality and level of learning. For a year he more or less coasted along on what he learned in Bangkok.

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Q: There was a coup, with a junta taking over in early 70s in Bangkok, and the long time Prime Minister was thrown out. Did that cause any problems for the type of work you were doing?

MULLER: That happened just after my departure. I remember Ambassador Unger telling me afterwards that he sensed something brewing for some time. Actually there were two coups, the first one was not very significant. But the one you're referring to is when the students took to the streets, and...

Q: Overthrew the government.

MULLER: Indirectly. This is one of the cases I always cite when I'm asked about the authority and the function of the King. The King is not involved directly in politics, but in this particular instance, as an example and in others as well, the King brought tremendous moral authority to bear.

It is my understanding that he made it quite clear to Prime Minister, Field Marshal Thanom, and General Praphas, who was the Minister of Defense and at the same time the Commander in Chief of the Army, which was of course the main military force in the country; the King made it quite clear that there must be no bloodshed in the streets and that the students must not be fired on.

The crisis ended with the resignation of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense. In a way, if you will, the students won because they...

Q: Forced a change.

MULLER: Forced a change and had the tremendous moral authority of the King on their side.

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Q: During those years, the early 70s, we were negotiating for a settlement in Vietnam. Did you think that the Thais feared the type of settlement we might reach there or what might happen later in Vietnam?

MULLER: I think so. I was not really privy to what was going on in Paris and elsewhere. It was clear that we were beginning to withdraw. And then came Watergate. I remember the early investigation on the Watergate break-in hit us at the Embassy pretty hard. I think the top of the Thai leadership was also concerned. Thailand had sided with us. They didn't want to be left exposed to Vietnamese expansionism. Cambodia was only an uncertain buffer. The Khmer Rouge insurgency was spreading and took over the country later, starting a terrible reign of terror.

Q: We began to withdraw our troops in Thailand too about that time didn't we? The drawdown.

MULLER: Yes, we were drawing-down even before I left in 1973. That was a lengthy and involved process. The Ambassador got instructions that had been worked out in Washington of what base closures and troop withdrawals had been decided upon. I staffed the Ambassador in meetings with Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman. He had as his assistant and note-taker a young, sharp diplomat named Bira Birabonghse, also a graduate of the Fletcher School, who happens to be the current Thai Ambassador in Washington. He was then already marked as a "comer."

This went on for a matter of weeks, perhaps even two months. Thanat had a reputation as a sticky negotiator, but we encountered no particular problems disengaging from these bases on the understanding that we retained re-entry rights and that certain equipment was to be left behind. Understandably, perhaps, the Thais wanted some things that we couldn't leave, but in the end a good deal was either left as surplus or transferred to them under Military Assistance. It was uneconomical for us to transport some of the stuff back to the U.S.

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At almost the same time, or maybe even a little bit before we began to withdraw, the air force wanted to establish a huge radar dome up-country on a mountain called Doi Inthanon. This was to observe Chinese rocket development. In order to build this a road had to be built up the mountain. In this case the negotiations were between the Ambassador and Air Chief Marshal Dawee, who was Kriangsak's boss and the Chairman of the Joint Staff of the Thai forces.

We managed to get Thai permission to build the road and to establish the dome. It became operational in the time period specified. But again there was a quid pro quo in terms of the width of the road, the quality of the road, and so on. In other words, the Thais were ready to deal but they always wanted certain emoluments at the same time.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident that occurred during my tour in Bangkok was the take-over of the Israeli embassy by Palestinian terrorists on December 27, 1972. They took several hostages, including the DCM and his wife, who worked in the embassy, as well as the Israeli ambassador to Cambodia, who happened to be in town. The Israeli ambassador to Thailand, however, was at a ceremonial occasion marking the formal investiture of the Crown Prince, which was attended by all members of the diplomatic corps. The embassy was immediately surrounded by Thai police and soldiers and the government set up a command post in a building almost directly across the street. Social functions were canceled as the stalemate continued throughout the night. I forgot the terrorists' demands, but the hostages were clearly in great danger.

The next morning, which happened to be the Crown Prince's birthday, General Kriangsak appeared unannounced at my office and asked whether the U.S. army had a non-lethal knock-out gas that would render the terrorists unconscious before they could harm the hostages. He asked me to meet him at the command post with the reply. I quickly ascertained from our military that we had no chemical agent that could instantaneously knock out the terrorists without giving them time to pull the trigger.

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When I reported to the command post, there was the Prime Minister, flanked by Air Marshal Dawee and a few other top generals. Also present was the United Arab Republics' ambassador (Egypt and Syria were joined in those days) who was asked to mediate. He told the terrorists that the Crown Prince's investiture was a national holiday, an "auspicious" day, and to mar it, or the birthday, by shedding blood would have anti-Palestinian repercussions in Thailand, and perhaps the Buddhist world generally.

In the meantime, the Israeli ambassador appeared at our embassy, understandably in a highly emotional state, with the request to use our telephone lines since he had been unable to get through to Tel Aviv. This was of course immediately granted. But going through several military switches before reaching State's Command Center took some time and he was almost apoplectic by the time he got the Foreign Office and couldn't reach the person he wanted to talk to. "Get me anybody," he shouted, "get me Abba (Eban, the Foreign Minister); get me Golda (Meir, the Prime Minister), I want to talk to Golda." At this point our staff withdrew tactfully, and I didn't find out until later that he got his instructions right then from both.

It turned out later that the terrorists didn't know they had captured an ambassador and the No. 2, with his wife. The hostages maintained that they were just lowly clerks, that all the important people were at the investiture.

Eventually, the following compromise was reached: the terrorists, hostages and Marshal Dawee would jointly proceed to Bangkok airport by bus, where a plane was standing by to take the terrorists to Copenhagen; on boarding the aircraft, the terrorists would release the hostages unharmed; but, to assure that the Thai side kept its word of free conduct, Marshal Dawee would come along as a guarantor. As this scenario unfolded on December 29, we listened intently to the step-by-step report of an embassy officer who was posted at the airport.

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When it was all over, the Thais were justly proud of the way they had handled the situation, but also gave credit to the United Arab Republics' ambassador for his role; for instance, he knew who the hostages were, but did not give them away. Considering the terrible massacre at the Munich Olympic Games only a few months earlier, everybody heaved a sigh of relief. In later hostage crises, this episode was referred to as the "Thai resolution." When I asked Marshal Dawee a few days later whether he had felt threatened on his flight to Copenhagen, he said "absolutely not;" he added that he bought a new watch and that all the Danish girls wore see-through blouses. He had a penchant for mixing the serious with the lighter things in life.

Let me finish this chapter by mentioning that my friend Kriangsak went on to become Prime Minister. I last saw him when he visited Washington in that capacity during the Carter Administration.

Q: George, your tour in Thailand came to an end in 1973. Where did you go then?

MULLER: I was transferred directly to Europe, to become the Political Advisor to the US-European Command located in Stuttgart, Germany. The fact that EUCOM was located there was an accident of history. It had been close to Versailles but in 1966, as you know, General de Gaulle severed his relations with NATO, at least to a large extent, and the NATO headquarters moved to Belgium; the Supreme Allied Commander's headquarters moved to Mons, also in Belgium. The US-European Command, that is the Supreme U.S. Command for all U.S. forces in Europe, moved to Stuttgart, where there was a large headquarters complex, with housing and communications, already available.

Q: Well, as Political Advisor there were you alone or did you have an assistant?

MULLER: Yes, I had an assistant.

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Q: The lines of authority. You answered directly, in your Department of State hat, I presume to the Department in Washington without any intervening European control. Would I be correct to presume that you reported directly to P/M in Washington?

MULLER: Not directly, only indirectly because as Political Advisor I was a full time member of the senior staff of the US European Command. My immediate superior was the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, US Forces Europe, an Air Force 4-star general. It was made quite clear to me, and I knew from my previous experience in the Pentagon, that you cannot have divided loyalties. That if you are seconded to a military command, you serve that master.

That doesn't mean that I did not inform P/M in the Department of what was going on whenever I felt that there was an issue that P/M should be involved. I also called on the Assistant Secretary P/M, George Vest, when in Washington. More importantly I think, was that I had very good relations with the Embassy in Bonn. Partly, of course, because I knew Ambassador Hillenbrand from previous service and immediately called on him when I was stationed in Europe. I also knew the DCM, Frank Cash, well and the Political Counselor, Frank Meehan; they were all old friends.

As I said, I was assigned on direct transfer to Stuttgart and I must say, I didn't particularly cherish the assignment. In fact, I fought it but it didn't do me any good. My point was that I had done this kind of work before when I was in the Pentagon. I didn't want to do it again. Allegedly, I had gotten the reputation of being able to get along with the military and therefore I was the choice.

It also didn't help my good feelings about the job that I was the first Polad who no longer received direct Embassy support. Among other things, for instance, I was not given a diplomatic license plate for my car but had a military plate.

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This went back to an arrangement within the Department, transferring authority over the Polads from the regional bureaus to P/M. But P/M had no representatives in the field. Therefore, the Polad became an unwanted appendage that the Counselor for Administrative Affairs at the Embassy had to take care of.

I ran into idiotic things, like my car was not being shipped from the States to Germany. It sat in New York for weeks. Bonn refused to ship it because the arrangements in Washington, the financial arrangements for shipping were all snafued. Having the equivalent rank of major general, I was of course assigned a car and driver, but I didn't feel I should use them for personal travel, although others had no such qualms.

The General I was initially called upon to serve was a very difficult man who had made his mark in the Strategic Air Command. He wanted me urgently and kept insisting that the Department send me over post haste. The only problem was that I had no orders while I was still sitting in Thailand.

I remember being called at 3:00 in the morning by Personnel in a rather terse manner. Of course it was easy for someone in the Department to pick up the phone at 3:00 in the afternoon, a very convenient hour to make a phone call. But it's 3:00 a.m. in Bangkok.

I think it was Tom Shoesmith asking me, why aren't you in Europe? I said, angrily, why don't you send me my orders instead of waking me up? He said, what, you don't have your orders? I said, No. End of conversation. It's no secret that our personnel system leaves something to be desired.

The first really important thing that happened after I got there in June was the September War between Israel and Egypt. As you know, the Israelis were overrun initially with large losses of materiel. A large-scale re-supply program was mounted by the military with exceptional American responsiveness. C-5s carrying tanks, other heavy equipment, etc. were ferrying the stuff in via the Azores. At the same time we were also drawing down our

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NATO stocks located in Germany. These were committed to the defense of Germany and we did not inform the Germans what we were doing. But they got wind of this—you can't load ships in Bremerhaven without anyone noticing—and made official inquiries.

From reading the State Department traffic, as well as the military traffic, I realized that we were either playing games, or inadvertently failed to notify them because of a gap in State-Defense communications. Ambassador Hillenbrand was called to the Foreign Office to tell the Foreign Minister what was going on. I read his instructions and I knew that what he was instructed to state was not factually true. I realized that the German longshoremen, and so on, loading our equipment would know what was being sent, and sooner or later, the story would out.

I tried to see the General and tell him that we should send a message, or call the Ambassador, and tell him what was really going on because he would be in an impossible situation vis-a-vis the Foreign Minister. The General was in a meeting and could not be disturbed. The Chief of Staff could not be found or could not be disturbed. They were all deeply involved in the shipments going to Israel.

So I got the DCM, Frank Cash, on the scrambler telephone and I told him that the instructions as written contained assurances that were not factually correct. He intercepted the Ambassador, who was en route to the Foreign Office, and double-talked to him on the car phone to change the wording of his statement in such a way that it conformed to the fact.

When the Embassy sent out the reporting telegram on the Ambassador's discussion with the Foreign Minister and why he didn't follow the letter of his instructions, they added, at the bottom, a paragraph: Contrary to what we had been told, EUCOM informs us that such-and-such shipments had gone forward after all. Words to that effect.

Next thing I was hauled before the General. The Chief of Staff came around and said, "Did you talk to the Embassy on this?" I said, "Yes, I did, because I felt that the Ambassador

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should be protected from making a misleading statement; our credibility was at stake; and quite unnecessarily so.” As I said, I was about 3 months on the job and the General read me the riot act.

I said, “Well, you asked for a senior Foreign Service officer, I'm used to operating on my own. I could not reach you, I could not reach the Chief of Staff. And I felt it was in the overall U.S. interest to warn the Ambassador not to make a statement which was not in conformity with the facts.” That sort of set the stage for my tour of duty.

Q: Your relationship with the General.

MULLER: Yes, I guess I was really hoping he would have me transferred, but he never said another word about the incident.

He was succeeded a year later by an absolutely wonderful guy, General Robert Huyser, also known as Dutch Huyser with whom I had a very good relationship and with whom I took many trips all over the European Command.

It must be understood that the European Command covers a great deal of territory—namely from England to the Persian Gulf and from Norway to the Mediterranean, including the northern tier of Africa from Morocco to Suez. COMIDEASTFORCE, the three ships stationed at Bahrain which I mentioned in connection with the Concord Cruise, were under the European Command, much to the Navy's disgust, because EUCOM is traditionally commanded by an Army general. This general was double-hatted as Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and Commander-in-Chief US Forces Europe (CINCEUR). While I was there, first General Goodpaster and then General Haig were the CINCs. But the day-to-day US Forces business was carried on by the Deputy CINC in Stuttgart.

I received a great deal of Embassy reporting and all State Department messages that had a bearing on military problems. I also saw the military traffic. My job was to brief the general and the EUCOM staff on what was going on politically in this vast area; and,

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by keeping close touch with the embassies, to inform them of military developments that would or could affect them. As an example: military contingency planning involved obtaining overflight and possibly landing rights. In the NATO area this was no problem, but, as the resupply for Israel demonstrated, this could get sticky when other countries were involved.

I hope I also made a contribution in fostering good working relationships between EUCOM and the Embassies by working out a program of bringing Ambassadors to EUCOM for briefings and discussions with the senior staff. This was especially important, I felt, for newly arrived Chiefs of Mission. They were usually picked up by a EUCOM T-39 and brought to Stuttgart in the morning for briefings and discussions that lasted most of the day. In the evening the general would give a dinner in their honor and they returned the next day. My wife, Ursula, took their wives on shopping or sight seeing tours, if they were so inclined.

I might add here that I have a very high regard for General Haig. Haig arrived with the stigma, if you will, of having served in the Nixon White House. Chancellor Schmidt and the German Social Democrats for that reason didn't like him very much. The Dutch had a socialist government, the Brits had a Labour government; in other words, Haig really had his work cut out to make himself accepted and respected.

I must say that within 6 months, he did. He was very effective. Succeeding Goodpaster was a very difficult thing also in another way. Goodpaster was the rapid action type. Yet, Haig managed to not only make friends and influence people very quickly, but he also developed a sense of cohesiveness which the alliance had lacked for some time.

He was particularly successful in bringing the French closer in by establishing a personal relationship with the French Chief of Staff. He got the French navy to participate in the naval maneuvers in the Mediterranean, not as NATO forces but as French forces working

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together with NATO task forces. He did the same on land, in the air, in the European theater, so he was very effective in that way.

I think, possibly, his most lasting imprint was that he, together with Ambassador Carlucci in Lisbon, developed a military assistance program for Portugal, which, in my opinion, probably prevented Portugal from sliding into the red abyss and leaving NATO.

I think Secretary of State Kissinger had already given up on Portugal after the revolution, when the paratroopers from the Portuguese overseas territories came swarming back into Lisbon. I remember being in Lisbon at the time when there were revolutionary slogans spray-painted all over the walls and it was a city in some turmoil.

But it was felt by both Haig and Carlucci, that a relatively unknown lieutenant colonel in the Portuguese army named Eanes, was a man on whom to bank. Eanes very quickly rose to the position of Chief of Staff of the Portuguese army. Haig established a very good relationship with him. Eanes subsequently became President of Portugal. Portugal remained in NATO. I really think that it was Haig's good judgment, and Carlucci's together, that helped bring that about.

Q: That certainly is a heart warming story and an excellent one speaking well for both of the men.

MULLER: I'm only sorry that Haig's tenure at the Department was fraught with controversy. My criticism of Haig is that he was obsessed with turf protection, with bureaucratic territory; you must not infringe upon my area of competence. Well, when you are commander-in-Chief in Europe, that doesn't arise. But when you're Secretary of State having to deal with the Secretary of Defense, who also happens to be an old friend of the President, then sooner or later you are bound to lose out, and that's what happened to Haig. He offered his resignation once too often.

Q: Not to mention the White House staff.

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MULLER: Exactly.

Q: You must have had other interesting experiences while you were on General Huyser's staff there.

MULLER: We took a large number of trips. We went to Jordan and had an interview with King Hussein, Tom Pickering was the Ambassador at the time. We went to Morocco. We inspected the Tunisian defenses in the desert because the Tunisians are very afraid of Libyan incursions way south in the Sahara Desert. But I don't recall any such striking things as the '73 war. These trips were mainly designed to establish personal contact at high military levels and to help formulate our military assistance program for those countries. We also went regularly to Spain where a joint committee was set up to manage our bases.

Q: Were there other Polads in Germany at the time? We used to have them in Heidelberg and Ramstein.

MULLER: You're right. We always had a Polad in Heidelberg, to the U.S. Army Europe, and in Ramstein to the U.S. Air Force Europe and, of course, we also had a Polad in London to U.S. Navy Europe, where U.S. naval headquarters was. On the NATO side, there was one in Mons, Belgium. We also had a Polad in Naples to the Admiral who was CINCSOUTH. The NATO commander for the Mediterranean area is an American admiral headquartered in Naples. Under him you had both Turkish and Greek forces, land forces as well as naval forces.

Q: Did you Polads ever get together or not?

MULLER: Yes, indeed we did. We had rotating Polad meetings just amongst ourselves. The nicest of these was in Naples when our Polad, who was then Jack Stoddard,

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managed to get the Admirals' motor launch. We had lunch and a swim and a ride over to Capri after we had completed our Polad business.

Also, the Ambassador in Rome very often held Political/Military meetings. That's where I first met Admiral Crowe, who was then the Commander of the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean. He made a lasting impression on me as an absolutely first-rate officer and, of course, went on to become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

We also met in London. One of the nicest aspects of my job was that as a member of the senior staff, I could get a T-39 anytime within the theater. When business demanded it, I could go to Madrid, Rome, any of the capitals of the European command, and have an airplane to do it in. Which was luxurious, perhaps not warranted, but nevertheless, a nice thing to have. The argument was that EUCOM had the aircraft and the pilots needed to get in their flying hours.

Q: It certainly was. Your tour there came to an end in 1978. Did you cap your career with that?

MULLER: I was assigned after some hiatus, doing small jobs in P/M, which had by then become a large organization. Les Gelb was the Assistant Secretary. Then an opening came up as Special Assistant and Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary of State for Military Assistance, Science and Technology, who was then Lucy Wilson Benson. She was the senior woman in the State Department, a prominent Smith College graduate; a former President of the League of Women Voters; Secretary for Social Affairs in Governor Dukakis' first Cabinet in Massachusetts; and a prot#g# of none other than the Speaker of the House.

Q: Tip O'Neill.

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MULLER: Yes. I worked for her on a number of political/military problems. We had two major problems. One of course was Iran, the other was security assistance for other countries in the Near East.

I remember, a case when civil war flared up, as it does right now, between North and South Yemen. In those days, the lines were drawn even more starkly because South Yemen was communist and the North were the good guys. The North very urgently needed a few tanks and some armored personnel carriers and that sort of thing. We crashed the program through. That kind of thing happened all the time.

I also remember that when the program for security assistance to Sanaa came through, each one of the items carried the personal initials "JC," Jimmy Carter. So the President had bothered to approve personally something like 6 M-30 tanks or M-60 tanks to Yemen. Well, I thought his time should have been better spent than looking into such detail.

I turned 60 just after the State Department won its case against those who had sued that the age limitation amounted to discrimination.

I must say that I never felt that these Foreign Service Officers had a good case. I always thought that when I entered the Service it was with the understanding that I would retire at 60. That was my contract, as it were, I never felt that there was a good case to be made to complain afterwards about "early retirement" age.

After retiring I joined the staff of CDC, Classification Declassification Office, where we had a number of declassification cases. One of these, I think, might be interesting.

I was assigned the case of Klaus Barbie, the Gestapo "butcher of Lyon." It was just after Barbie had been captured in South America, I think it was in Bolivia, on the basis of the work done by Beate Klarsfeld in tracking him down. Interest in the case was high because

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the United States was accused of having been instrumental in spiriting him out of Germany when the French had asked for his extradition after the end of World War II.

I got the case partly because I'm fluent in reading French; some of the files were in French. I found that shortly after the war, the then-French First Secretary of Embassy, who subsequently rose to a very high office in the French Foreign Service, called on the French Desk Officer, who was then Mac Godley, subsequently our Ambassador to Laos and later Beirut.

The French First Secretary handed Godley a Note Verbale, asking for the extradition of one "Barbie, Klaus," who had been the Gestapo commander in Lyon; who was known as the Butcher of Lyon; who was wanted by the French authorities for having sent Jewish school children and others to their deaths.

The outgoing message from the Department informed Frankfurt, where the Office of the High Commissioner for Germany was still located, of the French demarche and asked the High Commission to track this man down. The only problem was that, taking the name from the French note, the Department's message identified the wanted man as "B. Klaus". A message eventually came back from HICOG stating that they had been unable to track down "B. Klaus", nothing was known about his whereabouts.

I am personally convinced that when HICOG passed this request on to the military intelligence authorities, for whom Barbie had worked for a while, that they knew whom we were after. But on the books, there was nobody by the name of B. Klaus. This misunderstanding goes back to the French Note Verbale having asked for "Barbie, Klaus." End of that story.

Q: George, looking back on your long career in the Foreign Service, would you recommend it to a young person today?

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MULLER: I would. I recommended it to my son but he didn't take my advice. I think what turned him off was that I told him it involved a Masters Degree in International Affairs, not as an absolute requirement, but to provide a sound basis from which to go for the Foreign Service exam. Well, he had other plans. I highly recommended both the Fletcher School and SAIS to him. But he wanted to take an MBA and got into computers.

To any young person interested in international affairs, who is ready to accept certain hardships of life, and unquestionably there are some in the Foreign Service, some greater than others, I would recommend a career in the Foreign Service. The so-called hardships, which never bothered me, are to attune yourself to a different society, a different climate of operation, a different culture—I found all this interesting.

I was absolutely horrified, for instance, when several years back one of the major networks had an hour-long program on the Foreign Service. It so happened they chose Embassy Bangkok, Mort Abramowitz was the Ambassador at the time, and they interviewed some of the Embassy wives and they had nothing but complaints. I particularly remember one wife complaining that Rice Krispies were not freely available in Bangkok.

Well, if those are the things you want out of life, then you better not enter the Foreign Service or marry somebody who can't get along without Rice Krispies or the best quality toilet paper.

But, if you're interested in foreign cultures, if you're interested in learning about other people and in dealing with them, particularly, if you're interested in making a contribution, no matter how small, to the ultimate foreign policy objectives of your country, then I feel that the Foreign Service is a most rewarding profession.

Perhaps I made a mistake, but whenever I was asked—what are your objectives in the Foreign Service? I never put down any particular rank. I always put down: I want to be of

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service to the foreign policy objectives of the United States and to make a contribution to our national interests.

I think if that's your objective in life, then the Foreign Service, leaving aside the frustrations that come with any kind of job or profession, can be most rewarding and fulfilling.

Q: Thank you very much George, and good luck.

End of interview