

Interview with Eugene Kern and Edward Goldberger

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

EUGENE KERN AND EDWARD GOLDBERGER

Interviewed by: Claude “Cliff” Groce

Initial interview date December 12, 1986

Copyright 2000 ADST

Eugene Kern and Edward Goldberger were men who joined Voice of America in its earliest days. This interview is somewhat helter-skelter as to continuity, but it presents an interesting picture of the chaotic period through which the Voice went in getting organized for overseas broadcasting as America girded for the war effort in early 1942. It also offers a glimpse of the equally chaotic conditions that were prevalent during the misguided effort of Congress to turn over overseas broadcasting to the commercial networks in 1947, the recognition that this was an error, and the return of that function to VOA in 1948. Along the way, there is a glimpse of (1) the McCarthy period, with the rise of the sarcastically labeled “Loyal American Underground” — a group of disgruntled and in some cases, convinced right wing zealot employees at the Voice who reported clandestinely to McCarthy operatives, fingering certain VOA colleagues as alleged left wingers deserving dismissal from Federal Service; (2) a history; (3) origin of the high quality, highly successful American Theater of the Air; (4) and finally, the reactions of these old timers to suggestions that the Voice be made an independent agency.

Q: How did you get started with the Voice of America? Gene, you first.

Library of Congress

KERN: On April 20, 1942, I went over to Madison Avenue. I heard there was an outfit that was going to do radio broadcasting connected with the war, and they were hiring engineers, I was told by a friend of mine who was an engineer. I hadn't been employed as a radio engineer but I had done some engineering work in Philadelphia, and ham radio. As I started to fill out the forms — the engineering department was orderly, unlike the other part of the operation; they made you fill out forms first and then they would talk — he saw that I had used the name of Houseman who I had worked for in the Mercury Theater of the Air. He said, "If you know Houseman you ought to go talk to him, you seem to have more experience in that sort of line than in engineering." I said, "Where is he?" and he said, "Right next door". And I did, and he greeted me with open arms and put me right to work. I took off my coat and he introduced me first to a man named Werner Michel, a Viennese, full of energy, bouncing, who handed me a stopwatch and said, "Gut, I need someone to produce the 2 o'clock Finnish show. Over there are the Finns, here's the script. It's a 15-minute show; make sure they get on and off at a certain time." I said, "I don't understand a word of Finnish." He said, "Who does? Just make sure they get off on time." So that was my introduction, and within an hour or two after I had walked into the place I had produced my first show. So that was how it all started there. It was a wild place. Every week a new language service began. And then I was asked by Houseman to announce on the English shows, the news shows, in addition to producing. It wasn't until a few days later that it occurred to me to ask about the pay, and I did ask Houseman, and he said, "How do I know, talk to so-and-so," and I talked to this lady and the next thing I knew I was given papers to fill out and told I would have to be investigated to make sure I was loyal. I filled out the forms and brought them back in — meanwhile we continued working all the time — and I found out I was something in civil service called a CAF-7 and was paid \$50 a week. Later on I decided that wasn't enough and started agitating for more when I found out that others were getting higher rates, and that was a long procedure.

Q: And you, Eddie?

Library of Congress

GOLDBERGER: In a way, I suppose my entry into the organization was equally informal, although I wasn't dumped onto a show right away. I was working at WNYC, and I was getting increasingly unhappy. I knew Houseman because I had worked for and with him at the Mercury Theater, so I went up and talked to him about a job. I didn't hear anything for four or five weeks, and it's entirely possible that they were doing an investigation, because I was never aware of an investigation afterwards. But in any case, what happened was, I got a letter from a man with whom I had worked, who'd been program director at WNYC and was now working with Elmer Davis at the OWI in Washington, asking whether or not I'd thought about going to work for the OWI. So I wrote him back and said I'd been up to talk to Houseman but I hadn't heard anything. About a week or so after that I got a call to come up right away, on a Saturday. The weather was awful and I had a hangover, but I went up and filled out the forms, with a post office pen, and on Monday I went to work. I worked with the Features Division, with no idea of what my classification was or how much I was going to be paid: it was \$50 a week. I was delighted to get it. I think they were talking to anybody who wanted a job, and in addition to that they were looking for people, that is, actively, especially with languages. Don't forget that before the war CBS had, and I think NBC did too, a kind of rudimentary shortwave operation, and it may be that they delved into that for some of their language people.

KERN: I wasn't aware of that.

GOLDBERGER: They did. They used those transmitters they had.

KERN: Life at VOA in those days was full of atmosphere. From my standpoint, the production standpoint, there were three key players, a triumvirate: Houseman, Werner Michel, and Connie Ernst. They really ran the place, and organized it. However, other key people were the heads of the language services. Some of them were great artists and famous newspapermen; I remember Lou Galantiere and so many others. Bill Hale was in charge of the German Service. The recruiting was on two levels. On the one hand, you had a lot of talented artists — writers, professional actors and directors and so on, who

Library of Congress

wanted to do something for the war effort, and who were attracted to Houseman because he had been quite successful already in the theater. And on the other hand, you had the recruiting for the language services, where you had to get staffs.

GOLDBERGER: You also had privates, what the British call “other ranks.” Like me, very low —

KERN: And like me, who came in on their own, because they wanted a job, and wanted to do something connected with the war. We were not sought out.

GOLDBERGER: People like Lewis Galantiere, for instance, were probably recruited personally by Houseman and Sherwood because of their own reputations. And somebody like Galantiere would know who to go to for French-speaking people.

KERN: On the Ace show (America Calling Europe), incidentally, almost all the people were from the Mercury Theater, as I remember them.

GOLDBERGER: I worked on the news desk. Dorothy van Doren was the head of the news desk and we had on the desk Howard Fast, who by that time was a successful writer; Hillel Bernstein, who had been a star on the international Paris Herald, and who had been writing for the New Yorker since he came back after the Germans took over Paris; Henry Denker was on the news desk — a whole bunch of other guys. These were stars, and I was just a character.

KERN: Besides the news division, we had a production division, which produced all the shows in all the languages, since it was believed that the foreign language people didn't know how to get themselves on the air. So there was a production division that was fundamentally in charge, with Michel as the head man. Then you had the supporting services. You had Broadcast Control, which was Policy, and very soon they decided they needed a Monitoring Service to listen to what went on the air, to check that what went on the air was what was supposed to go on the air, and nothing else.

Library of Congress

GOLDBERGER: There was a unit for features and commentary while I was in it but what happened after I went back to the news division I have no idea.

KERN: It developed very quickly. We did a variety of programs. For example, I know that in the first year I was there I did two music shows. I did something called Jazz in America — just announced it — it was written by two experts. It was a daily 15-minute show. The other was GI Jive, and both were primarily for American GIs overseas. They were also considered a part of the audience of the Voice of America.

GOLDBERGER: Just as I was writing a news show for them.

KERN: We did special shows. I once produced Jack Benny on a special for the armed forces, and several others.

Q: How did the day-to-day system operate?

GOLDBERGER: Let me tell you about Broadcast Control and how a news broadcast worked. When you came in to work, you were expected to look through the guidance, which came from “upstairs,” but presumably that office got it from Washington — the State Department, another office of OWI, I don't know where. The policy people at VOA were empowered to make policy decisions. So you read the guidance; it was just a page. Then of course you looked through the previous shows and you sat down with whatever news items you had and wrote the show. When you finished writing the show, it went to a local editor. He took it upstairs to Broadcast Control before it went to the broadcasters. Then when you were finished for the day, you sat down and wrote a report, listing every item you had used on the broadcasts. Both the script and the report were on this awful purple ditto stuff. The script that you wrote went upstairs to Broadcast Control on ditto before it was run off to be okayed by them before you could broadcast it.

Library of Congress

Q: Were there military people around to guarantee coordination between what the PsyWar (psychological warfare) operations were doing and what VOA was doing?

KERN: The military were around the place in the beginning when it was still the Coordinator's office, but after it became VOA and OWI I just don't know.

Q: How did the managers of the Voice view its role in the early days — primarily to demoralize the enemy, to encourage and support the morale of allied peoples and keep up the hopes of people in occupied Europe and the Far East?

GOLDBERGER: I think they'd be damn fools if they didn't consider both of those things.

KERN: Both of them, yes. (With regard to PsyWar) VOA was not involved at the beginning-

GOLDBERGER: I think the PsyWar operation part of it came later, when we actually had troops overseas, and the OWI began to send its own people overseas, and operations like ABSIE, for instance — the American Broadcasting Station in Europe — then the PsyWar operation was involved. Although Howard Maier talked about having done some —

KERN: I had to go out and do some lectures once at a place on Long Island—

GOLDBERGER: The training center for people going overseas. There's a novel of Jerome Weidman's — he was one of the people involved in that part of the operation.

KERN: It was more an OSS type thing, and it went to OSS, which eventually took over all those operations. (Discussion of the “moronic little king” affair, in which Kern notes that Houseman, in his memoirs, blames the head of the Italian Service for running the piece.)

KERN: There was free wheeling in the language services to a certain extent. Broadcast Control tried to keep them in line, but just like in the Voice today, and in all the years we've known it, the East European language services always wanted a harder line and would

Library of Congress

do it on their own to whatever extent they could. So you had in the early years language services that were very active and that wanted to get in there and fight.

GOLDBERGER: Also, you have to remember this: policy is one thing, Broadcast Control is another. You have to think of Broadcast Control like the idiots who used to say, for instance, "You can't say of a particular government that it's a government, you have to say it's a regime. In other words, they're fighting over words, whereas policy is a very different thing.

KERN: The first time I had any direct contact with Broadcast Control was later, about 1945 when I came back from the West Coast and went back to work for the Voice and I did some live broadcasting from the UN at Lake Success, on both VOA and WYNC simultaneously, and sometimes we'd get on for six, eight, ten hours at a stretch there. And after I got out of that, which was a terrible ordeal every day, I decided I wanted to write a recap, a summary of the day's events, which I wrote. Then I had to present it to Broadcast Control.

(Discussion of absence of the two, Kern at the Los Angeles Overseas Bureau of the OWI and Goldberger in the army, till after the war was over — Kern returning to VOA in 1945, Goldberger in 1946.)

KERN: I came back for another job, a job in commercial radio, and when that petered out I went up to see Michel — I think Hotchner was then in charge of production — and I was rehired there. The feeling as to how long it would last — nobody knew.

GOLDBERGER: I came back in April of 1946 and went back to the Voice some time in the summer.

KERN: You worked for Howard Maier for a long time, didn't you?

Library of Congress

GOLDBERGER: Howard wasn't there. What happened was, I came back and talked to Bob Ross and Muc Delgado, who were running a documentary dramatics unit, and I also talked to Joe Marx, who was the head of news. I had worked with Joe on the news desk, and Bob and I had worked together in features, but I had known Bob before that when he first started to write radio scripts and they came to us at WNYC. So I talked to both of them about a possible job. It turns out they both wanted me, and I finally had a choice, so I picked the dramatics documentary unit.

Q: What happened when most VOA broadcasts were turned over to the commercial networks?

GOLDBERGER: They took all except a few languages away and gave them to the networks in 1947, including English, but the networks made a hash of it. When it came up for the usual Congressional inquisition — and let me tell you, in those days it was really an inquisition — some of the scripts, especially NBC's, were so god-awful that Congress reluctantly allowed all the languages to come back to the Voice.

(When the transfer was made in 1947) I can tell you how it was carried out. It was a RIF. There was a massacre. NBC and CBS hired a number of the people, but they also used some of their own people.

KERN: They wanted to get rid of it as quickly as they could.

GOLDBERGER: Barry (Zorthian) came from CBS; he never worked for us. And Jerry Theise worked for CBS, and when the thing came back some of those people were hired by the Voice. In 1946, the dramatics documentary unit was just a small unit; it was just beginning to add people. It had originally been three people — Muc, Bob Ross, and Elizabeth Lomax — and they gradually began to add people until there were about six.

We were primarily writing for the English service, broadcasting 16 hours or more a day at that time. We continued that way, but Muc became program director and he took Bob

Library of Congress

Ross along with him, and Howard Maier came to be the head of the unit. Howard had been at the Voice during the war, and was called up, was drafted, and when he came back from the army he came back to the Voice again. We had a series that was translated into German. It was a daily serial. We dramatized novels, we dramatized stories. (This was in 1946, before the transfer of VOA broadcasts to NBC and CBS.)

In June or July of 1947, Howard came downstairs and said, "You're fired, you're fired, you're fired." What was left were the veterans, and we became a unit writing features. There were maybe four of us by that time. And we wrote short features, five-minute talks and other features that were supposed to be used by the various languages. Lowell Clucas's unit was called features and commentary or some such — maybe Talks and Features, as it was called after the move to Washington years later; we were the features part of it. This continued all during that year when VOA was down to its absolute basic East European broadcasting — no English

Q: What about Russian?

GOLDBERGER: Russian began in the spring of 1948 under Charlie Thayer and Nikki Nabokov. They recruited the way we must have recruited in the beginning. They went out and grabbed as many people as they could — people Nabokov knew, people from Novy Mir. The initial reaction of the Embassy to the broadcasts — in long screeds that would come on the telex — was: they hated it. They really gave them very bad reviews, worse than Frank Rich in the New York Times. So they decided they had to send somebody up there to try to help them out, and my kind boss Howard Maier volunteered me; I really had no choice. So I went upstairs and sat in the office next to Bob Ross, and down the road a little piece were Thayer and Nabokov. Now understand, I couldn't read Russian; I couldn't understand Russian. As far as Thayer and Nabokov went, they really didn't want to have me there. And I didn't want to be there! So I did what I could, which was largely to talk with the writers, and to go over scripts with them, as best I could. What they were doing was Russian radio. I showed them how to break it up into voices, how to use different things in

Library of Congress

their programs, and so forth. This went on for, I guess, about two months, and every time I ran into Muc I would ask him when he was going to spring me from this job.

KERN: Eddie reminds me of something that's really very important. Up until the days when the Voice started, radio was just one voice reading the news. It was Houseman and Michel and Ernst who started this idea of using more than one voice on the same show. And when the first VOA show went on, the German show, it was a multi-voice show. And from that time on, all news shows had more than one voice — as many as you could afford. Sometimes we were down to only two voices, but always it was a multi-voice show. It was a new technique.

GOLDBERGER: Anyway, after about a month or so, the reports began to get better from the Embassy, and after two or two and a half months they were good enough so that I could convince Muc to let me go back to work for Howard Maier. After that I kept in touch with some of the people from the Russian Service but I didn't have to handle that any more. Then what happened was that NBC blotted its copybook in 1948 and Congress decided that maybe it was a mistake to let the networks handle this stuff because they didn't know how to do it. And so they sent the languages back to the Voice — including English. And Gene was put in charge of the English show.

KERN: Let me tell you how that came about. Before they came back to us, I thought we should broadcast in English, and I sold somebody — I think it was Bob Ross — on the idea that I would do, myself, a daily 15-minute English show, later expanded to a half-hour. Alone. I had to write it — I got the news from the newspeople — and do the transitions and everything else, and find some feature somewhere and put it in, and put on a half-hour show every day. It didn't last very long, and it wasn't very good, I can assure you. Just about that time the operation was returned, and then, because I had done that, I was put in charge of the English show.

Library of Congress

GOLDBERGER: And he went looking for people. So once again my kind boss Howard Maier lent me to Gene Kern. He'd already lent me to the Russians, he'd lent me twice to the news desk when they needed somebody to fill in, once because of vacations and once because of a flap. Do you remember that woman who jumped out the window from the Russian consulate? Well, I was on vacation, and that son-of-a-bitch Maier tracked me down to tell me I had to come back, and to start on the night shift on the news desk right away. Fortunately I was working with two very nice people on that overnight, but still this was a loan. And then I was lent to Gene.

General Barmine didn't come aboard until later. I guess it was 1948. He wasn't there at the beginning of the Russian Service. But the Service had some very good people. Nikki Nabokov was a musician but a very bright guy — Vladimir Nabokov's cousin.

KERN: Was (Eddie) Raquello the producer of the Russian show at that time?

GOLDBERGER: I'm not sure he was the first, but he came in very soon, and if the reports from Moscow got better it was not because of what I did; it was probably because of what Eddie did.

KERN: He came very early into the Voice. He had worked with the Lunts and for Sherwood, and Sherwood got him in.

GOLDBERGER: I've heard that he first came to the United States as Pola Negri's leading man.

KERN: In late 1942 or early '43 we started doing a variety of things of a feature type, and interviews. I remember once being sent up to the Waldorf with an engineer and what was then called portable equipment, which took two people to carry, to interview Madame Chiang Kai-shek. And I did. Houseman had written all the questions out. And it was really quite an experience. She was a dictator in the strongest terms. She had a beautiful, flowery suite there, a lot of attendants, a lot of servants, whom she would scream at. It was

Library of Congress

the most undemocratic type of thing you ever saw in your life. And I took an instant dislike to this woman. We got the interview, but it was a shocker.

Another time I was told to do a recording — a statement, not an interview — with Charlie Chaplin, for the troops. We did a lot of work for the troops at the Voice. And Charlie Chaplin comes in, with a script which he had written himself. He went into the studio and sat down, and I asked if he wanted to rehearse, and he said “Oh, no, let's try and do it, and if you don't like it we'll do it again.” He started to do it, and he couldn't get past two or three lines. This brilliant man, reading his own script, could not read it into the microphone. He was so disturbed by it, but so nice about it, finally I said, “Let's try it again,” and we tried it again. He said, “Wait a minute; I have an idea. You take my script and I'll just talk.” He did, and it was absolutely perfect. One take, that's all there was to it. He was simply not used to reading a script; he had never read a script. He was always improvising as he went.

GOLDBERGER: Let me tell you how we worked on the news desk. I told you that in the Features Division I worked a 44 hour week for the first time in my life. Things were very different on the news desk. At the beginning, I was on the overnight shift, midnight to 8 o'clock in the morning. That meant that you got in there somewhere between 10:30 and 11 o'clock at night, sat down and read all the copy that had come in during the day, plus the guidance, and then you went to work. You got finished, theoretically, at 8 o'clock in the morning, and then you sat down and wrote out your report on what you had done during the night. So you were there from, say, 10:30 at night until at least 9 o'clock in the morning.

During that time the one thing that always fascinated me were the announcers. This was all night long, an English language broadcast every hour; 15 minutes. They would come down, pick up their scripts, do a rehearsal, go upstairs and do the show, then they would go to a little room where there were beds. And they would stretch out for half an hour or whatever was available to them, and then do the whole thing over again. Most of them — and this was the shock to me, because I knew a couple of them — most of them were

Library of Congress

working regular shifts at radio stations. Melvin Elliot, for instance, was working a regular daytime shift at WQXR. Then he would come in and do this.

KERN: Speaking of working around the clock, I started work on April 20 in 1942. I didn't have a day off for a month, and I went to Werner Michel and said, "I've got to have a weekend off." He said, "Why?!" And I said, "Because I'm getting married." He said, "I'll give you Saturday morning, how's that?" I finally got the whole day Saturday out of him. That's all. Sunday morning I had to get back to work.

GOLDBERGER: When I worked at WNYC, my normal working day in the winter time was from 8 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock at night, when we went off the air. In the summer time, however, we were on the air until ten o'clock at night, and I had no regular day off. I always worked Sundays — and this was before the war started. When I was at the Mercury Theater I had Sundays off. I worked from 10 o'clock in the morning till the show was over.

Q: What was the impact on your news operation when the AP and the UP cut off service suddenly in 1947 or '48?

GOLDBERGER: During the summer of 1948, when I worked on the news desk on the overnight, we relied pretty heavily on the New York Times. We were writing mostly for the China Service because that's what was broadcasting at night.

(Discussion of expansion under Campaign of Truth and Korean War pressures.)

Q: Were you personally affected by the McCarthy investigation of the Voice?

KERN: I got peripherally involved in it, not directly. Were you (EG) directly involved?

GOLDBERGER: Yes and no. Yes, to the extent that the whole English Service, of which I was supposedly the head at that time, got eliminated. And yes, in the sense that some

Library of Congress

time in late 1953 I was asked to come down and talk to the security guy about certain questions that were the result of the investigation. But that's all.

KERN: The McCarthy inquisition at the Voice is a period in itself. Kretzmann summarizes it very well in his article in the Foreign Service Journal. From my standpoint, I was working for Puhan, who was the Program Manager, as his assistant and sometimes deputy, and we were deeply involved in the thing because our whole staff was being attacked. And there was the Underground operation in the Voice.

GOLDBERGER: I can tell you how one of the things probably worked. During the course of the VOA hearings, we of course had a television set, and I watched it for a few minutes in the English Service office, and I said, "McCarthy hasn't found a Communist yet, and he probably won't." And when I was called down to talk to that tall guy — Speck or Spick or something — this was one of the question he asked me. It means that someone in that office was part of the (Loyal American) Underground, and had reported that. I told him, "Yes I had said it, and not only had I said it, but it's true." KERN: To tell you a little bit about the Underground: it started because of a group of employees who felt that they were not given their rights, had not been promoted as fast as they should have, or were discriminated against in one form or another, and were opportunists. Howard Hotchner was one of the leaders, and Paul Deac, of course. Part of it was from the Production Section, in which I had been involved. Some of the people were involved at a much higher level, such as Barmine, for example. Barmine was called by McCarthy — he was very anti-Communist, Lord only knows, but he was not dishonest. He had integrity. Many of the others had no integrity at all.

GOLDBERGER: Some of them were simply unhappy. The guy who I think reported on me was a WAE [When Actually Employed] who had serious problems at home. He had a spastic or cerebral palsied child that was simply making his life almost impossible. He was just an unhappy guy.

Library of Congress

KERN: Barmine was called in because he was after all a former Soviet general. I don't know what his testimony was, but I'll tell you some of the roles he played, which were very positive. He helped a great deal to keep it from going completely haywire. There was a hit list that the Underground drew up, people that they wanted to get rid of. And on that list, among others, was me. I was on it because Howard Hotchner felt that I had taken his job away. He was chief of production and Puhon put me in as chief of production. Also Howard felt that I had employed certain people that were questionable. I had hired Jim somebody as an English regional producer. (Howard was with Red Channels, too.) The reason I had hired him was that he'd been cleared by the FBI and that satisfied me.

Q: Who were some of the most memorable characters with whom you've worked in your years with VOA?

GOLDBERGER: Eddie Raquello was a terror, a very talented terror. One day one of the correspondents he was working with started to strangle him — literally. This was a guy named Max Tak, a Dutch correspondent. At that time Eddie Raquello's job was to handle a group of foreign correspondents working in New York, to expedite what they wanted to do, much the way the foreign Press Centers operate today.

KERN: They were paid by their own people, but we also paid them.

GOLDBERGER: He had Dutch, Danish, Belgian, Norwegian, Finnish — he may have had a couple more. Max Tak had been a hero of the resistance in the Netherlands, was a very well known correspondent, and a very easy-going guy. But this particular day, Eddie was making Max go over and over what he was trying to read, and at one point he walked into the studio, leaned over the table to say more, and Max just reached up and seized him by the throat. That's what Eddie Raquello was like. He was a perfectionist.

KERN: He used to pressure these guys to put in propaganda. And with some it went over easily, they accepted it happily. Others refused. We had to keep it down with Eddie. It's

Library of Congress

okay to make suggestions, we told him, but they're independent people. "Well," he said, "I'm paying them." And he was. You see, it was a dual-payment arrangement, which was probably unethical if not illegal, but we had to do what we were told to do.

GOLDBERGER: And of course he thought his operation was the most important part of the place. He would keep demanding studio time, and so forth. I had a system. Once every two months I would lose my temper, deliberately, and so I would yell at him, and that would quiet him down for a while. The thing about Eddie was that he mellowed, the last five years or so. He had Addison's disease and didn't know it.

KERN: He had had it for years, and after he got treated for it he started to mellow.

GOLDBERGER: I don't think it was just the disease, Gene. I read the biography of the Lunts, a fascinating book, and Eddie Raquello's name comes up only once. But for someone who knows Raquello it's a fascinating story. In "There Shall Be No Night," they were rehearsing, and one of the other actors began to make fun of Raquello during the course of the rehearsal, not quietly off in a corner but actually on stage. And he was fired. You don't do that! But the thing that came into my mind was, he must have been like that then, too. What provoked this guy to do something so unprofessional? It must have been that Raquello was Raquello.

Another kind of Raquello story- -when Jack Vebber wanted to promote Ronnie Rimm, Raquello was then head of production, and flatly refused to promote him. He would not do it. He won, too. One time there was a trial alert in New York City, and Eddie insisted on going up on the roof and recording the silence.

Q: The way he asked us in the Washington office to record an hour of clear sound at the Lincoln Memorial. We stuck a microphone out the window in the penthouse of the Interior Department building, and when we sent the tape to Eddie he got on the phone, yelling, "That's not the Lincoln Memorial! There aren't any streetcars near the Lincoln Memorial!"

Library of Congress

He was right, of course, and we dutifully sent an engineer down to the Memorial to record an hour of clear sound.

KERN: There's one series, that Eddie (Goldberger) is primarily responsible for, the American Theater of the Air, that deserves mention. The Voice really did itself proud — top radio, top talent, directorial as well as acting. Beautiful shows.

GOLDBERGER: It got started because of a request from Swedish Radio. They were doing a series of broadcasts, English-language broadcasts, I guess for schools, and they had prepared a book of selections from various American plays, novels, short stories. They asked us to assist them in getting people to record these selections so that they could use them on the air. Their man in New York would work with us on it. The first thing we had to find out was whether we could do it. We got an okay from Barry (Zorthian). We felt that we didn't want to do the casting, so I got in touch with the American National Theater and Academy, and they agreed to do the casting. Swedish Radio was paying them, and what we did was to provide recording studio, equipment and so forth. The Swedes were very happy with it, and ANTA was delighted, because ANTA had been trying to find a reason for their existence, something that would actually involve them in some kind of productive work. And so they asked whether there was anything else they could do for us along the same general lines. And somehow, between Gene and Barry and myself, we came up with this idea of doing plays, great American plays — Len Reed was also involved — with ANTA to do the casting. I think we did about ten.

KERN: When you realize that you got the very best stars to work for \$75 — and it took time, they were done carefully.

GOLDBERGER: In light of your experience, what do you think of the proposal by the Stanton Commission in 1975 that the U.S. Information Agency be broken up and its various functions be assigned elsewhere, with the Voice of America made independent?

Library of Congress

KERN: Strangely enough, I don't think it can be independent and function properly. This was brought home to me in Europe more than anywhere else, because there was always a strong feeling, with correspondents going into Eastern Europe — the Embassies would insist that you work directly under them; you had to work with the Embassies. For example, I was sent over to Romania before Ceausescu came to the United States. I went to Bucharest to cover a fair, but the main reason was to see if we could get something about Ceausescu. You had to check in at the Embassy. The first thing they said to me was that you can't mention that he's coming to the U.S. We don't want you to touch it from Bucharest. If it's done from Washington that's perfectly all right. Because we have an agreement with the Romanians that nothing will go out of here until the day before he leaves, when there will be a simultaneous announcement. Well, Haratunian was furious. He just would not accept it. He ordered me to do it. But the only way I could get my scripts out was to go to a studio of Radio Bucharest to voice the thing and get it shipped out, sent over the line, but the scripts went through the Embassy switchboard. They wanted to see them. The ambassador personally brought me in to the political officer and said "If you violate this rule you're fired."

GOLDBERGER: I suppose the idea for this goes back to people's idea of the BBC. But you're looking in the wrong place. The BBC is not independent. It may be that the BBC domestic services are theoretically an independent agency, but the overseas services of the BBC are not. When I was there, I would go to the morning meetings, and at some point in the meetings I would have to leave because the foreign office guy would begin to read the policy guidance.

KERN: I don't think, from the standpoint of correspondents overseas, that you can work in Eastern Europe without working with the Embassy. After they took them out, as is the case today, you no longer get support, even administrative support. I can appreciate the political officers' point of view. This is the United States Government, for all practical purposes the State Department, even if it is another agency, and it cannot speak with two

Library of Congress

mouths. If they make an agreement to do something, it has to be obeyed by the rest of the agencies of the United States. However, that's only one phase of it. From the standpoint of policy control of content, I think an ideal arrangement would be if State simply provided policy guidance, but that there would have to be some kind of check-up to see that policy guidance was followed.

Q: Thank you, gentlemen.

End of interview