

Interview with Horace G. Torbert

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

AMBASSADOR HORACE G. TORBERT

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Q: Ambassador Torbert, I'm going to call you Tully.

TORBERT: That's fine.

Q: How did you come out with the name?

TORBERT: I came out with it largely because my Christian name is Horace and I never liked it. It's a family name. So I picked that name Tully up in prep school, which I believe was a corruption of Marcus Tullius Cicero. I've always used it.

Q: Tully, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?

TORBERT: I cannot say that my one dream from the beginning of time was to be a Foreign Service officer, but I grew up in Washington, of a poor but well-educated family, and knew what was going on and was aware of the Foreign Service. It was certainly one of the options that I had when I went to college, from which I graduated in the absolute bottom of the Depression in 1932. I took most of the good foreign affairs courses there, and there were several of them. I thought of taking the examinations, but just as I got out was the time they canceled all the examinations. And I shrugged, borrowed some

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more money, and went off to business school because you couldn't get a job very easily without extra training in those days. I entered the paper industry, was very interested in it and happy for a long time. I entered it mostly because I didn't have railroad fare out of Boston when I got through, so I got a job with a Boston paper company, and later worked in Mobile.

Q: Where were you going to college?

TORBERT: I went to Yale, and then I went to the Harvard Business School. I went down to Mobile to help build a big new mill, which was very exciting, in the late Thirties and early Forties. Then the war came along, and I put on a brown suit and continued to do a business-type job in the Office of the Chief of Ordnance here in Washington. By that time, I had begun to get a little bit bored with the paper business, and it was a relatively small company. I had a very interesting job in Washington. In a way, at least I was looking at the big picture of government, and that interested me. I also got better acquainted with a number of Foreign Service officers. My wife, who I had married just at the beginning of the war, had grown up also in Washington, and knew a lot of Foreign Service people, and I knew some of them. I decided, really, that was what I wanted to do. As I mustered out of the Army, I applied for the Foreign Service Auxiliary, but they canceled that just about the time I applied for it. So I went back briefly to the paper industry, found it intolerable, intolerably narrow by that time. And just at that time, they announced the Manpower Program for recruiting of Foreign Service Officers a little above the base starting level. I had had a good junior executive job in the paper business, and I'd risen to lieutenant colonel in the Ordnance Department, I had started a family by that time, so it seemed important to move a little bit higher. I came in as a Class Four officer.

Q: At that time, Class Six was the lowest level.

TORBERT: Class Six was the lowest. I took somewhat of a pay cut. I had resigned from the paper company, gotten a job as a management consultant for the Bureau of the

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Budget, and then when it looked probable that I would get into the Foreign Service, I had shifted over on a temporary basis to the organization and management side of the Department, which was useful because I got to know the Department in just a few months while I was waiting. I did get in, was accepted. Why, I don't know. They didn't accept an awful lot of people under that program, and most of them turned out to be fairly good. But I was assigned first to Spain, after a short wait, during which I wrote a new manual on protocol, about which I knew absolutely nothing. (Laughter) That's the way they filled my time. I had a very interesting three years in Spain, which was an old-fashioned post still. We were being mad at Franco. We didn't have an ambassador there, none of the Western powers did. The charg#, when I was there, was Paul Culbertson, a very able guy who, unfortunately, developed a drinking problem. Otherwise, I think he would have been one of the top guys in the Service. He was very intelligent and a very good trainer, and his wife was a wonderful trainer of my wife. We got into the old-fashioned Foreign Service there, saw a great deal of Spain. I was a commercial officer and as such, I could do a lot more than the political officers could because relations being what they were, the political officers didn't do much but read the newspapers. I got out and talked to businessmen and traveled all over Spain. I cannot say that I contributed a great deal to policy at that time, except to write a lot of basic economic reports. After I'd been there about three years and got home leave, I was assigned to Vienna.

Q: I notice that you were closely involved with Austrian affairs, really from 1950 until '55, both in Vienna and then as principal officer in Salzburg.

TORBERT: Then for two or three years in the Department.

Q: Yes. What was the situation in Vienna at the time, and what were you doing within that framework?

TORBERT: I went to Vienna, again assigned theoretically as an economic officer, arriving in early October 1950. The timing was that the commanding general who had been the

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High Commissioner for Austria was just leaving, and a civilian High Commissioner, who was going to be Walter Donnelly, who was not there yet, was on his way in. I drove in with my family from Spain, having gone back there to pick up a car, and as we drove down the road, we listened to reports of Communist demonstrations and riots in Vienna, which didn't sound very healthy as a place to be bringing a wife and two small children. But we kept on going, and got there. As it turned out, the Communist strike was stubbornly resisted by most of the Austrians, with a little help from the Western powers, particularly us. The strikes fizzled, and there never was a serious threat to the stability of the coalition government in Austria after that.

Q: Austria was still in different zones.

TORBERT: Austria was an occupied country. Our zone was the sort of center of Austria, with its headquarters in Salzburg. The British had the southern part of Austria south of the Kaertner Alps, with headquarters in Klagenfurt. The French had the Alpine part of the Tyrol and the Voralberg, with headquarters in Innsbruck. The Soviets had everything east of Linz and north of the Kaertner Alps, so that they surrounded Vienna. Their headquarters was in Baden. When I got to Vienna, as I say, Donnelly had not yet arrived. Walter Dowling was in charge, and we were just about to take over an absolutely immense occupation government, which involved something like 3,500 civilian Americans. There was a small American military group in Vienna, also British and French and Soviet. It was a quadripartite city, but just at the edge of the city was completely surrounded by the Soviet zone. Of course, the Korean War had just started a few months previous. We were feeling probably unduly excited, and a lot of people got very nervous. I arrived with the assignment, technically, as an economic officer, but very soon after I got there, "Red" Dowling asked me to go to a briefing session with the military with him, with a military G-2, who was a very able officer who, on retirement, spent a long term in the CIA. He told Dowling that he thought it was absolutely imperative that he have a coordinator for intelligence, because there were so many intelligence activities in the town. He said, "Do you have anybody that can do that?" And Dowling said, "Yes, Torbert here." And

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this was the first I had heard of it. I knew nothing about intelligence. I was thunderstruck, but it sounded interesting. I started in and organized on a very small scale. As I say, the atmosphere was a little difficult at the time. Intelligence was certainly the largest single industry of Vienna.

Q: As seen in the movie "The Third Man."

TORBERT: "The Third Man," I think, had just come out, or it was about to come out. It came out after we got there, but it was about that time. It was, of course, romantic, but the atmosphere was very much there. One of our early problems during that winter—Donnelly arrived a few weeks after I did, and we set up business. We only had, I think, about a dozen Foreign Service officers to take over and manage this whole thing. The military, about that time, ordered all their dependents home because of the Korean War and this caused a good deal of uneasiness in the Austrian population. I remember one device that Walter Donnelly, who was a very great leader. He wasn't one of the most profound foreign affairs men that we ever had, but he had a great sense of leadership and color — and the first thing he did when he felt the uneasiness growing was to enter his two daughters in dancing school, and let the word get around that he had done so. This was a very significant thing, because in the first place, dancing school was something the Viennese all appreciated. This gave them sort of a sense that at least the civilian part of our mission was there to stay. I worked very hard at trying to get a handle on this whole problem. I identified about thirty more or less autonomous U. S. intelligence units operating in or through Austria. The CIA was just being reorganized and consolidated. They had two branches, one of which was the psychological warfare and dirty tricks department, and the other was collection of intelligence. They were unified shortly after I started under a very able officer named John Richardson. The man who had been in charge of the other department of it was Laughlin Campbell, who still lives here in Washington, who I see a lot and became a lifelong friend.

Q: We're talking about in Vienna.

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TORBERT: In Vienna. Vienna was important from the intelligence point of view, not only for what went on there, but because of all of the things that went on through Vienna. We were right in the middle of Eastern Europe. A lot of defectors and many refugees, of course, came out that way. I got a little bit over being scared by going up in December on a trip to Germany, to inspect their immense establishment which was supposed to compare to mine. I think they had 50 or 60 officers working for the man who was my counterpart up there. I had, at that time, nobody except a secretary. (Laughter) Eventually I got two or three people, but I never had a very big staff. When I got to Germany, I met people in Frankfurt, which was then the headquarters, ladies saying, "How are we ever going to get back across the Rhine if there's an attack?" (Laughter) Then I went to Berlin and found everybody was quite calm there. So I decided there wasn't any point in fussing about that, and from then on, I and my family were reasonably confident. We were reasonably comfortable psychologically, and I can't say we ever had a problem. Our job in Vienna developed to where I was almost chief of staff for the High Commissioner, because I was monitoring all of the political, intelligence reporting, propaganda activity and, in a sense, security. Eventually I became the Assistant Deputy High Commissioner, which meant that I presided at some of the High Commission meetings. At that time, Vienna was the only country in which we were meeting regularly with the Soviets. The quadripartite arrangements in Germany had broken down, but for some reason, the Soviets were willing to continue them there. Every month while I was there, we had a meeting of the Allied High Commission preceded by the meetings of executive committee and various subcommittees. It was an exercise on our part in trying to keep the Austrian Government able to run Austria, because some bright man early on—and several people have claimed credit for this—had put in our agreement with the Soviets that anything the Austrian Government decided on would be all right, unless it was vetoed unanimously by the Allied Control Commission. So that our object was to take any question that the Soviets raised and bury it as far down as possible in the bureaucratic process of the High Commission subcommittees. Then when it got up to the top of the High Commission, if it was something that we didn't want, we'd all vote against it, the British and French,

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and then we tried to construct the record. We had an agreement that we never published anything until it was finally acted on by the High Commission itself, the top body. But then we would blast out as a propaganda exercise in the Wiener Kurier, which was the biggest newspaper in Austria, which we operated at that time, and on the radio network, and tried to gain psychological advantage from it. A great deal of this operation during this time was a matter of psychological warfare.

Q: Aimed at the Austrian population?

TORBERT: Well, aimed not only at the Austrian population, but at the international population, the world population, really, the whole European population, I would have to say. Because the Soviets liked to use Vienna and Berlin as seats for their great popular movements, such as the World Peace Council. You name it, they had an international group for almost everything. They tried to have big meetings, usually run by a non-communist, but a fellow traveler. We would spend time trying to make those meetings as ineffective as possible, actually, in one case, trying to prevent people going through Austria, Western fellow travelers, for meetings in Berlin and other Eastern European countries. So there was a lot of work along that line, which I worked on myself as far as the oversight went and the embassy could do anything about it, and also worked closely with the various intelligence agencies. I got quite close. Of course, we had a great many problems. Our job was to keep the Austrian Government in control of Austria, pending negotiation of the state treaty, which was being negotiated for many, many years, and was finally concluded just at the end of my stay in Salzburg later on. In late 1952, Walter Donnelly was moved up to Bonn as ambassador and High Commissioner there, and Tommy Thompson came in from Italy. This started one of the great friendships of my life, because he was my man that I worshiped. I was very fond of Donnelly, too, but Thompson was the par excellence diplomat, for my money, and we became very good personal friends. I was a godfather to one of his daughters, so this was a great relationship for me. He came in, and he had, before he came, already picked Dick (Richard Hallock) Davis to be political counselor of the embassy, which, in effect, was the job I was filling, although I

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didn't have the title. But we got so well acquainted, he said, "Dick is coming," and I couldn't agree more. Dick was an absolutely great man, and I got to be a good friend, too. He later died rather early, unfortunately, of a heart attack, but he was a good Kremlinologist, spoke fluent Russian, fluent German, and was a great fellow. I, incidentally, didn't speak a word of German, had never taken a course in it when I arrived there. Of course, this was one of the great disadvantages in having to expand the Foreign Service so fast. I studied German madly, but I never really mastered it until after I left there, and then it got to be fairly useful. But anyway, Tommy said, "We need somebody down in western Austria, U.S. military headquarters in Salzburg, to provide liaison political advice." One of my three titles was POLAD to the commanding general, who at that time was a fellow named Duke Arnold.

Q: POLAD is the acronym for political advisor.

TORBERT: Political advisor to the commanding general, which was not a well-known concept at that time, although, in effect, Bob Murphy had had it for Eisenhower during the war, and there were some others, but it later became a regular thing. I was given that job, plus a sort of working supervision of our zone of Austria, that is, relations with land (state) governors and that sort of thing. And, also, to run the consular establishment, although I had always a very good officer, first Oscar Holder, who was killed in an air crash in the Himalayas a few years later, and Frank Maestrone, who followed him. They ran the consulate, which, it's hard to believe now, was even one of our largest visa mills in the world. There were about 4 or 5 million refugees in Austria at one time, they weren't all there at one time, I guess, but they went through there. It was a big job. I didn't have anything to do, really, with the running mechanics of the consulate, but I did have a lot to do with working with the voluntary agencies, AJDC, National Catholic Welfare and various others. There were about 15 of them, really, altogether. It's one of the most politically loaded welfare activities there ever was, and there was always a great deal of in-fighting between agencies, so it was a diplomatic job. Also at that time, the Salzburg Seminar, which is one of the most successful of American cultural efforts abroad, was just getting organized. It had been going for two or three years, and although I didn't have

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too much to do with that, I did help them out occasionally on some of their problems. It was a meeting place for future leaders, many of whom got to high places both in Western Europe and eventually in Eastern Europe. So that was interesting. Anyway, after home leave in the summer of '53, I was there in Salzburg doing that. The summer of 1955, one of the last things that I did was to go down to Vienna to be present, at least, at the occasion of the signing of the state treaty. As you know, the Soviets finally agreed and finally gave up all their opposition, although there was a very difficult ending negotiation which Tommy Thompson completed brilliantly, which formed the state treaty and made Austria an independent country. Right after that, I was assigned for a year at the National War College, which was a very interesting year.

Q: Let's turn to your dealing with Italian affairs. How did you get into that?

TORBERT: I went to the War College, and I had been tabbed by Johnny Jones, who had come to Spain before I left, and I'd known him there. At that time, he was Director of the Office of Western European Affairs in the Department. So he asked for me. I was coming out of the War College, and at the same time, somebody wanted me to be Deputy Executive Secretary of the Department. Well, I decided to stay out of the discussion, although I preferred the Western European job because I was still very much in a learning process, and I figured I could learn much more about diplomacy and foreign affairs there, and I'd learn more about techniques than I would in the overall position of Deputy Executive Secretary. After a long argument back and forth, Loy Henderson asked me what I wanted to do, and that was just the position I didn't want to be put in. (Laughter) But anyway, I said I wanted to go to WE, and that's where I went. My first job there was officer in charge of Austrian and Italian affairs. The office handled nine countries. It was divided into three "officers-in-charge" and there was a desk officer for each country. Of course, I knew nothing about Italy at the time, except I'd been there, but I had no real knowledge. I had a very good Italian desk officer, Jim Engle, and I could handle the Austrian part all right. I moved up much too fast there, because after about a year and a half, I made deputy director of the office when Johnny Jones moved up and Tyler moved in to be

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director. Almost immediately Bill Tyler was taken out by David Bruce, so all of a sudden in 1957, I found myself director. In the Austro-Italian phase during 1956-57 we were dealing with two principal problems. On the Austrian side, we and the Austrians had done a pretty good job of getting them solid economically—and then all of a sudden, we were hit with the Hungarian uprising.

Q: This is 1956.

TORBERT: This is 1956. I started in the office about June or July of '56. In late October, as you recall, we had the Hungarian uprising, which was coincident with the British, French, and Israeli invasion of the Suez Canal, and was a very unfortunate coincidence, because it meant that most of the attention of the President and the Secretary of State was devoted to the Suez problem. They didn't want to get too involved in the Hungarian problem. My concern, in the position I had, was to worry about whether this thing might spill over and jeopardize the newly independent state of Austria, the status of Austria, and secondly and very important, was this tremendous new influx of Hungarian refugees which came into Austria and gave them a terrible problem economically. How do you move these people, on top of many hard-core refugees that were still left, the volksdeutsch and all the other people who had come from further east, Romania, and Bulgaria? We had no legislation, no possibility in this country of absorbing any large number of refugees. For that reason, the White House decided to send Vice President Nixon over to make a survey, to attract attention to the problem in the American press, really, and then to be able to come back and convince Congress. So I was picked as escort officer on that. As you know, a presidential visit is horrendous, and a vice presidential visit, under those circumstances, isn't much less so. That was a major organizing job. I went along with a very small group with Nixon, and we visited Austria. Tommy Thompson was still the ambassador there then. Nixon, for my money, at that particular time, I respected greatly his intellectual grasp.

Q: How did you find him to work with?

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TORBERT: He's not a warm person. I certainly never felt that I was close to him, although I saw him intimately for two weeks and then a little bit before and after, you know, but at that time, he was very respectful of professional advice, he listened to Tommy Thompson as though it were Moses speaking, more or less. (Laughter) He even listened to me once in a while. His prime interest, or at least his overriding interest, let's say, was the domestic political effect of what he was doing, and that is what he was sent there for. It was not too unreasonable. For example, he arranged to make a midnight trip down to the border, which was still open, with the refugees coming across it. The Austrians were very nervous about this, but they took him down. The security was handled, and the vice president was up all night. Incidentally, I don't think he slept for more than about two hours a night in all the time I was with him on the ten-day trip. But the Austrians said they hoped it could be kept quiet. Well, he didn't keep it quiet for more than about 24 hours, and then announced it. He told them he was going to, and they accepted that. But I don't think they liked it very much. So except for the fact that he was primarily concerned with the domestic political image, while, of course, my primary concern was our international relations, so I was sort of nervous about this, but it worked out. He went back, got the legislation through. That was very successful. I was dealing, by that time, I believe, with Karl Gruber, who had been Foreign Minister of Austria and had written a book which got some of his fellow Austrian politicians mad, so he had been fired as foreign minister and sent as ambassador to Washington, where he was very, very good. He spoke good English, he appealed, he had good relations with everybody, was good at working with Congress, and so on. He came back for a later tour as ambassador and wasn't quite so good. But anyway, during this period he was good, and we worked together very well.

Q: I'd like to go back to the Hungarian uprising at the time. Was it a prime concern within the State Department, or at least at your level, that somehow there might be a reimposition of Soviet rule in part of Austria, or this thing might break apart?

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TORBERT: That certainly was a peripheral concern. We thought we could control that. Of course, there are many, many Hungarians who were very unhappy because we didn't take more positive steps to support the Imre Nagy government, who was the very short-term interim prime minister of Hungary during that uprising. He was later executed, having taken refuge in the Yugoslav Embassy and been let go. I have been in some correspondence, for example, with Andre Marton, who was a correspondent that people know around here, who was foreign correspondent for the Associated Press. We've had some conversation and exchange lately about what else we could have done. My view is we couldn't have done all that much else, but there were a few things, if you want to be very subtle, that we could have done, possibly, that would have given Nagy a little more chance of survival. So much for Austria at that time. The Italian problem at that time was largely in coping with the fact that Italy had the largest Communist Party in the Western world, and everybody was very worried about it every time they had an election. For a while, there was a coalition between the Italian Communists and the Italian Socialists, but they never quite were able to take over the government. There were repeated elections during the Fifties and Sixties, during which we did everything we could, both publicly and privately, to try to support the center coalition.

Q: This is an unclassified interview, but when you say "everything we could," can you give some examples of things that you were involved with in one way or another?

TORBERT: I was involved in a slightly questionable procedure by which we used PL [Public Law] 480 grain which was given legitimately under the PL 480 law, but the proceeds of those sales were steered in such a way as to help out the election campaign. That kind of thing would have raised hell in both countries if it had been known at the time. We were doing it in our best judgment to serve United States interests, but I remember the purely relief-type people who were administering the law were a little unhappy about the fact that we had a political content in this particular part of the program. That kind of thing

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went on. Clare Boothe Luce was the ambassador at that time up until almost the end of my service in the Department. It was an interesting experience, and I saw something of her.

Q: How was she regarded?

TORBERT: I think on the whole, she was regarded very well. The Italians initially didn't like the idea of a woman. They're a rather male oriented society, and they didn't much like the idea of a woman being ambassador, but I think they came to accept her and liked her very much. She was, of course, extremely conservative then, as always. She was a converted Catholic, and there used to be lots of jokes about her preaching to the Pope, and the Pope saying, "But Mrs. Luce, I'm already a Catholic." (Laughter) But she was a great lady, no question about it. For me, I was never that close to her, but I did meet her a great many times. I think she was well thought of. One of the great issues which was never solved in my time came to be whether we should work more with the Italian Socialist Party. She was very much against that, and her successor, Dave Zellerbach, was against it. Later on, we did help the Socialist Party break their ties with the Communists, and I think it was successful. But it was a question of timing, and I think probably we were right, on the whole, to go slow and let the Italians do it, rather than our doing it, our trying to push that kind of thing.

Q: I'd like to go now to when you went to Rome as political counselor. What were you doing there?

TORBERT: The job of political counselor in Rome was probably the last great fascinating political job. By that time, De Gaulle was in power in France, there was nothing really interesting in the French internal political situation. As a matter of fact, I went there somewhat unwillingly because I didn't think I had sufficient sophistication to handle the job. But I had met Zellerbach when he was appointed there, and Zellerbach wanted a new political counselor. So finally, when he didn't get one for a while, he specifically asked for me, simply because he knew no one else. (Laughter) I was at that time just getting

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my feet under me as director of WE, and wanted to do it a little while longer, but I went along. I never was sorry, because it's a fascinating problem. The political section in Rome essentially did three things. They had a section on internal political affairs, and we perhaps meddled more in Italian internal politics than we should have. At least we followed them very closely. We marched the Italians leaders around and had lunch or dinner with the leaders of all these various coalition parties. I think they sometimes felt we were looking over their shoulder a little too much, but the fact was, we were helping them. We tried to forecast what would happen on the elections, and we had two or three people working on that. Then, of course, another part was the international thing, their representations with the Foreign Ministry on the general run of international affairs and the UN matters. Then the third thing was relations with the Vatican. We didn't have any mission to the Vatican at the time. The wartime mission had expired, and it was thought that politically in the United States, it was not a good idea to have a mission. So that came under me. I had an able young guy, Gus Veletri, who had, happily, been to school in the United States, a Catholic school, with one of the chief monsignors, not a well-known man, but a fellow who was the equivalent of deputy under secretary of state for the Vatican. So we had a pretty good line in there.

Q: You were saying you wanted to give a little more attention to something in the Department.

TORBERT: As a matter of completion, I will go on with what we were dealing with in WE, because it is an interesting period in history. When I got up to the general management of the office, I had, in addition to the two countries which we've already been talking about, France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland and the Low Countries. Of course, this was the period where we were holding the coats of both sides on the question of decolonization. It was a very trying period, particularly in France. As you remember, we had a very chaotic French government, too, much more so, really, than the Italian government. It got to the point where there really was nobody to deal with in France. So somewhat reluctantly, I think we came to the opinion, although we fully realized how difficult a man he was to

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deal with, that possibly De Gaulle was the only answer. We had nothing to do, really, with getting De Gaulle back, but I do remember that I was in Paris in that fateful May of 1958. I happened to be there waiting for an ambassadors' meeting to start, and France was in chaos, the Parliament was in chaos, and that was when De Gaulle came back in. So we had that period. We had the questions of the North African and, to some minor degree, although it didn't seem critical to us at that particular moment, the Vietnam problem with France. We had almost no stirrings of the colonial problem in Portugal, strangely enough, but Portugal was part of our thing. We had sort of an intra-agency scrap going on, if you will, with each section the Department trying to protect the interests of its clients. So at that time, I would have to be very careful to get a look at all cables from what was then the African section of NEA, the Bureau of Near Eastern and African Affairs, were sending out regarding relations with the emerging independent countries.

Q: This is the period when the so-called Battle of Algeria was taking place in the Department of State.

TORBERT: That's right. I was there. (Laughter)

Q: You were fighting the French side.

TORBERT: I was representing the reactionaries.

Q: Could you explain what the battle was about?

TORBERT: I honestly can't entirely remember, but there were all sorts of subtle things that we might do that would seriously offend the French. My job at that time was to maintain our relations with the French. So we would have to object to certain rather subtle questions of doing business with African revolutionaries. The African bureau officers, very naturally, wanted to get in and get on good terms with what were obviously going to be emerging governments, and they were perfectly right in what they were doing. This was a

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democratic process within the Department going on. At that time, in that particular context, I represented a reactionary trend.

The other thing I just might observe on that thing is of the nine countries that we had in WE at that time, eight of them had political ambassadors. This was a very interesting experience. I knew some very good ones and some bad ones, or at least some difficult ones to deal with, but I did get a chance dealing at arm's length, needless to say, with these types of people, people that had independent power and were not used to accepting instructions from bureaucracy.

Q: Who were some of the more difficult?

TORBERT: I personally always had some difficulty with John Lodge, although he was very successful in many respects.

Q: He was in Spain.

TORBERT: He was in Spain. There was a fellow in Switzerland who was quite erratic and difficult, and I can't remember who that was. I'm wrong. We had two career ambassadors, one in Portugal and one in Austria. But the others, most of the time, were political. John Lodge was in Spain. Most of the time I was there, Amory Houghton was in France and was great, although a little bit lacking in some types of experience. Frances Willis had been in Switzerland, the first great career woman ambassador, and she really was good. She was replaced by Henry J. Taylor, who was an erratic character, but it didn't really make much difference. (Laughter) We had some difficulty with John Lodge wishing to ride around the Department and do things on his own with the military and the White House, not telling the Department what was going on. The rest of them were pretty good. At that time, I didn't always agree with what Phil Young was doing in The Netherlands. He died a year or so ago, but I got to know him pretty well after retirement, and he explained some of the reasons that he was doing it. I felt Dave Zellerbach was an absolutely great ambassador.

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Q: What was his background? He was your ambassador in Italy.

TORBERT: Dave was, at that time, the head of the Zellerbach family, which owned the Crown Zellerbach Paper Company. It's a big national paper company. But he had been director for the aid program, ICA, whatever it was called in those days, in Italy, so he had some Italian background. He was a very, very cultured gentleman who had musical and artistic interests, so he was a civilized person, and he acted always as chairman of the board. He perhaps gave the career a little too much leeway, almost, because he let us run the embassy pretty much, but he was always there. He had certain very definite opinions. You didn't do any end-runs around him, but as long as things were going pretty well, he let us deal with the foreign minister and with other people some ambassadors would have kept entirely to themselves. So it was a great experience.

Q: When you were political counselor, what were our major political concerns?

TORBERT: Our almost overriding and continuing concern was keeping a non-Communist government going in Italy. Keeping direct Communist influence out of the government wasn't easy, because although a great deal of the Communist Party membership was a protest type of thing, and many of the members of it would have been scared to death if the Party had ever come to power, nonetheless, it had the apparent potential of coming to power or at least sharing it. Beyond that, of course, Italy was very important in our defense posture. We had bases there. Spain also became, during that decade, an important base for control of the Mediterranean, but Italy was further east and was important. As you recall, we put some missiles in there while I was there. That was a little difficult because every time we thought we had the arrangement all settled, the government would fall, and we'd have to wait for a new government. It was that kind of a problem. Then, of course, another great problem—not a problem, but an interest, a connection, a tie, was that we have so very many Italian Americans. I found this throughout my career in Europe, in countries where there was great immigration in the United States, created all sorts of ties

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and connections, economic, financial, political pressures at home and that sort of thing. It really was the influence on the American political scene that had to be managed.

Q: As political counselor, we were concerned about the influence of the Communists, but how did you operate? What did you and your officers do to work on this problem?

TORBERT: The first thing, the political section's mission, of course, was not to operate, but it was an intelligence mission. Overt intelligence is what it was. What we did was to work very hard estimating the political prospects, on getting to know the people, and then advising the Department what to do and what not to do, advising touring congressmen what to do and what not to do. There were many congressmen who were of Italian background themselves or who had very many Italian constituents who would come through, and a few of them would want to make speeches in Italy, usually in Neapolitan or Sicilian dialect. They'd want to make a speech in Rome, saying how much America loved them and how important it was that they vote anti-Communist. This would have been, in some cases, just the wrong thing to do. That kind of thing. So it was basically a reporting, a traditional intelligence operation. Then we would have staff meetings in which all sections of the embassy were represented, the economic section, the CIA was always present, and we would discuss policy actions. But those would be usually for recommendation to the Department as to what we should do.

Q: For about a year and a half, you were charge in Budapest.

TORBERT: That's right.

Q: How did this come about? This is 1961-62.

TORBERT: In the summer of 1960, I wound up my first two years in Italy by conducting an aspect of the 1960 Olympic games, in which I fought a losing battle to keep the Chinese Nationalists as the official representative of China. I always felt I was let down by the

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Chinese Nationalists themselves on that. But in all events, just as that was over, I had been ordered back to the Department to serve on a selection board.

Q: This is for promotion.

TORBERT: Promotion board. That's right. I was promoting people from Class Four to Class Three. It took a long time, because there were a lot of members. Then I was supposed to have home leave, and then supposedly I was coming back to Rome. But as so often happens, I was encountered in the hall one day by Loy Henderson, just after he had heard that Gary Ackerson, who had been charg# in Budapest, had decided to retire. He later went on to a very productive and useful second career with the International Refugee Organization in Geneva. Budapest was a very small post. We didn't have any ambassador there. It was a legation at that time. But they had Cardinal Mindszenty living in the embassy, and this was a very difficult thing. We still had almost no relations with the Hungarian Government. We were constantly harassed by security people. For example, there were always three cars full of goons poised outside the legation offices, which is where Mindszenty was, to be sure that he never escaped. Actually, the last thing Mindszenty wanted to do was escape. He believed that he belonged in Hungary, and he had been a member of the Council of Regents, and he was the only surviving member, the only one left in Hungary. He felt that he was the symbol of the ancien regime in Hungary. Anyway, willy-nilly, I was assigned to this job. (Laughter) I wasn't entirely sorry. I would have liked to have sort of finished up my full education in Italy, but this was a chance to have my own post. I was almost equivalent to being a minister or ambassador. I lived in the legation residence, and I had all the perks and whatnot. That was good. It was a different kind of experience. By this time, we had the kids in school in the United States, so we didn't have to worry too much about that, except what they did on vacations, which is no fun. But we went in there and we spent two years. I can't say that there was all that much doing. There were two or three things that might be worth highlighting. The first was the Bay of Pigs which occurred not too long after I got there.

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Q: 1961.

TORBERT: 1961.

Q: *This was April or May, rather shortly after Kennedy came in.*

TORBERT: I got there about the first of February of that year, I think, roughly. I might say as a preface that when I arrived there, it was very interesting, because at that time, the power of the United States and the influence was such that I found that the entire Western diplomatic community was waiting with bated breath for my arrival, because I was the leader. I was a charge. Everybody else was a minister. In other words, they ranked me diplomatically. Nonetheless, I found that immediately when I got there, I was expected to sort of take charge of morale and everything. The contrast, when I went to Bulgaria ten years later, more or less, our influence had eroded where nobody gave a damn when I arrived; everybody was on their own by that time. When the Bay of Pigs occurred, everybody was elated. There was a feeling of euphoria, even among a lot of the Eastern Europeans. They thought this was going to be great stuff. I, of course, knew nothing whatever about this, but I do remember in all my conversations, being very cautious and saying, "This doesn't depend on us, you know. It only depends on the Cubans. If they can't handle it themselves, this isn't going to be so good." Well, it wasn't so good.

Q: *The Bay of Pigs, I might add, was an abortive attempt to overthrow Castro, using dissident Cubans.*

TORBERT: Right. That was a great let-down, I must say. I went on there, basically flying the flag. I figured I had a mission to keep, for instance, the Latin American chiefs of mission happy, physically and psychologically, and so that was the kind of thing I did pretty much there, and babysit Cardinal Mindszenty, which was a half-time job.

Q: *How did you get along? He was there how many years?*

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TORBERT: Of course, he'd been in confinement about two-thirds of his life. He'd moved to me in '56. By that time it was '61. I can't remember the precise year. It was when Al Puhán was minister or ambassador there, I remember, that he came out, and he didn't want to come out. He came out kicking and screaming, more or less, but by then the Vatican wanted to improve working relations with Hungary. It was a definitely confining thing, not only because of the fact that he was living in what otherwise would be my office.

Q: Puhán was there from '69 to '73.

TORBERT: So you see, it was 13, 14 years. It was a long, long time. He was a very determined guy, in a way a saintly man, but with great political feelings and no political sense somehow. He had no sense of “give” as the Pole and the Yugoslav primates did. He was just fighting and resisting to the end. He spent all his time there reading and writing his memoirs. We subscribed to all the provincial newspapers and he got a little bit of information out of them that was good. I used to go in every Saturday morning when I was in Budapest, and spend a couple of hours with him. It was a very painful thing, because by that time, I spoke fairly good German and he spoke very good German, but he would refuse to speak German. I didn't speak any Hungarian, which was an almost impossible language. He insisted on speaking in English, which he had taught himself from the radio, more or less, and you couldn't understand it. So I'm sure there were some very valuable things that he said, but I often didn't know what they were. I would start out, and he'd start reminiscing, and I'd get a little of it, but not all that much. It was a babysitting job, it really was. The other big thing that happened, of course, while I was there was the Cuban Missile Crisis. That was also a very traumatic thing, as you can imagine, in that place. Everybody was scared to death. One of my few negotiating pieces of bravado was when the thing started, we at that time had all our communications through commercial telegraph, that is, with a teletype that was in our office. We would encode a message and send it out on commercial telegraph. When the crisis started, we suddenly got a message from the downtown office of the commercial telegraph that they couldn't

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take any messages from us until they had sent us 3,000 messages they had from local labor unions and town governments protesting our action on the Cuban Missile Crisis. So I put on my hat and went over and talked to the American desk officer of the foreign office, which was about as high as I normally talked to, and told him about this. He said, "You know, we've got a democracy here, and people have to protest. These messages have precedence over yours." I said, "I can understand that. We're a democracy, too. But it does worry me, because we're kind of exposed here in Budapest. You and I, we're all living here together, and I'm afraid. You know, we have atomic bombs these days, and people might get excited. One of my jobs is to tell people in Washington whether everything is peaceful here, and if I can't get a message out saying that, God knows what will happen." (Laughter)

Q: What a dirty trick! (Laughter)

TORBERT: He said, "I hadn't thought of that," and he disappeared, came back in five minutes and said, "Go on back. You can send a message." I think that's really the only time in my diplomatic career I ever pulled anything like that. I must say that the Cuban Missile Crisis was settled on the eve of the Turkish National Day, I think it was, and we all went to their reception. This is where we had most of our diplomatic interchange, because you knew you were bugged everywhere you were. I walked into that Turkish reception, and everybody East and West came up and shook my hand. I did have one or two long talks with [Janos] Kadar during that period. He was the secretary general of the party and, I think, prime minister, too, at that time. They were at his initiative, and they usually occurred when I was at some Hungarian official reception or something, and he'd send out for me, and we'd go into a back room somewhere to have a talk. There wasn't much we could say, but we were sort of sparring. I got a very good impression of him and advised the Department that I thought we were stuck with having made a total villain out of him, but he was probably a man that could be worked with when we could. But nothing ever really developed during my time. So that's Hungary and that's done. I was then picked out of a list somewhere, I guess, and called back to be interviewed in the White House to go

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to Somalia. I think I noticed a question on your list saying, "How did you get there?" I got there because there were more missions opening up in Africa, and not many people with experience, and they needed people to go as ambassadors.

Q: It also was not an area where they were sending political appointees.

TORBERT: No. Political appointees were certainly not clamoring for Somalia. One of the three official languages of Somalia was Italian, and by that time I spoke a reasonable amount of Italian. I was apparently considered to be an ambassador. Again, without wild enthusiasm, we went home in the middle of the worst cold spell Washington has ever had, and tried to find tropical clothes, which we couldn't find. This was Christmas 1962. Eventually, we got down to Mogadishu, having stopped off in Aden to buy a couple of lightweight suits which I couldn't find in Washington. (Laughter)

Q: The firm of S.S. Schwartz was no longer going then?

TORBERT: Schwartz was going in Baltimore, but the roads were so blocked, you couldn't get to Baltimore. It was a deep freeze.

Q: I should mention here within the Foreign Service, there's a firm that had a warehouse in Baltimore called S.S. Schwartz, and we all went there when we could, before for one thing, they stocked all types of suits. They were used to the diplomatic trade, and you could always get summer suits in the winter, or winter suits in the summer. Because of the type of assignment we had, it was an essential establishment which is now, unfortunately, no longer in existence.

TORBERT: Washington is also better equipped now. But in those days, you're right, Baltimore was the place. That's where we had planned to go, and there was an ice storm. There were just ruts so deep in all the roads of ice during that short time that we were home. The trials and tribulations of the Foreign Service officer.

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Q: When you went to Somalia, let's start first with the embassy. How did you find the staffing there? I'm not talking about the number of people, but the caliber of people there.

TORBERT: I was perfectly satisfied with the way it was staffed. I got a new DCM at the same time I went out, Charlie Rogers, with whom I had been acquainted. He was going there even less enthusiastically than I was, but he was a very good man, both from the point of view of intelligence, and he and his wife were good company, which is rather important in that kind of a post. I had several very good officers. They were sometimes, let's face it, not as sophisticated as the ones that I'd been used to in Rome and Vienna and Madrid, but they were willing and hard working and interested. We had a lot of people there because, in the first place, Somalia, which had one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world, was getting more aid from all sources per capita than any other country in the world at that time, a lot from the UN, a big UN mission there, not such a terrible volume from us, but it was mostly technical assistance, which meant there were a lot of people in the AID mission there. We had a Peace Corps. So there were quite a lot of people. There were, in a way, more operational responsibilities than I'd ever had, although it wasn't as big as the operation in Vienna, but I was directly running it, whereas in Vienna, I was only advising them on how to run it, so to speak.

Q: What were our interests in Somalia at the time?

TORBERT: At that particular time, I think our interests in Somalia were primarily to help these new emerging countries to develop, and secondarily, but not all that importantly, to keep the opposition out. That is, to keep the Soviets and the Chinese out, an objective which I and my immediate successors were notoriously unsuccessful. However, in Somalia, we had a particular problem, in that Somalia was claiming about a third of Ethiopia and about a fifth of Kenya, which was populated by Somalis. It was inscribed in their constitution, no less, that the object of the country was to unify all Somalis under

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a single flag. This gave us two strikes already there, because we were heavily involved in Ethiopia, as you will recall. We had the communications base at Asmara.

Q: Kagne Station.

TORBERT: Kagne Station, which was very important for our communications. At that time there were no satellite communications. That was the center for all our communications for all that part of Africa and the Middle East, very, very important. We also were doing a mapping survey of Ethiopia, which we were very much interested in, which involved a lot of overflights. And we were providing both considerable economic assistance and heavy military assistance to the Ethiopians. The Ethiopians and the Somalis were not actually at war, but Somalia being a nomadic country, the borders were essentially open. They'd migrate, these tribes, and every now and then the Ethiopians would try to clamp down on them. It was very hard to tell how many Somalis there were or whether they were really Ethiopians or Somalis because they moved back and forth and crossed these borders. There were a number of clashes, and every time a Somali got killed, he got killed with a bullet made in America. This became sort of a diplomatic problem. The Somalis, in a way, seemed to understand this. They didn't like it a bit, but they were willing. I guess they wanted aid so bad, they'd take it from us no matter what.

Q: Could you describe what the government was in Somalia and whom you dealt with and how?

TORBERT: Somalia, as you recall, was a combination of Italian Somaliland, which was all the southern part, the overwhelmingly large geographical part, which had been occupied by the British for quite a while during the war. And British Somaliland, which was the northern tip which the British treated as a protectorate. It was occupied in order to protect Aden and the Gulf of Aden. But the British had done a pretty good job of educating their people. At least they had one high school up there from which they graduated a lot of really acceptable high school graduates, whereas the Italians, up to very shortly before

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independence, the highest grade you could go in Italian Somaliland was the third grade. I remember being told this by Aden Abdulla Osman, the president and a wonderful, what seemed like an old, guy then, although I understand that today, 25 years later, he's still going strong, but he had had three years of formal education and then had gotten a job as a medical assistant in some Italian field medical facility. That was his total education, but he was a very intelligent, shrewd guy. He didn't speak much English, but he did speak Italian and Arabic and Somali. To answer your question, the government was basically an Italian type, but with some British influence, a Parliamentary government. Somalia had, in a sense, almost a democratic tradition, in that the tribal structure there was always governed by shirs. These shirs were sort of town meetings of the tribes, and they had a sense of discussion. It seemed like an almost idyllic opportunity for a good democracy. During the time I was there, it really worked pretty well that way. The trouble with the Somalis, in a sense, was that they wanted assistance and they were very opportunistic about it, and they always recognized the government that would give them the most assistance, they thought. So they figured that the Communist Chinese were bigger than the National Chinese, and therefore they'd probably give them more assistance. I don't think this was right, but that was their reasoning. They recognized Communist China, and, of course, they recognized the Soviet Union. They recognized, however, West Germany, because they figured West Germany would give them assistance. (Laughter)

Q: This was the time when you couldn't recognize West Germany and East Germany at the same time.

TORBERT: And China's the same way. So they sort of split it.

Q: So their policy was driven by "What's in it for me?" For basically aid.

TORBERT: Pretty much, yes.

Q: How about with this recognition of China? Did you get involved in this?

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TORBERT: When I came there, I was always a little bit of a rebel on these things. I believed that this not speaking to a Chinaman was hogwash.

Q: We're talking about the Communist Chinese. We were supposed to ignore them.

TORBERT: By that time, however, it was beginning to ease up a little bit, you see. This was the early Sixties, and we were already thinking in long terms on this. I used to play games with the Chinese representative there by trying to get him to speak to me, which he refused to do the whole time. But it was surely a game. He had almost no influence, and he lived totally cut off, probably worse than we were living, more cut off than we were in Budapest, for example. Later on, Zhou En-lai . . .

Q: Zhou En-lai came to visit there for three days.

TORBERT: Yes. I was there during the time Zhou En-lai came. He did a very good job.

Q: What did you do at that point, stay out of the way?

TORBERT: Well, I didn't push myself into anything, but as I recall it, I was curious and interested. Anything that there was that the diplomatic corps was supposed to do, I did. I think I got clearance for that, but I'm not sure. All the time I was in Somalia, we had extremely good relations with the Somali government. I had complete access to all the ministries. We had some people that were more favorable to us than others and so on. Not that we didn't have trouble. Shortly after I arrived, at that time the independence of Kenya was coming up, and the British had gone through the exercise of taking some sort of a sampling of opinion in the northern frontier district, which the Somalis claimed, as to what the population wanted to do. The answer came up overwhelmingly that they wanted to join Somalia. But this would not do. The British, of course, had much greater interest in Kenya, and they wanted to keep their relations there. So they, in their usual wisdom, decided that the two governments could settle it between each other after independence. With that, the Somalis forthwith broke relations with Great Britain, although I tried to persuade them not

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to, telling them it wouldn't do them any good, but they did. At that time, I was making my first major swing through northern Somalia. We traveled in Piper Cub-type planes more or less around the country. I was up there with the AID director and the Peace Corps director and a couple of other people. We got word on the radio from Mog that we ought to come back.

Q: "Mog," meaning Mogadishu.

TORBERT: Mogadishu. Because things seemed to be cooking up to demonstrations there. So we started back, but in those small planes and Somali's so big, we had to stop somewhere overnight. So we stopped at a little town called Galcaio, which is right in central Somalia, and there were a couple of our Peace Corps people there. There was also a Koranic school run by the Egyptians. Nasser was in charge in Egypt, and they were very jealous of their influence in Somalia and rather opposed to us. We slept overnight in an oil company compound there, and in the morning were awakened by the shouts of the entire town staging a demonstration outside the compound. The provincial governor was with us, and the provincial governor was from another province and another tribe, and he was twice as scared as I was, I must say. (Laughter) He and I went out to the gate and met with the leaders of this group. They said we were the cousins and tribal relatives of the British, and therefore we were equally at fault because we hadn't persuaded them not to commit this horrendous thing on the frontier district. I made my most brilliant speech about George Washington and one thing and another, and persuaded them that we were not hand-in-glove with the British, and we were in their interests. They said, "Fine." We said, "We're going home now. We've got to go out to the air strip," which was a mile or so outside of town, a flat place in the desert, really. We started out. My wife was there with me.

Q: Tully, we were talking about your being in this small village in Somalia and how there had been protests because of the British stand on Somalis in Kenya.

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TORBERT: Yes. I believe I just said that I had been extremely persuasive in talking to the leaders of these groups in explaining our position, and they had agreed to leave us alone. So we gathered we had several four-wheel-drive vehicles there, and we had quite a local contingent of Somali police and the governor and my wife. We decided that the governor and I would go in the lead car, and then we would put my wife in the second car with a group of Somali police, and then there would be another police car behind that, and we'd go on out to the airport. We thought we'd be all right, but we were a little bit nervous. The governor was probably more nervous than I was. We drove out and there was nobody immediately outside of the gate of the compound. We started to drive through the middle of the village, a village of 2,000 or 3,000 people, I guess, mud huts, mostly. We came to the first crossroads, and there was a large contingent of "welcomers," each with a rock the size of a baseball or softball in this hand, which they immediately started throwing at us. The governor was driving my car, and I got a great respect for the Land Rover which we were in, because the windshield withstood the blow of the first one of these rocks that hit us. So the governor did a quick U-turn or something and went off through another part of the town, and we ran into another group. We avoided those and we got two or three miles out to where we'd left the airplane on the airstrip, with a large stream of demonstrators following on foot. The ammunition, which was rocks, was plentiful everywhere. It was almost desert country, but there were lots of rocks around. So they had plenty of ammunition. They didn't have to depend on foreign aid for that. We sprinted out and threw ourselves in this airplane, warmed it up, took off over the heads of this oncoming crowd. I later found out that my wife was having an even more traumatic experience than the rest of us because she was separated from me, and she was alone in a Landrover with nothing but police, which was absolutely the safest place to be, except I'd forgotten that this was probably the first time that she had been exposed to being entirely alone with nothing but blacks around her. In another few months, this wouldn't have bothered her a bit, but she had been a bit terrified. We got out of there over the heads of the crowd, and of course, this was, in a way, just a form of exuberance. I later, when I was mad at the prime minister, talked to him about his people trying to kill me once. I

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know they had no intention of killing us, although they might well have done so if those stones had landed. We got back to town and had a little trouble there for a while, or at least were there while it was going on, the same kind of general protest uprising, and the British ambassador, meanwhile, either had left or was leaving, I can't remember which by that time, and went on to become consul general in San Francisco, from which he retired, I think. We later took over the British interests there, which I'm not sure was good for us. The Department rather resisted it, but as a practical matter, we were about the only people who could do it, and I said I thought we ought to take it on. We did, and so I represented Great Britain, as well as the United States there for two or three years, I guess the whole time I was there. There couldn't have been anything more different between Somalia and, say, Italy, where I had been, or for that matter, Hungary. In Italy, it was all subtleties, and in Somalia, everything was hanging out. I had a fairly big administrative job to do and a morale-building job. We had to build our own school. Our own children, by that time, were in prep school or college, but we had lots of small children out there, and we built a school. We had a large, as I say, AID program, under which we were building a school for Somalia, and a little bit of roadwork, but mostly sort of agricultural technical assistance. The Somalis, at that time, had not yet reached the stage of planting crops in rows, which shows just exactly how primitive, essentially nomadic, essentially herding culture this was. There were a few Italian banana plantations along the two small rivers in the country. Other than that, there was a part of the country that had sufficient rainfall, equivalent, more or less, with our upper Midwest in Nebraska, the Dakotas, Minnesota, that type of country, where they could have grown fairly substantial crops. I remember having forecast or said or used in all my statements to visitors or researchers or the Department on this subject, that they should plan on a minimum of 20 years to really make a dent in developing Somalia. Of course, we had one year AID appropriations. As a matter of fact, it's far more than 20 years now, and I doubt if Somalia has progressed all that much in the meantime. But it has been shaken up with political turnabouts in between.

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Q: One of the issues that seemed to be going was the switch, about the time you were there, to getting arms from the Communist Bloc.

TORBERT: This really did not happen on a large scale until after I left, but was undoubtedly influenced by decisions I participated in. The Somalis very much wanted substantial military assistance from us. They had been getting some Army military assistance from the Soviets, and essentially what happened was that we aided and abetted and supported the police. They were led by a very interesting character about which a good deal has been written, General Mohamed Abshir, who was and still is a good friend of mine, although he spent much of the intervening time in jail. The Soviets had helped out a little bit on the military. We were trying to prevent an increase in the Soviet military aid. They, of course, had influence with the military leadership and we had influence with the police leadership, which we figured was much more important. The Somalis were interested in our supplying them more aid, which they needed like a hole in the head—military aid, I'm talking about. We figured as a matter of just common sense and policy, that some help might be desirable, and we'd try to do enough to keep the Soviets from getting too much influence. We worked out a package by which we said we would create an engineering regiment, I think it was, for them, which we would provide the military and civilian equipment for, and we figured that they could use this regiment to build roads and a few things like that which would be really useful to them. The Somalis wanted tanks and artillery and all sorts of things. They had essentially nothing in this respect. I came back to the States and talked it over for a while, and we went and had a meeting, I think, in Bonn, for some reason or other, of the Germans and the French and maybe the British. I'm not sure whether the British were involved, but anyway, our Allies generally who were represented in Somalia. We agreed on this package, and then I recommended—this was perhaps undiplomatic on my part—that we instruct our charge, because I was not going right back, in presenting our program to say that this was based on the assumption that they would not get a large increased amount of military aid from anybody else, meaning the Soviets, and that if they did, we reserved the right to think this over. I

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felt this was desirable both from their point of view, but primarily from the point of view of presenting the matter to Congress. I felt that this would be a good selling point. Well, I was later told by some of the Somalis that that's the worst thing we could have done, to make that condition, that gave ammunition to all the opponents of U.S. relations. Eventually, they did not accept this package, did turn to the Soviets about the time I left. The first thing the Soviets did was to take about 5,000 Somalis to the Soviet Union for training, and they trained them exceedingly well in NKVD-type operations.

Q: NKVD is the same as the KGB, internal intelligence.

TORBERT: Yes, internal control techniques, which they apparently learned exceedingly well, as we later learned. But that was towards the end. Meanwhile, we did a lot of constructive work. I traveled a great deal, I got to know a lot of them pretty well. I never could begin to speak Somali, but I spoke enough Italian to usually get along pretty well. Our Peace Corps was, I thought, very effective there, an effective tool, although we had to pull them all out at one point when there was a lot of border fighting, particularly up in the north. We had some oil exploration there, and I had various problems to solve in relation to the government. But generally, it was that kind of a problem. We personally seized the opportunity to travel a bit around east Africa and went out as far as Madagascar and Mauritius, which was an education for us and gave us a feeling for the area. Of course, we covered Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya.

Q: Speaking of Ethiopia, in your negotiations in consideration of arms, was there a problem of "localitis" on both sides, of you feeling that we've got to do more for the Somalis, our embassy and the desk back in Washington saying, "No, you can't because of Kagnew Station"?

TORBERT: The scenario wasn't exactly like that, but certainly this was a consideration at all times, and it was a consideration that I think we in the embassy recognized. We always recognized that our interests in Ethiopia were far more important than they were in

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Somalia. In fact, I never was able to get even a military man at that time to give me a clear statement of what our concern in Somalia was, our national interest and security interests and so on. But we were aware of that. At the same time, our argument always was that we should do everything we can within reason to keep up our interest and our friendship in Somalia, in spite of the fact that we were helping Ethiopia. Now, my counterpart in Ethiopia was a gentleman named Ed Korry, who later became somewhat better known as ambassador to Chile. I don't know where he is now. Ed was very bright. At first I quite liked him. He was a very bright fellow. He had talked his way into an embassy through the White House staff, most of whom became fed up with him as it turned out later. He was very, very insistent that he was in the most important place in Africa and his word should be a regional word, and we should stop paying any attention to Somalia whatever. He used to send in a three-page telegram about once a week saying this. We always put those telegrams in the drawer overnight to let our temperatures boil down, and then we put out a carefully worded reply. I later found, when I got back, that it was considered some of the best reading in not only the State Department, but in the White House, this semi-vitriolic exchange between me and Ed Korry. This is childish stuff.

Q: At the same time, there were policy considerations and a very major one, and the repercussions are still here, and that was do you, because of one military base, put all your eggs in that particular basket, to the detriment of everything else, and this is still haunting us in the area. So it's not minor.

TORBERT: I think probably I won that exchange to a degree. At least I developed a great deal of sympathy in the White House. Robert Komer was the White House National Security Council man on Africa at that time. He was later ambassador to Turkey. He was also Secretary of the Navy at one time. He was a very positive guy, very much of a Democratic politician, too. He was always on my side after a few exchanges of these telegrams, so we got what we wanted pretty much. It was an interesting exercise in "localitis." I think the reason we were able to win was that we made our best effort to look

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as though we were being objective and looking at the big picture, whereas it was Korry that actually had a severe case of “localitis.”

Q: This is an unclassified interview, but did the CIA play any role there?

TORBERT: We had one CIA man, maybe two at times. They had some role. I think they perhaps had a little money to spend and that sort of thing. I think I knew what was going on. I didn't object to it. Of course, I had a record with the CIA, so they probably told me a little more than they told some people. It wasn't a big thing.

Q: It wasn't an intrusive operation?

TORBERT: I wouldn't think so, no. There's no question we supported the existing government, and we did spend some money on things which we thought were quite justified in developing a democratic election structure, that sort of thing which you can argue about. We were certainly “Big Brother” in a lot of ways. But there were no serious incidents. The day before I departed Somalia, we ran into a typical kind of a dirty tricks thing. There was an, obviously a Soviet-planted, alleged letter from a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia who had traveled across Ethiopia and was supposed to be writing home and saying he had observed Somali troops and was going to help combat them. It was a pure fabrication. We were able to prove it eventually, but, of course, the Somalis didn't believe it. I spent all night practically, the night before I left, thrashing this out with the prime minister at what was alleged to be a pleasant farewell party for me, and I went off leaving Alex Johnpoll, who by that time was the number two and charg# for a while, I left him to cope with this. I had two hours sleep, I think, got on the 5:00 a.m. plane for Rome, and in Rome, started organizing movements to disprove this thing. But the Somalis and all Africans were very suspicious. They were easy targets.

Q: For this information.

TORBERT: For this disinformation program.

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Q: We're moving now to the time when you were Deputy and Acting Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations. This is from 1965 to 1970. Without going into all aspects of this because of time constraints, I imagine you were there at the absolute height of the Vietnamese War, and this must have absorbed much of your time.

TORBERT: Yes. Of course, we had a fairly sizable staff at the beginning, particularly, and I was executive officer of the operation. Much of my job had to do with mobilizing the Department to provide the information and the services and whatnot that the Congress needs. It was distinctly a service-type job, but you're certainly right that the major single thing that we did during my time there was to try to keep the Congress informed and sympathetic to our effort in Southeast Asia. In a sense, of course, the Congressional Relations Office and the Department spokesman, the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs and his role as spokesman in press control are very similar, both doing that kind of a job. It's not an operating job, not a policy making job; it's a policy explaining job. Plus a service job, and we provided a great deal of service to Congress, which they wanted and we thought was naturally helpful to get their attention. There were, of course, other things besides Vietnam that came up during that time. For instance, the '67 Palestinian War, things in Africa, and things in other places. But the all-consuming thing was Vietnam. In the meantime, all the Sixties' generation, including my two sons, were reacting as all good Sixties children did. (Laughter) Anti-Vietnam. I had certain personal strains involved in this.

Q: How did the Department operate, as far as working with Congress on, let's say, Vietnam? This is the pre-eminent crisis.

TORBERT: Of course, the major volume of our work was generated by the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. We would work with the chairmen thereof and senior staff members, all those members of those committees, whom we saw at least once a week, and we kept in steady touch with. Basically, we would try to explain things as they went along, but also we arranged for Department witnesses. Every committee and subcommittee always wanted to get the Secretary of State, and he

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obviously couldn't be everywhere at the same time, but we'd get the Secretary down there or we'd get one of the assistant secretaries or whoever the expert was, or we would try to get down there by ourselves and keep it unnecessary for them to come down. But usually in the bigger things with the committees, anyway, we would get the major Department witness, go down there with him, advise him on how this member and that member felt, and then do any following up that was necessary as a result of the hearing.

Q: But it was a staff job, as far as what you were doing.

TORBERT: Absolutely. In the early days, of course, I had a relatively small acquaintance on the Hill, I had no detailed political background. Doug MacArthur [II], who was the first assistant secretary I worked for, needed a chief of staff who would get things done in the Department. Skip White was one of the great public servants the Department ever had, was strictly a Boston Irishman who had been Herter's man on the Massachusetts legislature when he was governor, Herter brought him down to Washington and put him in that job, and he was just a wonderful guy because he knew all the Democrats, who assumed he was a Democrat, and all the Republicans assumed he was a Republican, and he managed to keep them both amused, really a great fellow. It was a great blow of my life when, the week that I took over from Bill Macomber later on, when he moved up to be under secretary, I became acting assistant secretary just before the beginning of the Nixon Administration, Skip had a massive stroke and died. I'd been counting on him to run the thing for me, so it was tough going at that time. This was basically an information job and a service job. Of course, both Secretaries of State, Rusk for most of the time and then the last year or so it was Bill Rogers, Rusk was down on the Hill all the time. We always went with him and we saw him usually at 8:00 o'clock at night or something. We'd see him every day. When Bill Rogers came in, by and large, he detailed us to Elliot Richardson, who was an absolutely great operator, and we saw Elliot every day. I did, particularly, because by that time I was in charge of the place. We'd sit in all the small top-level staff meetings. We gave the best advice we could as to what Congress was apt to do and what would

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go down with Congress and what wouldn't go down with Congress. The front office, the seventh floor, was always very attentive to this problem.

Q: In 1970, you were appointed as ambassador to Bulgaria.

TORBERT: Yes, that's right.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

TORBERT: Bill Macomber felt he owed me something by this—and he did. (Laughter) He wanted to give me a resting place. They had decided fairly early, I guess, that Dave Abshire would come in, but he wasn't available immediately, so they kept me on as acting beginning about election time, up until mid-1970, when Dave Abshire was confirmed as assistant secretary. I was there, and Bill was looking for a place to park me afterwards. Embassies, of course, were pretty tight because the Republicans had a lot of obligations to fulfill and so on, and I felt I was too old and my wife was too old to go back to another primitive African post, of which I was offered several. Finally, they got down to Bulgaria, which I knew wasn't an all-that-important place, but I thought it would be interesting. It was sort of a retirement post, and quite frankly, that's what it was. As soon as Dave Abshire got broken in, and that didn't take much because he was a savvy type of fellow, I started to study Bulgarian. I never learned very much, but I learned a enough to listen and at least to ask a question occasionally. I went out there, and it was the ideal retirement post. There was almost nothing to do. Our relations with Bulgaria were absolutely minimal. The Bulgarians happened to be the only satellite country that really welcomed the Russians with open arms, because they were liberated from the Turks by the Russians, even though it was a czar in 1878, and most of their government was trained by the Communists under the Comintern system, in the Thirties. The Soviets had no trouble whatever. Furthermore, I mentioned a while back the question of American immigration and the populations in this country. Of all the Eastern European countries, there were less Bulgarian immigrants to the United States than any other. I think there were perhaps 50,000 people in the United

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States who claimed Bulgarian ancestry, whereas you know, it ranks in the millions for most.

Q: I served in Yugoslavia, and they have a very large amount.

TORBERT: For the size of the country, a tremendous number.

Q: What were our interests in Bulgaria?

TORBERT: Our interests in Bulgaria consisted of flying the flag. It's a sovereign country, it's not an insignificant country, it's got ten million people, and it's in a strategic area. We have relations with everybody. It was much more important than a lot of embassies we had at that time.

Q: No particularly commercial or geopolitical interests?

TORBERT: Their principal export was tobacco, and we weren't about to encourage that particularly. They were always yammering for a most-favored-nation treatment, which would have allowed them to send us some exports. They talked about themselves as the largest exporters of bottled wine in the world, which they could statistically prove they were because the key word was "bottled," and they had a contract to sell 200 million bottles of wine a year to the Soviet Union. (Laughter) But it's an agricultural country, a not unpleasant country. We had a very interesting time there. It was the first time we had been in that part of Europe and looked east rather than west. The influence has been Turkish and Russian there. The scenery is nice, it's only two or three hours from Thessaloniki in Greece. I couldn't, of course, hop out, but my wife, when she wanted to get a breather, would get in the car and drive down to Greece to stock up on provisions such as Bulgarian lamb which was not available on the Bulgarian market. So it was a pleasant place, and I unwound rather slowly. I went the rounds and made the efforts, but quite frankly, there was very little working relationship. The only thing of significance that happened while I was there was that we got into discussions with the Bulgarians on the

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control of the drug traffic. Much to my surprise, they showed some interest in trying to cooperate. They were important because a major flow of Middle Eastern and Far Eastern drugs was carried in the very heavy international truck traffic that went through. We were aware that a major part of that flow was in these TIR trucks. So we started talking to them about cooperation and this sort of thing, and much to our surprise, they seemed to be interested. One of the problems that we had was that the control of drugs was more divided then than it is now within the United States Government. There were individual duchies in the Treasury Department, Customs, Bureau of Tobacco and Firearms, the Justice Department, maybe a couple of others. One of them would say they wanted to negotiate with the Bulgarians, then all of a sudden, another one would come up and say, "You can't negotiate." (Laughter) But anyway, finally we did get their Commissioner of Customs and somebody else to come to this country on a visit, and we were allowed to tell them some of the things that we did, some of the ways of inhibiting drug traffic. They made a couple of stops of smugglers for us. We never were absolutely sure whether they were just trying to find out something about our method, you know. You couldn't be sure. But at least we educated a few of them and they did talk to us. We made some progress in the drug control situation. Other than that, there was very little . . .

Q: Did you have much contact with the head of government, Todor Zhivkov?

TORBERT: I made calls on him when I arrived, and they were very correct about this sort of thing. I made calls on all members of the government, including Zhivkov. It was an exercise. I'd write reports about it, describe it. Of course, I did business fairly regularly with the foreign office. Their security control was at least as rigorous as the Hungarians had been. I was used to that by this time, of course. One of the major things that you have with the smaller posts is maintaining the morale of your people, the morale and the conduct, I might say, and maintaining the morale of Western allies. Particularly, as I said, in the case of Hungary, if there were Latinos there, they very often needed to have their hands held. We had a NATO group there from most of the NATO countries. Not all of them were

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represented. I developed very good relations with the Greek ambassador, who has been there a long time and, of course, Bulgaria was a very important relationship for the Greeks.

Q: Having served my five years in Belgrade, did you manage to keep out of the Macedonian dispute? This is Greece, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, all having vehement claims on what is mainly Yugoslavia today, the area called Macedonia.

TORBERT: That's right. Of course, historically, for generations, it's been a problem in the whole area. The Bulgarians used to hang Macedonians from the lamp posts in the city squares, I understand, before the Second World War. The only time that I can recall getting at all involved in this is when I picked up a MemCon from Dick Davies, who was later ambassador to Poland. He was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Eastern Europe at that time, and in talking to a Yugoslav in the office, he had said something that sounded very much to me like endorsing the Yugoslav position on Macedonia. This bothered me, not because I wanted to expound the Bulgarian position at all—I couldn't have cared less, and I didn't figure it was any of our business—but because I'd had some experience in this kind of thing, particularly in the South Tyrol-Alto Adige problem between Austria and Italy. In Italy it's called Alto Adige, the upper Adige River. In Austria, it's called the Sud Tyrol, and it's the same area. It was ceded to Italy after the First World War. From an ethnic point of view, it was an outrageous cession, but when you lost a war in those days you were pretty apt to lose territory. Partly from my own efforts, we kept from ever getting deeply involved in that problem. Eventually, they settled it pretty well between themselves. It still flares up occasionally and is still going on today, but at least we didn't get involved in it. I was afraid it sounded like the Department was getting involved in this problem, so I sent a short wire, followed up by a longer letter, saying this, and saying that I was in no sense trying to support the Bulgarian view, but I hoped that this did not mean we were getting involved in this thing. I got back a rather plaintive letter from Davies, in which he seemed to miss the point entirely.

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Q: I don't think anybody who hasn't served in that particular area understands the depth of feeling over something. They're buried so deep and they will explode, so you become very attuned to them. Somebody outside thinks this is one of these petty little quarrels, and it's deeper than that.

TORBERT: No, this is a century-old problem. Anyway, that is the only time I can remember being involved in this. I eventually shut up, because I really didn't care.

Q: One last question about Bulgaria. You were there when we were really putting the pressure on in Vietnam, including bombing. The Bulgarians had ships in the wrong place at Haiphong, and their embassy was damaged during the Christmas raids of '72 in Hanoi. How did this affect you?

TORBERT: We were obviously in a continuous propaganda war with the Bulgarians. Curiously, I don't remember the issue of the damage to the Bulgarian Embassy or property being a serious point with me, I mean, a point that I had to deal with. I can't really remember that clearly enough, but I do remember lots of incidents. About our only form of internal propaganda in Sofia was a show window that we had on the first floor of the embassy, in which we put up exhibits. It was one of the best shows in town, in-so-far as it was right downtown Sofia, and we used to get hundreds and hundreds of people a day to stop and read everything that was in the window, look at it and so on. We did have an exhibit at one time that had to do with our explanation of the bombing of Cambodia, I think, or some bombing that we were doing. I may be confused with the earlier bombings. But it had something to do with that. We got a phone call threatening to bomb the embassy, so I didn't know what to do about this, but I decided that really I had to report it to the foreign office. Although I knew it was a phony, I still did. Immediately they came back and said they would give us police protection, and they immediately stopped all Bulgarian access to the area. They said perhaps if we would not emphasize those rather controversial exhibits we had in the window, we wouldn't have threats like that. Well, obviously I'd fallen into a trap that I couldn't have avoided, so we went along for a few days, and we always changed

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those exhibits every two weeks, anyway. Then I wrote them a letter and said, "You can stop. We think we're safe now. You can stop the extra guards." (Laughter) And they did. This was the kind of little game we were playing all the time.

Q: You were saying there were some other types of trouble you had?

TORBERT: Curiously enough, I had as much trouble with the Marine guards as anything else, because here were a lot of youngsters who were all bachelors and all living there, and they would occasionally take on a little too much. They were all wonderful guys, but we had a couple of automobile accidents, one thing and another, you know. Sadly, somebody was killed on one of them. Then we'd have a terrible time getting the Marines out.

Q: This does raise a point, particularly because we've had some scandals in Moscow, but something that has concerned many people in the Foreign Service, myself included, and that is the use of very young Marines. No matter how well trained, they still are at the heavy drinking, heavy involvement in sex time, usually unmarried. Particularly in places where there's difficulty, we're not really going to use them as combat troops, and maybe somebody a little more mature than using young Marines as our security guards might be better.

TORBERT: The British usually have taken retired warrant officers or some junior officers and put them on this job. I don't know. The Marines have a lot of advantages. I'm certainly not against them. There was a drop-off in the quality at the end of my tour there, once we pulled troops out of Vietnam. Up to that time, going on embassy guard duty was considered sort of a reward for having served in Vietnam. We got people that had had that service and had done all right, survived, and they were a little more mature. Then we suddenly started getting people who were maybe not just recruited, but were a year or two younger and with no really sobering experience under their belt. We had a little more trouble with them then. But it's a question in that kind of a post, to my mind, whether they

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aren't almost more trouble than they're worth, although God knows you've got to have— as long as they confine themselves to the girls in the Western community, the single girls, they served a useful purpose. (Laughter)

Q: This is a bit traditional.

TORBERT: Yes. I'm not anti-Marine at all.

Q: But we're talking about a serious problem of conduct, and young men are young men.

TORBERT: Most of these incidents were accidents. They weren't wild, but they may have had a drink or two. They weren't roaring drunk or anything of that sort, but they were unwise.

Q: This was your last post. You retired.

TORBERT: This was my last post. I looked around. I was over 60 by that time, and Mac Toon, who was by that time ambassador in Yugoslavia said, "Hang on. You can get this post when I go to Moscow," and he didn't go to Moscow right away, anyway, but I didn't see much point in that. So I took one of those magic dates when you got a little extra kick.

Q: This is during a period of inflation and you could retire.

TORBERT: I had no idea it was going to happen that way, but I happily hit into a whole series of these inflation kickers. I did retire on the 31st of January 1973.

Q: You have been conducting these interviews for us, and you know that we ask this question. What do you feel is your greatest personal accomplishment during the time that you were in the Foreign Service?

TORBERT: I think I would have to say that by and large, my greatest skill was as a manager, that is, managing organizations or organizing policy formulations getting

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people to work together and getting somebody else to do my work for me. I had, after all, been trained to be an executive in my education. God knows I didn't have a lot of other qualifications that it takes to be a good diplomat, but I do think that I had some of them, and one is a desire to make people work together and also a willingness to listen to the other guy's point of view, which I've done. So I think that kind of thing. There is no one great achievement that I made, but I did handle a lot of jobs that were ticklish, where things could have gone wrong, and at least nothing absolutely catastrophic did. I remember Tommy Thompson, when he came out of Moscow the second time, was asked to evaluate his tour of duty there. It had been a time of a sinking in relationships a little bit, things had turned cold. He said, "I think my greatest achievement was that I didn't do any positive harm."

Q: Looking at it today, how do you feel about the Foreign Service as a career?

TORBERT: Certainly it seems far less attractive today for a number of reasons, and it's very easy to be an old-timer and say things were better in my day. Of course, I came in at a time of change, too. I came in when it was still the old Foreign Service, but only for a little while, and then changed quite a lot. We were irrevocably changed by the absorption of the military governments, and that sort of thing made a big structural outlook change in the Foreign Service. The women's rights revolution made a tremendous change in the Foreign Service, which in many ways is for the better, but one gets nostalgic about the kind of life that my wife and I put into it. She was as responsible as I, certainly, for any successes I had, and she seemed to enjoy it and got something out of it, but she didn't get much of any of the credit, which I recognize as an injustice. The other great trouble today is the security problem, terrorism and other related things, which require so much encumbrance of security and protection. It's very hard to conduct diplomacy in the traditional way at all. It's hard to get out and see the community. I would have to have some reservations in advising anybody to join the Foreign Service today, although I would still say that you'll never be bored. It's an absolutely fascinating thing. I think we somehow have to make it clear, and this is a very, very hard thing that we all had to do

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all our lives, but we have to make it clear that the best path to interesting jobs and good jobs and influence and sense of accomplishments in the foreign affairs field is through the career service. I think the idea has gotten around, not without justification, that there are a lot of ways to success that are quicker and easier for a bright guy than getting in there and learning the ground work. I certainly came into the Service at a slightly advanced level when I was 35, 36 years old, and there were a hell of a lot of things I didn't know that I should have known or would have known. My languages weren't good. I skipped a lot of the grades. I had some other experience that happened to be very useful to the Service at that time on the management side of the thing. I think it is true, there is so much to know about dealing with other countries, that it's much better to have people who have spent their whole life at it, doing most of the jobs than otherwise. This is the reason why. It isn't just because you're a career diplomat, you should have the right to the big jobs, the ambassadors and the assistant secretaries and other major jobs, but it's because if you don't think the expectation is fairly high of getting that kind of a job, then the best people, the most aggressive, the most hard working, the most intelligent, the most brilliant people are going to look for some other route to get there. Namely, the political route or going down on Capitol Hill or going out and making a million dollars and giving it to a Party and getting an appointment. This is not a new idea; Loy Henderson used to say this to Congress every year on budget hearings. I think we have to reiterate that sort of thing if we want a Foreign Service. If you don't have that, then you really don't have a solid corps of professionals, which every other major power has felt it's necessary to have. I could not in good conscience tell somebody to join the Foreign Service, that it's the absolute best way to get into a fascinating job in the foreign affairs field now. But I would say that it's an interesting way, and at least you get paid regularly. (Laughter)

Q: Tully, thank you very much.

End of interview