

Interview with August Velletri

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

AUGUST VELLETRI

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is February 12, 1993. This is an interview with August Velletri on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Velletri could you give me a feel for your background—when, where you were born, your education, etc.?

VELLETRI: I was born in Ithaca, New York. When my father died I was about two years old and my mother decided to go back to Italy. We were four in my family...my mother and three children. I spent almost 12 years in Italy.

Q: Where in Italy?

VELLETRI: Well, it was south of Rome in towns by the names of Terracina and Fondi, but I spent some time in Albano Laziale, which is right outside of Rome and also near La Spezia where I spent about two years with my uncle. I went to school in Italy and completed the third year of gymnasium. Then I returned to the United States.

Q: You were born in 1916?

VELLETRI: Yes, a long time ago.

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Q: When did you go back to the United States?

VELLETRI: I came back in 1932.

Q: So you were in Italy for part of the Mussolini period.

VELLETRI: Yes. Well, during the march on Rome I was there, but I was very small. But even in these two little towns you could see the trouble between the Socialists and Fascists. They were fighting right in the middle of the streets sometimes. The Socialists were picked up and were given, I remember, large doses of castor oil and marched up and down the main street of the town. It was very embarrassing for them because naturally nature was taking its course. It was tough and many times I had to seek refuge in churches because often I was caught in the middle of these wild confrontations.

Q: How old were you then when you came back?

VELLETRI: I was almost 16.

Q: So you came back to...?

VELLETRI: Ithaca.

Q: What were you doing during that time and the time when you got involved with the Department of State?

VELLETRI: I went to high school there. Then I graduated from high school and went to Cornell for less than a year because I could not afford the high tuition of \$500 a year in those days. So I happened to get a scholarship at the Rice Institute in Houston, Texas. I went there and spent about a year at the Institute, which is now Rice University.

By that time I had an offer to come to Washington by the Securities Exchange Commission which had offered me a job. So I came to Washington and have stayed here ever since.

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From there I went to Dayton, Ohio during the war and then I went to Ohio State and did some graduate work and stayed on a while teaching. Somebody came from the Department of State and offered me a job in INR.

Q: This is when?

VELLETRI: This was in 1949.

Q: You had already done some graduate work on the Christian Democratic Party.

VELLETRI: Yes. I passed my orals but did not present my dissertation.

Q: You then came into INR. What were you dealing with there?

VELLETRI: I was dealing with Italy and the Vatican. At that time, in fact, I went to Rome for three months to get some information to write the NIS (National Intelligence Survey) on the Vatican. Then in 1955 the Wristonization movement...

Q: This was the amalgamation of the Civil Service, which you were in, with the Foreign Service.

VELLETRI: Yes.

Q: Now, I would like to go back to the INR period. You started there dealing with Italy and the Vatican in 1949. This is a very interesting period. One of the most crucial things at that time was the election of 1948. It was an open secret that the Soviets had been pouring money in and we had poured money in, particularly to the Christian Democrats. What was the attitude towards Italian politics, Italy's role and concerns about the Communists in this late forties, early fifties period?

VELLETRI: Strategically Italy occupied a very important place as far as the United States was concerned. I think we really feared a Communist takeover in Italy. That would have

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been a catastrophic occurrence. That was the way we thought at the time. All sorts of money and aid was poured into Italy to prevent it. Of course we worked very closely with the Catholic Party, the Church and the Holy See to prevent the Communists from taking over. The only place in Western Europe where the Communists were in charge was San Marino. If that happened in the rest of Italy it would have been too much. In fact San Marino was taken care of later on. I was in Italy at the time assigned to Rome in the political section and was the liaison officer to monitor the San Marino question.

Q: We will come back to that. How did we view the Communist Party of Italy at the time? Did we feel it was completely under Soviet...?

VELLETRI: Soviet influence and possibly control. I think that it might...a personal view at the time, Togliatti would have been a much better man to work with, but he had people under him like Luigi Longo, for instance, who were very closely allied with the Russians and the Comintern. During the Spanish Civil War Longo played a very important role in Spain on the Communist side. So there was that fear that if Italy went communist, Russia would have gotten a foothold in southern Europe, and this is what we did not want.

Q: How did we view the Christian Democratic Party during that time?

VELLETRI: Well the party was our faithful ally and we accepted its Catholic ideology. We were not worried that it would bring a theological government in Italy.

Q: What was the role of INR in Italian affairs? What did you do?

VELLETRI: We looked at it from the intelligence point of view. I think INR worked very closely with CIA at the time. We did exchange information. I don't think at the time INR had any great input into the policy making.

Q: It was just an analytical tool.

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VELLETRI: Yes. If the analysis put out by INR was accepted and did influence the policy, well then I think that was to some extent incidental.

Q: What about relations with the Vatican in this 1949-55 period?

VELLETRI: There weren't any because, as you remember, the special representative of Roosevelt was withdrawn after the war. There was a gap. During his first campaign for the Presidency, it was rumored that Truman had made a deal with Cardinal Spellman. If the Cardinal could help him get the Catholic vote, Truman, if elected, would sponsor legislation to open up an American diplomatic mission to the Vatican. He won the election, as you well know, and he did present Congress with a bill proposing a diplomatic relationship with the Vatican, but Congress turned it down.

Q: It is hard to recall, but at the time there was great concern of church relations...

VELLETRI: At the time, I believe, The Washington Post was somewhat anti-clerical, and anti-church. Also, there were a number of liberal refugees from Italy, who still were fundamentally anti-clerical and viewed the Christian Democratic Party and the Vatican in a very negative sense. They heard that the Vatican would eventually dominate the Italian political scene.

I think I made a mistake in accepting an assignment in Italy, because at the time, the sending of a Foreign Service officer with antecedents in that particular country was not looked upon favorably.

Q: So the fact you were of Italian background was...

VELLETRI: Of course my assignment was not to the political section of the Embassy but as deputy to the political counselor who headed the Rome Liaison Group.

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Q: We had these different groups. I was in the Dhahran Liaison Group, which was evacuations from the Middle East. You would be doing this with southern Europe.

VELLETRI: This is correct. The Rome Liaison Group was responsible for the evacuation of American citizens in North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East in general during a war. After the Suez War in 1956, I moved into the political section as a political officer.

Q: Did you get involved while in the Rome Liaison Group during the 1956 war in getting people out?

VELLETRI: Oh yes, indeed. Lansing Collins as chairman of the Group, and I worked with Admiral "Cat" Brown, the head of the Sixth Fleet. We tried to "pressure" the Admiral into using the Sixth Fleet to get the Americans out from the Middle East. The Admiral, was somewhat reluctant, because as he was trying to point out, the Sixth Fleet had the primary responsibility of watching the oil fields of Saudi Arabia. He reminded us that he could not spare ships and men to get the Americans out of all those countries affected by the war. Yet, he did help us a great deal.

Q: Well, let's talk about the Christian Democratic Party. Who was the leader of the Party then?

VELLETRI: The principal players in those days were Amintore Fanfani, Segni from Sardinia, and Andreotti.

Q: In later years the bloom is off the Christian Party and the problem of corruption has really surfaced. Were we feeling that at the time or was there a different spirit?

VELLETRI: The political section in Rome was plugging very arduously for an opening to the Left so that the Socialists could join the Government. The decision was made, of course, by President Kennedy. The administration finally accepted the idea of bringing the Socialists and the Christian Democratic Party together. The Socialists at the time were

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in the opposition and had shared no government power since the end of the war. With the assumption of power, however, the Socialists became as corrupt as the Christian Democratic Party. Today we learn that a large number of Socialist leaders are being prosecuted for corruption.

Q: When you first arrived there was Clare Boothe Luce ambassador?

VELLETRI: Yes, I served under her.

Q: What was your impression of her in the role of ambassador?

VELLETRI: Mrs. Luce was a very intelligent woman. However, she was very conservative. Her relationship with the Italians, to some extent, was limited to that sphere in the government where the Rightist people held sway. I did not get along with her at all on this question. But, as I say, she was highly intelligent. She knew what she was doing, except that she had different ideas for Italy. A "left turn" was not to her liking. Eventually she left Italy under a cloud due to reports that she was being poisoned, which was not true.

Q: Was the Embassy then divided with a very conservative ambassador and a political section which was generally looking towards our opening to the Left a bit and all that?

VELLETRI: In my view there was a division.

Q: Who was the political counselor?

VELLETRI: The political counselor, if I remember correctly, was H.G. Torbert. The Minister was Outerbridge Horsey who was opposed to the idea of bringing the Socialists in the government.

Q: Well, this was a very big debate in the United States. This is all very nice but here are people in the United States debating about whether the Socialists should join the

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Christian Democratic government in Italy. What the hell were we doing talking like that? What control did we have over this at that time?

VELLETRI: Well we had a lot of control over Italy, there is no question. The United States had tremendous influence over the Italian government and even the average Italian looked upon the United States with a good deal of admiration and respect. Also, they were thankful for all the material we gave.

Q: Did you have the feeling that some of the Ministers in the Italian government were more or less dependent financially on the largesse of the United States?

VELLETRI: To some extent yes. Of course they did not admit it officially. I felt that our intelligence agencies had penetrated most of the government. They exercised a great deal of influence and gave a lot of money to groups and individuals.

Q: Then you got involved with San Marino. What were we doing in San Marino that you got involved with?

VELLETRI: San Marino had the only communist government in Western Europe. Washington and Rome decided to get rid of it by hiring and arming about 100 retired Carabinieri (Italian National Police) with the aim of dispatching them to “invade” San Marino and overthrow the leftist government. To some extent it was a comic opera but it worked and San Marino was handed over to the Christian Democratic Party.

Q: How did we analyze San Marino at that time? My impression of Italian politics are that people often vote because they are bloody minded rather than...so they might be communists but it has nothing to do solely with ideology.

VELLETRI: San Marino, whether or not it was communist dominated, presented no danger to Italy. The little country is surrounded by Italy and in no position to cause any real

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trouble. At the time however, any communist regime in Western Europe would be a cause of apprehension.

Q: Did you get involved in it?

VELLETRI: Yes, I was the liaison officer in the Embassy. I was following the situation. The Christian Democratic Party member who was involved actually had a desk in my office. He was giving us ideas of what to do and what not to do, etc. These were then passed down to CIA and that was it.

Q: Do you have the feeling that it was our instigation, telling the Christian Democrats to get rid of this thing or did they say they wanted to get rid of it and asked for our help?

VELLETRI: That I do not know.

Q: Then let's move to Vatican relations. When did you start this and how long were you dealing with that in Italy? What had the situation been prior to your taking over?

VELLETRI: Well, as I said, Roosevelt's personal representative, Taylor, left Rome after the war and all diplomatic contact with the Vatican was cut off. Pius XII was a true diplomat and refused to do business with the American Embassy because he always felt that the American Embassy was accredited to the state of Italy. Pius insisted on an Embassy official duly accredited to the Vatican if the U.S. wished to maintain any contact with him.

Q: There was a strong anti-Catholic Church feeling at the time in the United States.

VELLETRI: Especially in the south.

Q: They felt that the Pope was a subversive element, etc.

VELLETRI: Today I read that some religious people in the South are asking President Clinton not to appoint an ambassador to the Holy See. Suspicion of the Vatican still exists.

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With the departure of Taylor establishing contact with the Vatican was done through the Vatican Secretary of State. At the time this office was headed by a substitute Secretary of State whose name was Dell'Acqua. Archbishop Dell'Acqua was assisted by Iginio Cardinale, a second cousin of mine.

Q: Who was Iginio Cardinale?

VELLETRI: He was born in this country. His parents who had emigrated to this country early in the 1900's returned to Italy during the depression. I knew him in Italy when he came back. We were just about the same age. In fact, he was teaching me some English at the time because I had forgotten all my English. Lansing Collins, the political counselor learned about my relationship with Cardinale and he thought I might be of some use in renewing State-Vatican contacts. There was, of course, Pius's initial reluctance to allow this sort of informal diplomacy, but I was told by Cardinale that Pius had been won over by Archbishop Dell'Acqua. CIA objected to all this but their objection was dismissed by Robert Murphy.

Q: Oh, yes.

VELLETRI: As you know, he was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and had the authority to decide in favor of the Embassy.

Q: What were we getting out of it and what were we getting out of these conversations?

VELLETRI: I used to meet with Dell'Acqua twice a week and we talked about American policies; worldwide and also towards Italy. Dell'Acqua kept us informed about the problems Italy was experiencing in Italy as well as in other countries. I think the situation worked to our mutual satisfaction. I cannot tell you in detail what was discussed at the time, but there is a record in the Department of State as well as in the Vatican archives.

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Q: I am sure. Looking back on it how valuable did you find the Vatican approach to things? Did they have a good intelligence service? Did they have a different view of the world than we did or not?

VELLETRI: The “intelligence” was provided primarily by the Bishops throughout the world. The Bishop, as I understand, is required every three or four years, maybe five, I don't know exactly, to inform the Vatican on the political, economic and social conditions in his diocese. Probably, the various orders, like the Jesuits, may also provide some intelligence.

Q: What were we getting out of this? Were we finding out things that we could use?

VELLETRI: I don't know what the Department was doing with it. I have no idea. But I do know that the Church was our ally, not only in Italy, but in other countries where Church influence was considerable. To that extent if the Department knew what the Church was thinking in general or in particular, it benefitted us to a great extent.

When Pius XII died, the Cardinals organizing the consistory which elected John XXIII, invited Cardinal Mindszenty, who was “our guest” in our Embassy in Budapest, to come to Rome to participate in the elections. The Embassy had also made a suggestion to the Vatican to invite Mindszenty knowing full well that Vatican was not happy with Mindszenty living in our Embassy.

Q: Yes, he was a pain to everyone, including the people in our Embassy.

VELLETRI: He also was a source of irritation. The Vatican was interested in maintaining proper relations with Hungary. They could not appoint Bishops, train priests, etc. The Vatican was interested in the welfare of the Catholic Church generally, and Mindszenty was interested in Mindszenty. He was still dreaming of being the Primate of Hungary and claimed that under the old constitution he was the legitimate leader of Hungary. They tried to get him out of there by inviting him to the Consistory. He accepted provided that he was guaranteed passage back to the Embassy. The government of Hungary refused to do that.

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The Hungarians also wanted him out of the Embassy and out of Hungary. Unfortunately it was not the course of action which would be approved by Under Secretary, Robert Murphy. When Mr. Murphy came to Rome, accompanying Eisenhower on his last visit before he left the Presidency, Mr. Murphy told us that the idea of getting the Cardinal out of Hungary was not a wise course of action since the Department was looking upon Mindszenty's movement out of the Embassy as a bargaining chip in our relationship with Hungary. Mindszenty would be pulled out if the Hungarians made some concessions. We tolerated Mindszenty. He apparently was useful.

Q: We must have been reporting back to Washington what was going on?

VELLETRI: yes.

Q: But nobody told you don't...?

VELLETRI: Nobody told us anything.

Q: You left Rome when?

VELLETRI: I left in 1960.

Q: You came back to Washington again?

VELLETRI: Yes. I had a series of jobs in NATO Affairs and then was assigned to the Italian Desk. Then I was in Personnel and finally I was sent to Greece.

Q: You went to Greece when?

VELLETRI: In 1964.

Q: What were you doing in Greece at that time?

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VELLETRI: I was again in the political section and dealing with the government on UN affairs. Whenever there was a problem in the UN and we sought the support of Greece, I was there to go to the Foreign Office and explain what the situation was. I also handled labor and the church.

Q: You were in Athens from 1964 to 1969.

VELLETRI: Yes.

Q: You were there during a critical period in Greek affairs.

VELLETRI: Yes. There was a coup and a counter coup by the King which failed. We settled in for a long period with the Colonels.

Q: When you arrived in 1964, who was the Ambassador?

VELLETRI: The Ambassador was Henry Labouisse who was replaced by Phillips Talbot in 1965.

Q: What was your impression of Phillips Talbot who was there most of the time you were there? I am talking about how he ran the Embassy and how he did things. This is important to get a feel for the time.

VELLETRI: He was not a very forceful administrator or a forceful ambassador. Apart from that, I don't know. I made a few trips with him outside the Embassy and these contacts made me think that a different Ambassador could have done more to prevent the Colonels from taking over.

Q: What was the political situation at this time? The coup took place on April 21, 1967. You got there in mid-64. What was the situation before the coup?

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VELLETRI: Greece was governed by the senior Papandreou, an experienced and, I believe, a not too radical politician. Ejections were to take place in 1967 and the U.S. was very much interested in the results of these elections. Since the young Papandreou (Andreas) was conducting what appeared to be a very successful political campaign, with definite anti-American nuances, the Embassy had a particular interest in the elections.

Q: This was George Papandreou.

VELLETRI: Yes, the father of Andreas. There was a strong possibility that George Papandreou might be elected, and that his son, Andreas may play a prominent role in any future Government. The prospect of a Papandreou Government pushed the Colonels to take over.

Q: Well, there was concern about Andreas Papandreou particularly. I think George was beginning to fail.

VELLETRI: I believe so.

Q: How did you find your relations with the Greek government regarding UN and Church affairs, etc.

VELLETRI: The Greeks were very supportive even under the George Papandreou government. It was not George who was feared but his son, Andreas and his anti-Americanism, etc., which, I think was just a policy ploy to get elected. Before the Colonels, the Foreign Office had been very supportive of us. I never had any problems with it.

Q: What about the Church, the Orthodox Church? Did you find it quite a different Church to deal with than the Catholic Church?

VELLETRI: Yes, indeed.

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Q: Could you tell me why?

VELLETRI: The Orthodox Church in Greece was not as sophisticated as the Catholic Church. They had problems getting good clergymen. In general, the priests and monks were not well educated. Most of the vocations came from rural areas. Urban areas such as Athens and Thessaloniki, however, had their share of well rounded Papas.

Q: The Papas being the father.

VELLETRI: Yes. As I said the Papas left something to be desired. I found this also in Mt. Athos, which I visited for a few days. A shortage of monks was restricting the activities of the various monasteries. One could see that the monasteries were deteriorating.

I think the Orthodox Church took the position that it had nothing to fear because its position in the community was very well established. After all, it had survived 400 years of Turkish occupation. Despite all its problems the Church still exercises a good deal of influence.

Q: Then moving back to the political scene, did you find the political section, just before the coup, somewhat at odds with the Ambassador?

VELLETRI: I don't remember that there was any debate going on between the senior officers and the more junior officers in the political section. I think they were pretty much on target during the campaign preceding the elections. The coup, however, came as a big surprise to all of us. Even the CIA was not prepared by this turn of events. Some of the officers didn't even know who this "fellow Papadopoulos" was.

Q: What were you doing and what were you doing immediately after the coup?

VELLETRI: I just carried on as usual although my job was not affected by the dictatorship and my relationship with the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Labor or the trade unions did

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not change. But I think we should have made known to them that we didn't like their way of doing things. We didn't like their government, yet we tolerated them too much. I remember periodically we went before Congress and told them that elections in Greece were coming soon. We could see the light of democracy at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. We did for a hell of a long time. What I was doing with the Foreign Office, nothing changed. Nothing changed with my relationship with the Foreign Office. I still kept in touch with the Ministry of Labor and the various trade unions (of course, there was very little trade unionism in Greece—the AFL-CIO and what few organizations existed, were kept alive by donations that usually ended up in the pockets of the so-called trade unionists).

After the coup it was Ambassador Talbot who asked me to “take over the Church and see what is going on.” Well, the Church went along with the coup.

Q: It was the conservative Colonels who were very religious in a conservative sense.

VELLETRI: So I believe.

Q: You left in 1969. Where did you go?

VELLETRI: In 1969 the Department asked me to go to Peshawar to close the Consulate. So I came back to Washington for two weeks of consultations. I was told, “Take a year and close the place.” I went to Peshawar in the summer of 1969 and in early 1970 the air station (Badaber) was closed.

Q: This was the air station. Peshawar was in Pakistan.

VELLETRI: Yes. Twenty-five miles from the border of Afghanistan. I did not know anything about that area. Everything was new. But I was curious and interested. After about six months I didn't think the Consulate should be closed. I reminded the Department that if the Consulate should be closed, it probably could never be opened again, especially since the Pakistani government did not like the idea of having an American presence in that

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area. Peshawar was very near to a sensitive area. Finally, with the help of Ambassador Neumann in Afghanistan and Ambassador Farland in Islamabad, I was able to dissuade the Department from closing the Consulate.

Q: Well, you were there how long?

VELLETRI: From 1969 to 1973.

Q: You say it was near a sensitive area. What were you doing there?

VELLETRI: The Consulate was open in order to service the personnel of the American Air Force "listening post". After the closing of the station, however, the Department decided the Consulate was no longer needed. I felt, that from a political point of view it was useful. The operation was costing the U.S. about \$75,000 a year. We were very near the tribal area; we were near Afghanistan and the Soviet Union had an interest in the area, an interest which became quite evident later, when they invaded Afghanistan.

Q: How did you deal with the local Pakistani authorities?

VELLETRI: Our relations were very good indeed. Also you must remember that Peshawar was the location where the air force of Pakistan was based. It was the Headquarters of the Air Force. Peshawar was also the headquarters of one of the reserve military divisions. Whenever we saw the movement of that division, then you knew something was going on. It was a very interesting place. You wanted to know what the heck the tribes were doing. What was their relationship with the Pakistani or Afghan government? Was anybody fomenting any trouble?

Q: How could you tell?

VELLETRI: Well, we had some sources of information. Our number one local employee was a Pakistani, an ex-colonel in the Pakistani army, who knew the area very well. He came from Chitral. Of course, I was not allowed to go into the tribal area...the government

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didn't allow us to do that. But from time to time we sneaked in. We did talk to tribal chiefs, etc.

Q: Were you there during one of the India-Pak wars?

VELLETRI: Yes, the 1971 war.

Q: How did that impact on you?

VELLETRI: The only aspect of the war that touched us was the air war. Two or three Indian planes flew into Peshawar, but caused no damage. They were shot down immediately and they never tried it again. They tried, I remember, to destroy the bridge over the Indus as you go from the Frontier into the Islamabad area. They missed it all the time. It was a war period and we had to maintain a certain discretion, not too many lights, etc. Our servants had dug a little ditch for us just in case we were bombed. But nothing happened.

Q: Who was your Ambassador?

VELLETRI: Farland.

Q: How did you find him?

VELLETRI: He was very, very interesting. He was, of course, a Republican, a political appointee. He relied a great deal on his DCM, who was a professional.

Q: Who was that?

VELLETRI: Oh, it was Sid Sober.

Q: We also have an oral interview with him.

VELLETRI: He was the officer who ran the Embassy.

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Q: But you felt that you were getting pretty good support from the Embassy?

VELLETRI: The Embassy left me alone. They couldn't do anything. In fact they were worried about my security. One day the Embassy security officer came to inspect the premises and to warn me that there was nothing that could be done to improve the situation. The Security Officer reminded me that the jeep was wired to make a lot of noise...in the event of trouble, I was to instruct my driver to activate the siren and speed as fast as he could. That was the amount of security that I had apart from a 45 which was left at the Consulate by one of my predecessors.

Q: I suppose in the practical sense that was about all they could do anyway. Did you have any problems during the war with a Pakistani mob or anything like that?

VELLETRI: No. There were a couple of instances of mob demonstrations against the USIA under General Yahya.

Q: Yahya Khan?

VELLETRI: Yes, Yahya Khan. We had some students who demonstrated in front of the USIS library which was a distance from us. But apart from that, the Consulate did not experience any hostile demonstrations. In fact, the Consulate was situated near the Pakistani army barracks and army intelligence which was always watching us very carefully, would also see to it that we were protected.

Q: Was there much political activity in your area at that time?

VELLETRI: Yes, the Moslem League was active and so was the Awami Party which struggled for political autonomy. The North West Frontier Province, like Baluchistan and Sindh, was always pushing for some kind of autonomy, but the central government refused to surrender any centralized power. This was unfortunate, because if the provinces could have been granted some local autonomy and been able to raise some taxes, administer

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their own educational and judicial system, like the states in our country, Pakistan would have avoided a great many internal problems.

Q: Then you finished your tour in 1973. What happened then?

VELLETRI: I came back here and after a great deal of difficulty finding a job, I decided to retire. I felt that if I could not contribute in any meaningful manner, it was useless to remain in the Department.

Q: Well, this is always one of the great problems. I went through the same thing. I think most people in the Foreign Service do. They come back at a more senior grade and it is hard to find a job in Washington.

VELLETRI: I was at an age that made it difficult for the Department to send me abroad. I also had heart problems at the time. So I told myself that my relationship with the Department was at an end. However, in 1976 I opened and operated BookMakers, a shop selling bookbinding supplies to individuals, universities and museums. A story on this second career was the subject of an article in The Washington Post Sunday magazine section as well as The DACOR Bulletin, September 1990 and State, December 1990.

Q: I appreciate it very much what you have given me here.

VELLETRI: Well, it isn't very much.

Q: Oh, there are some very interesting aspects. Thank you.

August Velletri, too successful, retires again

August Velletri, a Foreign Service officer who retired in 1974, used to collect Italian political books—until they were badly damaged in a Pakistani monsoon. This led him into a new career as a bookbinder and restorer and now, a success in business, he has retired again.

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“After my last assignment in Peshawar,” he says, “my books were packed into a wooden box, then stored in a warehouse in Karachi to await delivery to the States. The monsoon flooded the warehouse and ruined them. The books were irreplaceable, so I decided it was good to learn how to fix them.”

Back in Washington, Mr. Velletri took a class in bookbinding and worked for two years as apprentice to a friend who was chief conservator at the Library of Congress. “We were having trouble getting supplies—the closest place was New York,” he recalls. “I went to the lady in New York who owned the supply store and suggested we open a store in Washington. She said no, so I decided to do it myself. I took a course on bookkeeping for small businesses, and I opened a little shop called BookMakers in the Parklane Building on 21st and I Streets. I was making a profit in three months.”

Mr. Velletri sold BookMakers earlier this year. He explains: “The business was getting too big for me. I used to run it myself with the help of part-time employees, and my wife kept the books. I would have had to hire more people. I felt that I wasn't up to it—I'm 73 and I wanted to enjoy myself.”

Since retiring for the second time, he has been helping the new owner of BookMakers and working on his original project—restoring the books damaged by the monsoon. When asked if he misses the State Department, he says: “Once I left the Foreign Service, I didn't want to work in any field that resembled it. I enjoyed the Service, but I thought, why keep the umbilical cord tied? I'd had my day and made my contribution. I was ready to let the next generation do its work.”

Mr. Velletri also served in Rome and in Athens.

—Donna Gigliotti, State, December 1990

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End of interview