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PAUL P. BLACKBURN

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Bob (Charles R.) Beecham, on November 18, 2002. I am speaking with Paul P. Blackburn III about his 40 year career, from September 1962 to September 2002, first with the U.S. Information Agency and then with the State Department after it absorbed USIA on October 1, 1999.

BEFORE JOINING USIA IN 1962

Let's begin with this question – how did it happen that you joined USIA, and what were you doing before that?

BLACKBURN: I was at Haverford College when I got interested in the Foreign Service. At that time, my dad, who was a career naval officer, was serving in Okinawa. I went there two summers, after my sophomore and junior years. Japan was fascinating to me, and I thought, gosh, maybe I could find a career that would take me to Japan, give me a chance to study Japanese, and even pay me to live there. I was fortunate at Haverford College that our president, Hugh Borton, was a great Japan scholar. He had been the director of the East Asian Institute at Columbia, and gave me a lot of his time, even letting me take a special reading course under his tutelage. I took the Foreign Service exam for the first time while at Haverford. I easily passed the written part, but flubbed the oral.

Thwarted in my first attempt to get into the Foreign Service – which I now realize would

have been nuts to take me in at that stage of my life – I went on to do graduate work at the School of Advanced International Studies, or SAIS, at Johns Hopkins. While there I again took the Foreign Service exam, and failed the oral for a second time. The examiners told me that I needed "more seasoning," by which they essentially meant that I needed to grow up. I was 22 at the time, and looked 18. They strongly urged me to go into the military, saying that the Foreign Service particularly needed more officers with military experience. I didn't follow that advice, but instead gave the test a third try, this time the one specifically for USIA, and finally passed.

I was delighted to get into USIA, having been strongly encouraged by my professor at SAIS, Paul Linebarger, a China specialist who was also something of a psywar expert of that era – and by graduate school pal Gordon Tubbs, who had joined USIA's research arm and later headed its East Asia division. While waiting for my appointment I took a course at American University on "International Communication" given by USIA Training Division stalwart Charles "Chuck" Vetter, so even before coming on board I had built up a lot of enthusiasm for what I was getting into.

Q: But what about before that? According to the stud book, you were at Brookings and at the Library of Congress.

BLACKBURN: I did one research project at the Brookings Institution, under the direction, as it happened, of Murray Lawson, who was for many years the USIA Historian. Then from the summer of 1961 until the week before I joined USIA in 1962, I was the Analyst for Far Eastern Affairs in the Legislative Reference Service at the Library of Congress.

Q: How did it happen that you were at the Library of Congress?

BLACKBURN: I tried to get through SAIS in just one year, instead of the two years normally required. I didn't quite finish it, and had only one more course to take. In that second year, and not being a full-time SAIS student, I landed the job at the Legislative Reference Service, where they needed an analyst to prepare reports for committees and Members of Congress on subjects relating to East Asia. Currently, the Congressional Research Office, which replaced LRS, has a team of East Asia specialists, but at that time I was the only one, and hardly a specialist, doing the job. I wrote several reports on Vietnam, where during those early years of the Kennedy administration our involvement was getting deeper and deeper. I also prepared a speech – "draft remarks," it was euphemistically called – on the U.S. involvement in South Korea, a background paper on U.S.-Japan relations since the end of the war, position papers on both sides of a Philippine war claims issue, and of course materials on various aspects of what to do about the problem of "Red China." The workload was heavy and the deadlines often ridiculously tight, but I learned to write under pressure – and just produce the best possible on-time product given the constraints placed on me.

OVERVIEW OF USIA/STATE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY CAREER

Q: Okay, now, looking back on 40 years with the Agency, why don't you just say something briefly about what was typical in your experience and what was sort of unique?

BLACKBURN: In the typical category – I came in, like other entry-level officers who joined the Agency in those days, as a Foreign Service Career Reserve Officer. They had not yet established a permanent Foreign Service officer corps for USIA, and didn't want to call us FSOs. I started at the very bottom, as an FSCR-8 Junior Officer Trainee and worked my way up through the ranks. We all had to be under 31. The women – four of the 20 in my entering class – had to be unmarried. Compared to today's intake, most of us were quite inexperienced – in both life and overseas exposure. I had been married a little over a year; our first daughter was born ten days after I entered USIA. The welcome our new crop of officers got was very warm. We all received much individual attention and special mentoring from trainers, personnel officers, and area offices.

There were many aspects of my career that were atypical, however. For example, I got nearly every job I ever competed for, a streak of good luck that undoubtedly contributed to my nearly consistently high morale throughout those many years. When I joined the Agency I said I strongly preferred to work in Asia, even though I recognized that I was "worldwide available" and had to have a secondary as well as a primary area. As it turned out, I spent all my overseas years – 24 years worth – in just four Asian posts, in each of which I had the privilege of serving as Public Affairs Officer: Malaysia, Thailand, Japan and China.

Also unusual was the fact that I was never a Cultural Affairs Officer or Information Officer – or Executive Officer, for that matter. I served as an assistant or deputy only twice.

I had tremendous good fortune at critical times, as well. When I got fired from a job I'll be talking about later, powerful colleagues came to my rescue and saved my career. That was when I was Associate Director of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in USIA. Later on in Japan, just when I thought my career was coming to an end, the Agency sent me an out-of-the-blue offer to go to China as PAO. Another stroke of luck made it possible for me to retire as a Career Minister from the State Department at the maximum age of 65. Had there been no consolidation of USIA, I would have had to retire for "time in class" a couple of years earlier, as the TIC period for CMs in USIA was only four years, but seven years in State.

My 40-year career stands, I believe, as the longest for continuous public affairs or public diplomacy service in our history. And it is unlikely anyone will surpass my record now that consolidation has taken place, as advancement to the top ranks requires assignments outside of the public diplomacy track – for example as Consul General, DCM or Ambassador. So my career was atypical in that regard as well.

Q: Now, at this point, why don't you briefly just establish chronologically, from the beginning, your various assignments?

BLACKBURN: I entered USIA in September of 1962 and went through the JOT program in Washington, with half a year of basic training and half a year of Thai language study. I was a Junior Officer Trainee in Bangkok, 1963-64, and an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer from 1964 well into 1965. I went up to Khon Kaen in northeast Thailand as Branch Public Affairs Officer in 1965-67, and then to Udorn as BPAO in 1967-68.

In 1968 I returned to Washington for the Phase II program, which provided more training for junior officers, for three years. The first year was basic rotational training, followed by a year as Special Assistant to the area director in charge of East Asia and the Pacific. The last year was spent in Japanese language training in Washington, after which I took the second year in Yokohama. From 1972 to 1975 I served as Director of the USIS Tokyo American Center. I went back to Washington to be an Agency inspector for two years, 1975-77. Then I was a Senior Policy Officer at USIA 1977-78, and from 1978-80 headed what was called the Fast Policy Guidance Unit. I served as PAO in Malaysia in 1980-84, followed by another four year stint as PAO Thailand, 1984-88. I was assigned back in Washington as Area Director for Africa for a year, after which I was made the Deputy Associate Director of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the so-called E bureau in USIA, a job I held in 1989-90.

During 1990-92 I was at Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy in the School of Foreign Service, before going to Japan as PAO in 1992-96. That assignment was followed by a year in Washington for Chinese language study before becoming PAO in Beijing in 1997-2000. On returning to Washington for my last assignment, I was Director of the Office of Public Diplomacy in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs until I retired at the end of September, 2002.

JOT IN WASHINGTON – 1962-63

Q: Please go back now and talk about your JOT training at the outset of all of this?

BLACKBURN: It was very exciting joining the Agency in those heady Kennedy years. Edward R. Murrow was USIA Director and we basked in his reflected glory. Many of the men in my JOT class of 20 ended up having long and very successful careers – people like Len Baldyga and Sam Courtney. Marjorie Marriley Ransom was one of our stars, who left to get married, but returned in style and eventually became a Career Minister. Two from that class, Barry Ballou and Mary Fattu Ashley, switched to the civil service and are still working in public diplomacy for the State Department.

Our JOT years were a time when men were encouraged to get married, if they hadn't already done so. We were told that the most effective Foreign Service officers were men with spouses and children, because that's how to get more deeply into the local society. The women officers, however, were forced to resign if they wanted to get married. It was

strongly hoped that they would marry male FSOs. In that case the Foreign Service would gain the services of two professionals at the cost of only one salary – the ideal "two for one" situation, they said. Anne Hannehan Oman and Marjorie Marriley Ransom both married FSOs, but only the latter put in many years as an unpaid Foreign Service spouse.

Gays and lesbians were presumed not to be present in our ranks, having been screened out by the rigorous background security investigation. It was, in short, a much less enlightened Foreign Service than we see today.

Another bizarre feature of our profession in those days was that we all got at least two annual performance evaluations. Those of us who were married got four of them. The first was an open report describing our strengths and correctable failings. The second dealt more candidly with our performance, using language that did not have to be shared with the rated officer. Similar reports, both open and secret, were done on our wives.

Q: And who would be writing these?

BLACKBURN: Your supervisor in the field would do them. These were the conditions of employment. This was the climate of the Foreign Service that we came into, and the sort of thing that we (and our spouses) had to accept. In the JOT training, we started with about ten weeks that overlapped with State Department colleagues in the A-100 course. Otherwise, it was an Agency design. Much emphasis was put on what we now call American studies. We talked at great length about U.S. society, our system of government, American ideals, that sort of thing. The training, much of it led by my old professor Chuck Vetter, stressed the importance of being able to out-argue our foreign critics. We were to imagine ourselves facing a hostile audience of Indian students who would make virulent anti-American statements and put us on the defensive. We were expected to be able to give as well as we got – eloquently defending everything from the American way of life to our foreign policy positions.

This was also the counter-insurgency period. We had many sessions on that as well, using books such as one called The Ugly American, by Burdick and Lederer. We had to prepare ourselves to be culturally sensitive field officers capable of interacting effectively with villagers who were getting regular doses of communist propaganda. If we couldn't play the guitar or sing folk songs, like the hero of that book, too bad. At least we should be able to make a good impression for our country and show the poor people of the developing countries that "the free world," not communism, offered them greatest hope for a better future.

The Agency took much pride in its films in those days. Some were indeed excellent, and deserved the awards they were given. The account of the Kennedy presidency called "Years of Lightning, Day of Drums," which came out after the 1963 assassination, was particularly memorable. As JOTs we watched many films, discussing at length not only their content but also how we would best use them with mass audiences abroad. And we were all trained to use a 16-millimeter projector. That skill actually did come in quite

handy for many of us, but gave Embassy colleagues the mistaken impression that USIS officers were proficient with all AV equipment.

The training was episodically exciting and even fun, but I think we all were itchy to get to work. It really was a long grind, being trained for a year in Washington and then another one as a JOT overseas before you could get a responsible job all your own. After the general JOT Washington training, I was given six months of Thai language training at FSI. That was a most challenging experience. I was very, very intimidated at the beginning. I had major doubts that I would ever be able to master the Thai tones. I worked for hours and hours on those damn tapes, and found it extremely hard going. Eventually, however, I began to feel that I could actually distinguish between the sounds, and that people listening to me were beginning to be able to make out what I was trying to convey. Probably nothing in my entire career gave me more satisfaction than reaching S-4 in Thai by the end of that first overseas tour. I also got to the 3+ level in reading, having made out-of-class use of a book called "Teach Yourself to Read Thai."

Q: Did what you learned in training actually apply when you hit the ground in Thailand? Not only the language study, but other aspects of the training as well.

BLACKBURN: Yes, it did pretty well. The Thai training, though devoted in part to some very high class, even courtly, language, helped me communicate appropriately with ranking officials I dealt with when once in Thailand. But mostly it was essential for giving me control over the tones and the basic grammar. As for the other parts of the training, some was quite pertinent, particularly that part which dealt with counter-insurgency and working on the ground in Southeast Asia. On the other hand, I never had to face an audience of hostile Indian students, and not a word was said about how to handle two major responsibilities I faced in my first years in Thailand: running a teenage exchange program and promoting troop-community relations at an overseas U.S. base. And much of the American studies emphasis was unnecessary; as it consisted of basic information we had been tested on in the Foreign Service exam.

JOT IN BANGKOK – 1963-64

Q: Would you talk now about the JOT phase in Thailand?

BLACKBURN: Thailand was a mind boggling and growing-up experience for me. When I first got there, I was young – just 25 – and pretty callow, which is another way of saying immature. But I was extremely lucky to spend my first tour in the company of some really great officers. The Executive Officer, Russ Cox, told me, quite accurately, that never again in my career would I serve with so many outstanding officers. USIS Thailand at the time was led by an extraordinary PAO named Jack O'Brien, who had an amazing ability to command those of us who served under him. Though I thought he was an old-timer, actually he was then only in his early to mid-forties.

I think I learned the bulk of whatever public affairs "tradecraft" I ever learned in the

Foreign Service during that tour. Many senior and mid-level officers were generous with their time, and directly or indirectly taught me valuable lessons. For example, from Jack O'Brien I learned the importance of thinking through what you're trying to do so carefully that you can articulate it in ways that everybody on your staff will understand. Jack stressed that every part of the PAO's operation deserves attention and respect – and that meant it should be periodically critiqued in systematic fashion. His policy of keeping an "open door" to all staffers was also an excellent example.

From you, Bob Beecham, the USIS Thailand Press Officer in those days, I learned the importance of being persnickety about how things look in writing, especially when they deal with U.S. policy and are to be shared with the public. You taught me not to accept, from oneself or from anyone else, a written product that does not meet the highest standards.

From Jack Zeller, who was an Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer, I learned that "there is always plenty of money." Don't worry about financial constraints, he taught me, or you will think too small. If something needs to be done, and you have a good idea, then go look for the funding, either from the post's assets or some other source. You are likely to get it. He stressed that responsible creativity is an essential quality for a first-class USIS officer.

From Howard Biggerstaff, who was later my boss in the field program, I learned that careful planning is extremely important – and can be great fun, too. He showed me that thinking through the component parts of a complex and ambitious plan, explaining it to others and getting their inputs, and finally seeing your concept reach fruition brings a special sense of satisfaction – especially for USIA officers who have such a rich plate of resources to work with. "Bigg" worked indefatigably to plan the USIS Thailand field program that we all carried out during those years. Later on in my career, when enthusiastically involved in one complex scheme or another, I would fondly remember the zest of Jack Zeller and Bigg as they worked on similar projects.

From Bob Lasher, then the formal head of USIS Thailand field operations, I learned of the pleasures of visiting Thai villages. Even before leaving Washington I had read many of Bob's widely-distributed reports on USIS-supported Mobile Information Team (MIT) trips to sensitive villages in the northeast. Besides assisting the senior Thai officials on the team, Bob would have a grand time of it in the evenings – drinking, eating exotic foods, and even taking part in traditional folk dancing. In other words, winning hearts and minds just like the "Ugly American."

In Rob Nevitt, who was the Branch PAO up in Ubol, I saw an exemplary communicator in action. Rob was an officer who made maximum use of his limited Thai and his extraordinary gift for empathy to add an extra depth to his relations with both Thais and Americans. I tried, then and later – albeit with limited success – to emulate Rob's thoughtful and respectful approach to interpersonal relations.

As a JOT assignment, I was tasked with preparing a brochure on the post. I went to every section and talked to them about what they did, looked for pictures, and drafted the text. The resulting briefing brochure was very useful in telling Washington, the rest of the Mission, and others what USIS Thailand was all about at that time. That was a great training exercise. I think the idea might have come originally from the Deputy PAO, Ken McCormac, another of my kind and helpful mentors. At that time Ken and Cultural Affairs Officer Nelson Spinks, along with Jack Zeller, were the Thai hands at the post.

In those first years in Thailand, I was trying to fit in and find my role as a USIS officer. There was a lot of internal social activity, much of it very male oriented. Once a week we had a poker game, and another night was set aside for bowling. We often ended up going to bars and drinking heavily. I often went with Jerry Tryon, an Assistant Radio-TV Officer and good friend. The carousing is not something I feel proud of in retrospect, but it was fun at the time and definitely part of the USIS Thailand culture of that era.

One of my most enjoyable JOT experiences came when I visited USIS Chiang Mai, to see how that branch post operated under BPAO Jerry Kyle. It was the time of the Songkran water festival, and I had a grand time joining the other revelers in the mass water fight. I think it was the most fun I had ever had in my life up to that time.

ACAO AND AFS DIRECTOR IN BANGKOK – 1964-65

Q: Why did you do in the Cultural Affairs office in Bangkok between your JOT and upcountry stints?

BLACKBURN: I believe it was Jack Zeller who came up with the brilliant idea of starting a large-scale American Field Service high school exchange program with Thailand. He got it up and running before I took it over. I was a complete neophyte actually, but took to it with gusto, applying energies pent-up from the two long years of JOT relatively passive traineeship. AFS, a two way exchange effort, offered the U.S. a way to reach out to the young people of Thailand and make friends for America, particularly those who showed the most promise in the provinces. USIA was giving strong financial support to the national AFS organization headquartered in New York anyway, and Jack just decided USIS should initiate a start-up program that could eventually evolve into a proper non-USG AFS-Thailand office.

When I became AFS director in 1964, we had just sent off 89 students to the States, and the 14 “pioneers” from the first group had just come back. We were preparing to send another 160, two thirds of them from the northeast or other regions outside of Bangkok. This was a mammoth undertaking, and the kids were carefully screened through a series of written and oral tests. The responsible FSN, Khun Amphorn Komes, and I worked closely with high schools, education offices, and Thai and American English teachers throughout the country. We were supported by Jack Zeller, then in another job in Bangkok but serving as the “AFS godfather,” and scores of volunteers who helped with

interviews, our two-week final orientation program, and the constant search for Thai families to host American AFSers. Responsible Americans involved in the program had to visit each selected Thai student to assess what kind of a home life he or she came from, in order to help AFS New York find a compatible American receiving family.

Q: Who would do these interviews?

BLACKBURN: Americans and Thais would. This was one of the pluses of the job for me. I really liked doing the home interviews, even on miserably hot weekend afternoons. We would go into the homes and ask personal questions that gave us unique insights into Thai families, asking about living arrangements, space and privacy, family activities, the role of Buddhism in their lives, and how much – if anything – they could afford to pay toward the cost to send their student to the U.S. for a year – the maximum being $450, if I remember correctly. For the Thai families volunteering to host American AFSers we were even more careful in our home descriptions. We had to imagine how well an American kid would be able to deal with the specific conditions of that particular family.

Q: Did most of those American kids end up in Bangkok, or did they get out into the countryside?

BLACKBURN: Those who initially came in the full-year program were expected to reach a level of basic classroom competence, with help from English-speaking Thai teachers, so we placed them only in Bangkok during those first years. However, later they were sent all over the country. Amazingly, even without speaking more than rudimentary Thai, most of them did fine after a few months, even in pretty rural areas. The summer program, which brought 14 kids while I was there, was nationwide from the beginning. The American AFSers who came to Thailand in those days, all of them about 17-years-old, were gutsy and impressive kids. I was quite sure I never could have handled such an experience at that age.

Q: Has anyone ever gone back years later to see what's happened to those kids, the Americans, I mean?

BLACKBURN: I don't know of any systematic study of the Americans – or the Thais either. A lot of the Thai participants later became prominent in one area or another of Thai society, and are great friends of the United States. The best known probably is Surin Pitsuwan, who was Thailand's Foreign Minister until recently. When I went back later as PAO, many Thais I ran into would say, "I was one of those early kids you helped." That made me feel terribly proud, even when I couldn't exactly place them. It was a great program, one that worked mainly because of the kids who took part, but also because it had tremendous support from many quarters – in the U.S. as well as in Thailand.

Through AFS I met many Peace Corps Volunteers, quite a few of whom later became great USIA officers. Among them were Harlan Rosacker, Robin Berrington, Frank Albert, Ed Ifshin, Larry Daks and Gary Smith.

BPAO KHON KAEN – 1965-67

Q: Would you like to talk some now about your assignment to Khon Kaen?

BLACKBURN: The USIS Thailand field program was truly extraordinary. Our goal was to serve as a kind of surrogate ministry of information to help the Thai government achieve its security and development objectives in rural areas, particularly in northeast Thailand. When in 1965 I went up to open our post in Khon Kaen, a once-sleepy town that Thai Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat was pouring money into with the aim of making it "the capital of the northeast," we had all the financial and equipment support I could have possibly asked for. Besides plenty of regular staff – perhaps six FSNs – I had other funds for hiring "temporary" workers. We called them SPS (special personnel support) staffers. Altogether I had maybe 15 people working for me, as many as you could stuff into the little office area we rented along a downtown Khon Kaen street.

We had probably six vehicles, a sedan for the BPAO and five CJ6s, which were specially configured jeeps – carefully designed by Biggerstaff – used for transporting people, posters, pamphlets, and books, as well as equipment for showing films out in the villages. In our base office we had a large collection of films and perhaps 25 projectors we lent out to Thai institutions that wanted to show our movies. All of us BPAOs had the latest AV equipment to use. For example, we had new cameras to take pictures of anything we found in villages that might be useable in a publication or poster. We had radios to do interviews that might be used on one or more of the radio stations that we were supporting, or on VOA. And we had 8-millimeter cameras for making "tactical films" that might be used locally to show the Thai government working for the good of the people in the villages. Of course, we had had no training in any of these areas, so the results of our efforts were at best spotty. Still, it was a time of abundance, innovation, and intense activity in support of a goal we all believed in.

One premise of the field program planning by Biggerstaff – and also later by Jack Zeller and Ben Fordney – was that throughout the country the 13 branch posts should all have the same types of vehicles, projectors, cameras, etc. Bigg loved to plan so much that he even designed a model house for Thailand Branch PAOs – and got two of them built. My family lived in one of them in Khon Kaen, and my colleague Mark Brawley and his wife down in Yala had the other one. The two houses had the exact same floor plan. Unfortunately, they both suffered from the same planning oversights. Bigg and his engineering partner – Jose Rico, I think his name was – neglected to allow for water to be piped into the inside kitchen area. The assumption was that all the cooking and washing would be done by servants working outside the main living area. And because Bigg liked spacious commodes, we had an unusually large downstairs bathroom that featured a toilet placed in the middle of a long wall – just sort of sitting out there in splendid isolation. In addition, the stairs between the first and second floors were designed to come down into the middle of the dining and living room areas, but had no railings. Bigg didn't have small kids, but we did. Banisters were quickly added, as was piping to the inside kitchen. And I

now realize that Bigg's overall concept of a made-to-order USIS BPAO house, audacious as it was, wasn't at all bad. In those days we were all amateurs, trying to do the best we could under urgent conditions. And it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to give full rein to our most creative imaginings. I didn't know any more about making movies than Bigg knew about designing houses, but we all tried to give such tasks our best shot.

The centerpiece activity of the field program was the MIT trip, generally lasting a week or two, that had us going out into villages in groups led by Thai officials like a governor, deputy governor or district officer – and also including officials who could provide much needed services, like a doctor, veterinarian, community development worker, or agricultural specialist. During my time in Khon Kaen and Udorn, I estimate I stayed overnight in more than a hundred villages, and spent at least that much time in district and provincial capitals. A couple hundred nights in less than three years was a large cumulative chunk of time away from home. It was hard on my wife and kids, and often strenuous and otherwise difficult for me, too. I, however, was energized by all the experiences I was having – and by the thought that I was being a brave and valued soldier in the counter-insurgency battle.

Conditions in some of the villages were plain awful. Most were very poor, and some were wracked with diseases – including leprosy – and suffered from ineffective leadership as well. Despite their exposure to anti-government Communist propaganda, the villagers were almost invariably grateful for our visits, particularly when they realized that we intended to be self sufficient in our meals, including paying for anything we needed to supplement the supplies we carried with us.

For me personally the time in a village was a real challenge. I tried to come across as a sympathetic foreign visitor, interested in admiring village folk crafts like woven items and mousetraps, and not in any sense a leader of the team. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction just to survive some of those trips. Fortunately, I had great help from Thai FSN colleagues, especially Khun Withee Suvarat in the Khon Kaen period and Khun Sanguan and Khun Tiew Tawat Pantupong when I was in Udorn. The Thai USIS staffers provided the essential mobile unit for the evening film showings and helped the Thai officials in various ways. They were great guys – dedicated and brave. Three of our USIS Chiang Mai colleagues were killed in a Communist ambush shortly after I left Thailand, but we had no such incidents on the MITs in my time.

I spoke Thai well enough to communicate with the officials and at a basic level with villagers who spoke only Lao. I could overcome fears that our group might come under attack by the Communists. I could sleep on bedbug-infested cushions and under mosquito nets even when there were mosquitoes inside my net – as I found when I squashed their blood-besotted bodies early in the morning. I could find my way to places to relieve myself when there were no toilets anywhere to be found. I could eat food that was sometimes not properly cooked – helped along by Mekong whiskey or locally made rice whiskey that reduced my inhibitions about eating such dishes as uncooked pork, raw lake shrimp, and ant eggs – even, once, live red ants. And I could maneuver the Thai cloth

called a pakoma skillfully enough to take a standing bath using water from a large water jar, maintaining my modesty when washing and drying even though fully surrounded by Thai kids eagerly anticipating a misstep on my part. That I could do all of this game me a sense of confidence and accomplishment. And actually, it was often fun. I traveled with and met some wonderful people, the villagers were exceedingly generous, and not infrequently the food was tasty. Sometimes we had gourmet fare, like frogs legs, roast pig, or cannabis-laced soups or chicken curry.

Our reports on these trips were sent back to Bangkok. The Ambassador (first Graham Martin and then Leonard Unger) would say, "You guys are my eyes and ears out there." How many of our reports got such ambassadorial attention I don't know, but we believed our reports got read by people who could make good use of them, so we were careful to describe the specific characteristics of a particular village, the amount of cohesion it seemed to have, its problems, and the major issue the villagers brought to the team leader (potable water being the most frequently cited felt need). The intelligence people, civilian and military, loved our reports. We often heard from Embassy colleagues that we were doing important, even enviable, work on the front lines of U.S. policy in Thailand.

BPAO UDORN – 1967-68

When I went to Udorn I had, in addition to all the MIT activity, the additional responsibility of working on troop-community relations. My predecessors as BPAO Udorn were Ed Schulick and, before him, Gordon Murchie, both of whom had done really amazing work in gaining the friendship and confidence of local officials in Udorn and nearby jurisdictions. I had the good fortune of being able to pick up on their excellent contacts among the Thais. However, dealing with the senior U.S. military was not so easy for me – a 29-year-old snot-nosed civilian whose only authority came from being a junior member of the Udorn Consulate. In 1967-68 Udorn was a major Thai base from which we prosecuted the air war over Vietnam. In addition, it was the headquarters both for Air America and other elements of the CIA's so-called "secret war in Laos" and also for the Thai government's counter-insurgency effort in the northeast provinces bordering the Mekong River.

I worked closely with our exceptionally able Consul, Al Francis, on various efforts to promote reasonably comfortable relations between the U.S. Air Force and community leaders in Udorn. Though the senior officers listened politely to my suggestions for minimizing frictions with the local populace, their reaction often was, "Yeah, we know cultural sensitivity is important, but don't bother us too much about it. Our mission is to fight a war, after all." One of my ideas was to take some of the "civic action" officers on an MIT to visit villages on the periphery of the base itself. They were pretty shocked to see how easy it was for villagers to walk directly onto the base. With no proper perimeter fence, the base was extremely vulnerable, but no one took action to protect it. Shortly after our MIT, Communists sappers went in and fire-bombed some of our planes, and then made a clean getaway. In a few instances, problems we uncovered on that MIT could be and were addressed. For example, equipment was brought out to build a needed well,

and in another case steps were taken to reduce the noise level of on-base testing of jet engines that greatly disturbed services at a Thai temple.

On Saturdays I regularly took part in briefings of incoming Airmen. I gave them general advice on showing respect for the Thai King and Queen, avoiding offending sensibilities by publicly fondling their Thai girl friends, and behaving appropriately at Thai ceremonies. As I was about to leave the country, I wrote down a summary of my main points, and passed the draft to a senior Air Force officer. Years later I learned, much to my surprise, that my text was used almost word-for-word in a pamphlet called "Thai Customs and Courtesies" that was given to all U.S. Air Force personnel assigned to Thailand from 1969 until we pulled out in 1975.

I sometimes used my residence as a venue for large dinner parties that brought the Air Force officers together with local officials and their spouses. As an "ice breaker" I would serve a concoction made from mixing village rice whiskey with small amounts of the blood of a kind of monkey found in the remote parts of Laos and northeast Thailand. The blood supposedly had various medicinal qualities, and was also considered an aphrodisiac. It would be slightly congealed in the bottom of the bottle, so vigorous shaking was part of the ritual. The Thai officials, especially the macho police and military officials, recognized the concoction as a rare and special libation, while my American military guests, though generally queasy if not horrified, gamely took a shot or two as the price of building close relations with their Thai counterparts. It was a kinky idea, and perhaps had desirable cross-cultural bonding results, but the practice was not universally lauded. Later on, I heard that in some quarters I was known as a monkey killer who sent his staff into the mountains to procure blood to feed my filthy habit. When I returned to Thailand in the 1980s I was told that those monkeys had become virtually extinct, and didn't feel at all proud that I had contributed to their demise.

When I left Udorn in 1968 the USIS Thailand field program was at its largest. We had 50 officers overall, most of them working in the branches, 13 branch posts, and perhaps 500 Thai staffers. I had an Assistant BPAO, first John Fredenburg and then Frank Albert. Both were great guys to work with, and later went on to head their own posts. John, who started the branch post in Nongkhai, on the Mekong River just across from Vientiane, and reported to me from there, was the first and last BPAO in Nongkhai. With such responsibilities on my young shoulders, I was blessed by working for excellent officers. Ben Fordney had a terrific avuncular touch as leader of the entire field program at that stage of its history, and Ed Schulick was my immediate boss, having taken that position just after turning USIS Udorn over to me. Ed was probably the best boss I had during my entire career. A born leader, he was enormously dedicated, thoughtful, and empathetic. He always seemed able to draw out your deepest concerns as well as your best thinking, and could then help you find needed focus for tackling the task ahead. Ed later used his talents in fashioning the Agency's speaker program, but tragically died of cancer not long after his Thailand tour.

PHASE II IN WASHINGTON

Q: In 1968, you went back to Washington as a part of the Phase II training program. Refresh my memory as to what Phase II was all about.

BLACKBURN: An officer by the name of Jim Halsema came up with the idea that officers like me, who were relatively new to USIA and to the media dimensions of public affairs should have a second, Washington-based stage of career training – to expose them to the media products and other support operations run out of USIA headquarters. In those days most of us joining the Agency had had little if any previous experience with the media, unlike those who came in after the war. The idea was that, over a three-year Washington tour, we would spend one year on short assignments to various parts of the Agency, one year in a mainstream job, and the third year in language training or other preparation for our next assignment.

It was definitely a concept that sought to address a real need, and those charged with implementing it, like John Challinor, tried to be flexible and helpful to us. But of course we the trainees soon came face to face with the serious flaws in the idea. The receiving offices, especially in the media, were not crazy about having an ongoing parade of trainees coming in and out of their purview. Often we were given mundane tasks and never got a real sense of what was going on. That happened to me when I was assigned to line up donations for a major USIA-sponsored education exhibit headed for Eastern Europe. No one in the section ever took the time to brief me on the purposes of the exhibit, much less the concept of how it was being structured. In all too many cases, the rotational assignments had little relation to our interests or immediate needs.

Besides that, we were sick of being trainees and being treated as ignorant neophytes. And it was 1968, after all, prime time in an era of striking back at authority. By 1969 there were some 50 officers in the program. With me as one of the "ring-leaders," we got nearly all 50 to sign a strong petition complaining about the program. We asked that it be substantially modified to more closely meet our individual needs. Our protest led to significant changes, for example by being a major factor behind the Agency's establishment of a new system of career counselors responsible for helping guide younger officers and looking out for their best interests in the assignment process.

In truth, my own Phase II experience had many enlightening and positive elements. On my way back from Udorn, even before checking into Washington, I was asked to be the escort interpreter for a Thai governor traveling on an International Visitors Program. That grantee, Governor Phat of Ubol, was a key figure in ensuring a secure and friendly welcome to the U.S. Air Force units based in his province. The USIS Thailand leadership insisted that my recent experience in neighboring Udorn would be particularly helpful to the success of his visit. This assignment gave me a rare chance to see the operations of the marvelous IV program up close. Our itinerary emphasized certain military communities which were eager to roll out the red carpet for this key official from Thailand, our Vietnam War ally – such as Ft. Bragg, Eglin Air Force Base, and the Air Force Academy. During our travels around the country we met some truly amazing

Americans within the IV volunteer network who generously provided services ranging from home hospitality to simply driving us from one point to another. That was a great education for me.

On the negative side, I found working with the prickly grantee a bit of a trial. One incident stands out in my mind. We went to Houston, where the local Council for International Visitors had arranged for him to be given a prominent seat at a pro-Nixon rally, a significant local event in that 1968 presidential campaign summer. Our plane had been a bit behind schedule, and he, understandably tired and out of sorts, suddenly said, "I don't think I'll go to that rally." Ouch! I tried to persuade him to change his mind, but he said he just wanted to go have some noodles and turn in early. When I called the local sponsors, they were very upset – with him and with me. They irately asked me: "Do you have any idea how hard it was to arrange this? Do you understand that the next time we try to set up such special attention for a visitor, we are much less likely to get it?" I gave it another try, telling him about all the trouble the local people had gone to, the VIP treatment that had been laid on, and the importance to him personally as well as to Thailand of this golden opportunity to meet the man most likely to become the next president of the United States. All to no avail – and we had to cancel his attendance at the event. Later on the Governor told me that the real reason he had been so reluctant to go was that he feared his presence might become a factor in our election!

That is only one of my many Governor Phat stories. Suffice to say here that the IV assignment was an interesting experience, a challenge to my diplomatic and Thai language skills, and at the same time an extraordinary opportunity to get reacquainted with my own country. The latter was particularly important. I was probably having almost as much culture shock as Governor Phat was. After all, I left the country when John Kennedy was president and came back following the assassinations of Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. The Democratic national convention took place in Chicago while we were on the trip. I would stay up at night watching the horrific events surrounding that convention. Then I would meet Governor Phat for breakfast, and he would say something like: "By the way, I was watching television last night, but with my poor English I couldn't understand what was happening. Why were all those people shouting? And what were those police dogs doing attacking people?" As best I could, overcoming my own confusion and shock, I tried to make the appropriate, reassuring "in context" remarks about the vibrancy of our political system, our long tradition of anti-government demonstrations, and the ongoing internal U.S. debate about the Vietnam War.

Q: During your initial Phase II training, what specifically did you do so far as exposure to Agency media and other operations was concerned?

BLACKBURN: At VOA I worked in the newsroom for a couple of weeks, and then filled in for about a month for Jack Zeller as acting head of the VOA Thai Service. After that, I wrote two or three articles for one of the Agency's general interest magazines about America. And I worked on the American education exhibit I mentioned earlier. I was able

to practice such skills as news and publication writing, radio program management, and telephone solicitation (for the exhibit), but as no one gave me direct feedback on my work in any of the offices, I didn't really have an experience that could be called "training." On the other hand, I gained enormous respect for the skills of the GS professionals in USIA's various media offices.

Also during the period I went out on a week-long recruiting stint for USIA. To make the most of the "orientation to America" dimension of that assignment, I volunteered to visit campuses on our list that had had strong antiwar demonstrations, including San Francisco State. I got there on Vietnam Moratorium Day, 1968 – not exactly a promising moment to be recruiting for the Federal Government – but spoke to several classes and got into lively discussions with some of the more activist students. Much to my surprise, I actually a recruited a future USIA officer, George Bonjoc, while I was there.

Q: So Phase II was worthwhile from your standpoint, is that right?

BLACKBURN: I didn't have such a bad experience, but the concept had fundamental flaws that I tried to point out. First of all, they never should have tried to make us all follow essentially the same schedule. Quite a few of the junior officers came from the media to start with, and certainly didn't need the kind of rotation we were put through. Another flaw was that going from place to place to place was too much like the JOT training we were so glad to have behind us. Besides that, the receiving offices quickly lost any enthusiasm they might have initially had, because we were pretty inexperienced and weren't around long enough to make a substantial contribution to their operations.

In our protest, I was a leader of our six-person "review committee." We met over lunch every week and talked about what actually might improve the program. We tried to consult with everybody and sent questionnaires around to make sure we were not leaving out anybody's ideas. The effort was somewhat "underground," but not really secretive – and we shared all our findings and suggestions with Agency managers. We had some rather large meetings with those running the program. There was some defensiveness by those who had developed it, but the exchanges were not particularly contentious, and the managers really had no choice but to recognize that we were making solid, well-researched criticisms.

We basically said we opposed and resented the cookie cutter approach. Instead, we wanted a personnel system that could interact with each of us coming back for our first assignment in Washington – and develop individualized programs, based on each person's special needs and desires, for preparing us to become more effective officers over the long run. Basically, they bought it. Rob Nevitt was head of Foreign Service personnel about that time, and he was responsible, I believe, for starting the career development officer system. He and others in personnel were very sympathetic to us. So we got the career counselors we had asked for, and the training became less elaborate. The whole program faded out within a few years, but it had been a valiant attempt to deal with the real problem of our general ignorance about the functioning of USIA's media.

Q: The weakness had been that personnel did not have any leverage in the media sections, in terms of making sure that the Phase II trainees were properly taken care of?

BLACKBURN: Yes, there was that. In addition to our own resentments about being supernumeraries, the media people were undermining it or criticizing the whole program from a different direction.

This was all happening about the time that Frank Shakespeare became the USIA Director in 1969 and started what he called the Young Officer Policy Panel, or YOPP. Shakespeare laudably sought to find out what the younger people of USIA were thinking. YOPP had about 16 members, half of them Foreign Service and half Civil Service. It was headed first by Mike Schneider and then by Mike Canning. I was not on it originally, but filled the first FS vacancy. We would meet regularly to discuss issues, and sometimes met with Shakespeare himself.

We in YOPP took particular interest in how the Agency was treating the Vietnam War and the range of U.S. opinion related to it. We looked, for example, at VOA's coverage of the war, to try to determine how biased or balanced it was. That was when I learned never to ask VOA a question that suggested they might not have been covering any particular subject. Even for obscure subjects, VOA has doubtless devoted many hours to it, and they can readily dump reams and reams of broadcast scripts on you. Whether VOA's coverage of Vietnam issues was or was not adequately balanced or credible was far beyond our ability to assess. But the spirit of that time was that we USIA's professionals were not only engaged in important work, we could also influence decisions about what our Agency's future direction should be. What would be the role of film, whether Agency-produced or acquired? What about publications? What should be the future of the binational centers? It was an exciting period. Much like I had experienced in the USIS Thailand program, it seemed that all issues were on the table, innovative thinking was encouraged, and everything was possible. Not only the junior or mid-level officers, but many senior officers were also questioning assumptions and trying to suggest new directions.

Q: Who were they?

BLACKBURN: People like Alan Carter, Dan Oleksiw, and Jodie Lewinsohn, three very strong and controversial personalities who became mentors and strong supporters of mine at various times over the ensuing years. They were critiquing our involvement in "counter insurgency" and "nation building" – especially in Southeast Asia – and proposing a wide range of operational and administrative changes. Others were focused on how better to build more international support for our Vietnam involvement.

I was fortunate to be involved directly or tangentially in much of this discussion, through the YOPP and otherwise, as I got to know and collaborate with interesting people from all parts of the Agency, in both the Civil Service and the Foreign Service.

Q: What was Shakespeare's role in this personally? Did he get a lot of feedback?

BLACKBURN: Yes, he got some feedback. He would meet with us from time to time. I remember one time he met with us and he was quite upset about the "incursion" into Cambodia, which turned out to be one of the pivotal events of our Vietnam involvement. He said it was really hard for us persuasively to justify, and very damaging to our image abroad, but we as the United States Information Agency of the U.S. Government had to do the best we could with the policies we had. We of course agreed with him - so we kind of agonized together. I don't know really, in operational terms, exactly what came of that discussion, but it was certainly good for our morale to be interacting so candidly with our Director.

Q: Henry Loomis was his Deputy at that point, is that correct?

BLACKBURN: That was the period when Loomis was his Deputy and Jack O'Brien was the Special Assistant to Loomis. Actually, it is quite possible that the YOPP was originally Loomis' idea, but Shakespeare certainly embraced it and Loomis never showed up at any of our meetings.

Q: Maybe I didn't – and still don't – have the right vantage point, but I don't remember being aware of any positive developments within the Agency of the sort you are talking about. There was a lot of ferment, perhaps, but did anybody take hold of it and say this is the lesson of all this and we should make these changes?

BLACKBURN: As far as messages or big operational changes, I can't think of new themes or products that can be credited directly to the YOPP or junior officers more generally. I think you could say that during the period we were all going through a lot of personal questioning that went beyond just advancing our careers. We were asking if we were right to be working for our government, and, if we were going to stay with the Agency, what could be done to make it more of an institution we would be proud to work for. A lot of people were quitting the Agency, and retention and morale were very much on everybody's minds at that time. Career development, fairness to all employees, recruitment of minorities, and the like were topics we talked about, but the Vietnam War and the general unrest of the late 1960s dominated much of our thinking.

Q: I think you're right about that. This was the period in which you had a sense that personnel was beginning to take a more direct interest in the individual officer. Care was being taken about where these guys were assigned. They had to compete more or less fairly with their peers to get assignments. Previously, it had been, geographically via the area offices, that there were cliques and clubs where people got assignments because they had done well in a particular post and were favored by those managers, so they were transferred to another area post or brought back to the area offices. Some of that led to abuses, I think, how much I don't know. Now, where do we go from here?

SPECIAL ASSISTANT IN ASIA AREA OFFICE – 1969-70

BLACKBURN: To my working as Dan Oleksiw's Special Assistant in the "Far East" Area Office, or IAF. Your mention of the Area Directors' control over personnel assignments in that era is very pertinent. I was the beneficiary of just this system – a system I should say that operated in almost identical fashion during my last assignment in the East Asia Bureau of the State Department. Dan, as IAF Director, said he was going to have an open competition among all the young officers who had an interest in Asia to pick his special assistant. About 15 or 20 of us were summoned to his office for a brown bag lunch to talk with him and "strut our stuff" in hopes of getting this plum assignment. As it happened, my friend John Burns, who had been in the Thai field program with me, was the personnel officer for IAF. He told me Dan had picked me long before that session, and that the paperwork had already gone through the system.

I am not sure things were quite that finalized, but in any case I got chosen, and had a fantastic opportunity to witness the internal operations of the area most concerned with the Vietnam War and many other important developments of that period. Dan was extraordinarily generous to me. Saying he wanted me to know everything he was doing, he put my desk right outside his door, between him and his secretary, Mary Lipper, so that I could see every piece of paper that came in, on any subject. I also sat in on all of his meetings, if I was available, on any subject. It was really quite something to have that kind of access to the leader of what was a very active and high-powered office. Fitzhugh (Fitz) Green was the deputy, and Dave Hitchcock, Jodie Lewinsohn, and Ike Izenberg were all policy officers at one time or another. Stanton Jue and Jim Hoyt, and many others were also on that team. It was an intense period for me personally. Dan wanted me in his presence so much that he actually picked me in the mornings at a place close to my house and dropped me off at night after work, usually after 7 p.m. He had a very old green Buick that would be loaded up with his pals and go lumbering down Wisconsin Avenue on its way to 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, where he had somehow wangled a parking slot just outside the back door.

Because that was Vietnam War time, and due to his own proclivities, Dan was very much involved in personnel issues. I would sit in on his long sessions with personnel officers or others that would invariably start late in the day after the close of regular business. Asia personnel chief Bernie Lavin, or later Evan Fotos, would come up to Dan's office to cover personnel matters with great candor. Discussion often focused on people who were reluctant to accept jobs in Vietnam. Such assignments tended to be hard on marriages and not good for careers either. I sat through several excruciating sessions where officers pitifully pleaded to be allowed to break their assignments. Though Dan usually did not support such requests, I don't think he was the cold-blooded person that some people considered him – and in fact found him sometimes extremely soft-hearted. Over all, though, he definitely had the toughness the Agency needed for such a job at that time.

Another priority for the area office was sending out moon rocks, of all things. The first moon-landings had just taken place, and people all over the world wanted to see what the

astronauts had found up there. We got a share of the haul, and Ray McGunigle and others put a lot of time into figuring out where in East Asia they would go, who would personally escort them the conditions of display, and the like. The moon rocks gave us a welcome positive story to tell our overseas audiences when we were getting so much criticism over the Vietnam War.

During that time, I got drawn into the middle of a dispute Dan Oleksiw was having with Lew Schmidt, the PAO in Bangkok at the time. When Lew went out to Bangkok in 1967 to replace Jack O'Brian, Dan had in structed him to cut back the USIS Thailand field program, saying that it was not an appropriate use of the taxpayer's money to have USIS operating essentially as a surrogate information ministry for the Thai Government.

Q: You are saying that Oleksiw sent Schmidt out there with precisely those marching orders?

BLACKBURN: Those were Lew's instructions when he went out there, yes. But when Lew arrived and heard from all of us – and from others up and down the line in the Embassy – what we were doing and how important we all thought it was, he told Dan he had reached the conclusion that the USIS Thailand field program he had inherited was on the right track and we should not precipitously turn everything over to the Thais.

Q: Did Lew have the backing of the Embassy and the Ambassador on that? The Ambassador at that time would have been Leonard Unger, right?

BLACKBURN: Yes, Lew had their backing, but Dan, with the support of the Agency leadership, insisted that they should get out of the field program as fast as possible. Dan in early 1968 went to Thailand to see for himself what was going on – and that was when I first met him. He accompanied Lew on a trip to the south, during the course of which they dropped in on an AID-supported training program for midwives, for which USIS was providing some publicity. When Dan returned to Washington he infuriated Lew by dismissively characterizing the USIS Thailand program as one devoted to "midwifery." The dispute cut so deeply, for both of them, that they both treat the incident in considerable detail in their oral histories.

So there I was in the IAF area office, on the one hand working for Dan Oleksiw and on the other hand a proud alum of what I had fully believed was a valuable and effective USIS Thailand field program. At the same time, many of the senior USIS Thailand officers were now back in Washington. A number of them, like Jack O'Brien and Rob Nevitt, had a broader perspective on the USIS Thailand program than I did, but Dan decided that I should be the person to make an objective presentation to Frank Shakespeare and Henry Loomis on what we were really doing there.

I pulled together a great deal of material – both in written and film formats – demonstrating that although much of what we did could be considered information work for the Thai government, we were also devoting substantial attention to spreading

information about the U.S. – for example, through the regular TV program "Report from America," our translated books, our exchange programs, and targeted materials dealing with the space program, our foreign and domestic policies, and U.S. direct support for Thailand's development. The presentation for Shakespeare and Loomis was heavily attended and gave, I felt, an honest, balanced, and essentially positive picture of a carefully planned and implemented USIA field program in support of a key ally in the Vietnam War. Whatever they thought of the briefing, the Agency's leadership continued to support Dan's push to eliminate those activities that did not directly deal with the U.S. The pressure intensified when Lew's assignment ended in 2000 and Keith Adamson, and then Jack Hedges, took over. By 1972 the post was transferring operations and equipment to elements of the Thai government at a very rapid clip.

During those Phase II years, I was also completing a doctorate at American University's School of International Service. At that time the Agency was extremely generous to officers who wanted to take courses having to do with public affairs, communications, or regional studies. I cashed in on that largesse, taking five or six fully-subsidized courses at SIS. Having gotten a master's degree at SAIS and later done additional course work at American University, I calculated that if everything broke for me – and with a lot of work at night and on the weekends – I would be able to complete the Ph.D. during my three years back in Washington between overseas assignments. For my dissertation topic I chose to look at mass media and national development in Southeast Asia, specifically Burma, Malaysia, and Thailand. As this topic was of interest to the Agency, I got some help in that respect as well. For example, when it came time to collect data, I was able to extend an inspection TDY to Italy so that I could spend a week each in the three countries I was studying – and get help from the local staffs, especially in Burma, with finding materials and identifying people to interview. Then when I got back to Washington and was finishing up some of the analysis, I got myself parked in the research office with Gordon Tubbs for about a month. Even Frank Shakespeare took an interest in what I was doing, and invited me to his office to talk about it. So, thanks to all that help and moral support – and busting my butt – I got the Ph.D. just before leaving town for my assignment to Japan. Of course, having a doctorate while working in USIA was pretty close to useless, though I did sometimes find it useful to stick a "doctor" in front of my name, especially when performing such roles as chairing a Fulbright Commission. And besides the satisfaction of meeting the academic and intellectual challenges afforded by working on the degree, it also served as a kind of insurance policy to keep in my back pocket should the Agency sour on me, or I sour on it.

JAPANESE LANGUAGE TRAINING IN WASHINGTON AND YOKOHAMA – 1970-72

Q: Were you also preparing to go to Japan at that time?

BLACKBURN: Yes, I was. Fortunately, I had finished the first draft of the dissertation before I started Japanese training at FSI, so did not have that hanging over my head.

Having been interested in Japan for a long time and with some earlier self study under my belt, I was able to get a fast jump on the Japanese language training. I really didn't want to put aside two full years for language study, but hoped to earn the required 3/3 in one year and start working right away. The FSI teachers (especially Tanaka-sensei, a gifted educator known to many of her students as "Tiger Tanaka" for her boot camp type drilling of beginning students) really encouraged and pushed me. I got the S-3/R-3 after that one year, the first student ever to have done so, I was told. Still, there was no appropriate job for me in Japan, and my Japanese was not all that deeply implanted anyway.

When I got to FSI Yokohama in the summer of 1971, the teachers were very kind, but essentially said, "Burakuban-san, you may have gotten a 3/3 back in Washington, but you don't yet have a 3/3 by our reckoning." The terrific team of Japanese teachers in Yokohama worked me over pretty well that year, while keeping my spirits up through ping-pong games, go lessons, and occasional drinking bouts. In the end I scored a 3+/3+, which was pretty good, but not the 4/4 to which I had earlier aspired and which some had predicted I might be able to attain.

One of the highlights of the Japanese language program was my participation in the annual Japanese speech contest for foreigners that is broadcast live on NHK. With enormous help from an extraordinary Japanese instructor, Konno-sensei, I wrote a speech on the stages of my supposed "love affair" with the Sony Trinitron TV set that aided my language learning efforts. Looking back on the experience today, I wonder why I came up with such a sappy subject. Still, it was a good speech, reasonably well delivered despite my on-air stage fright, the Japanese loved it, and I beat out most of the competition to win third prize – the best anyone from FSI Yokohama had ever performed in that contest, and a record that may still stand.

After two years of the exquisite agony that only Japanese language students know – and I can attest that spoken Chinese is a breeze in comparison – I was eager and ready for my assignment at the heart of Alan Carter's would-be USIS utopia, the Tokyo American Center.

TOKYO AMERICAN CENTER DIRECTOR – 1972-75

Q: When did you know you would be going to the Tokyo center, and who did you replace?

BLACKBURN: I knew about it roughly a year in advance. I replaced Warren Obluck, a superb officer who had made tremendous contacts within the Tokyo arts community.

Actually, Frank Shakespeare took an interest in my assignment to Tokyo, and told me he had personally and enthusiastically signed off on it.

Q: So while you were studying Japanese, Carter showed up as PAO, right?

BLACKBURN: Alan arrived there in 1970, replacing Ned Roberts, just as I was getting started in the language training. On his arrival he announced a determination to fundamentally revamp a program he viewed as almost totally inappropriate for advancing our interests in the Japan of that time. He said the operation had become flaccid. The bulk of the post's key contacts dated back to the Occupation period, we were spending much of our time, energy, and money on "cultural centers" that had outlived their democracy-tutelage original purposes, and a scathingly-critical younger generation of Japanese viewed the U.S. as a nation in decline. Alan, I think correctly, concluded that USIS Japan, in both style and content, should reflect a vibrant, up-to-date America poised to exercise leadership in the decades ahead.

Although capable Japan specialist Dave Hitchcock served as Alan's deputy, most of the post's Japan experts and Japanophiles were moved to the sidelines or out the door. In their place came an extraordinarily talented and brilliant group of officers. Among them – besides Dave Hitchcock – were Barry Fulton, Don Hausrath, Ray Komai, and Dennis Askey. Harlan Rosacker, another outstanding officer and later the head of USIA personnel, ably handled press relations, but was not centrally involved in the "Carter revolution."

First among the revolutionaries was Barry Fulton. Barry had Alan's complete confidence and was in overall charge of planning and implementing the new organizational concept. His first act was to "seize the mailroom" – to get a feel for what sorts of communications were passing between offices and in what formats. Soon we all had standardized letterheads for USIS products, with stationary and name cards that were all part of a modernistic design concept masterminded by Ray Komai.

Among Barry's early tasks was to set up an integrated speaker system along the lines of the "packaged programming" concept first articulated, I believe, by Sam Courtney – and put into practice when Alan was Area Director for the Near East and South Asia just before being assigned to Japan. It was a great and, at the time, highly innovative idea. When a speaker came to us at the Tokyo American Center (TAC), it was not just a one-off event, but part of a broad-gauged effort that often included materials for distribution, other Japanese and American speakers, simultaneous translation, and lively A/V elements such as "triptych" slide introductions.

At the time we had branches in Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Fukuoka and Sapporo. All USIS activities operated out of American Centers (ACs) in those cities. The TAC was part of a tightly integrated AC network, and my official Agency title was "Branch PAO Tokyo." To emphasize our intention to address tough policy issues, the former "American Cultural Centers" had been shut down for refurbishment and then reopened as "American Centers." All of the ACs used essentially the same speakers, had the same library collections, and featured the same modular furniture, for example. And we all operated according to detailed instructions, written or approved by Barry, that we kept in loose leaf folders by our desks.

Barry invented the first full-fledged "Audience Record System (ARS)," which later became the Agency's standardized Distribution and Record System, or DRS. We worked hard to identify the key organizations and audience members we would try to reach with our activities, limited our invitation lists essentially to people we had identified, and kept track of how well we did in contacting them over time. In addition, each officer at the post was charged with maintaining his or her own "inner circle" of about 20 individuals who were supposed to receive our personal attention on a regular basis. We would report attendance at programs and other interactions to a central ARS office of the post. Every few months we would get a computer printout that showed how we and the other ACs were doing in terms of reaching our audiences with various types of program activities. Although Barry had thought through many of the fundamental issues, implementing his concepts brought out the Jesuit in each of us – as we struggled to define precisely who should be in or out of the system, how much of our effort should be devoted to bringing people to our centers – as opposed to taking speakers to other venues – what to do about keeping track of students in the ARS, and so on. And on and on.

Don Hausrath was in charge of the libraries. They were no longer called "libraries," but became "Infomats" – to emphasize their new status as outlets for current "information materials." The Infomats were technologically well ahead of most Japanese institutions of that era. We had video as well as audio cassette collections, including excellent materials on U.S. scientific achievements as well as VCRs of the best of our AC speaker programs. And, beginning in 1972, we used an early form of a FAX machine, with which we could communicate with the USIS Infomat support office and between ACs. It took about ten minutes per page for the transmission, but it was very handy for answering reference questions and doing other business.

Besides the modular furniture, another important design feature was our beanbag chairs on the floor all around the Infomat. The Japanese loved to sit in them and read. And of course sometimes they would be so comfortable they would fall asleep. When Alan would come to the TAC and find a patron dozing, it seemed to make him mad, because he would go over and give the "chair" a little kick. If you have ever tried to sleep in a beanbag chair and had someone kick it, you know it wakes you right up. By the time the startled Japanese patron had his wits about him, Alan would be well away from the area, with an innocent but satisfied look on his face.

The most innovative, radical and controversial aspect of the Infomat was its approach to the collection itself. For starters, each of the six ACs had exactly the same 3,000 titles, 2,000 of them for circulation and 1,000 to meet the reference needs of our audiences. The TAC had an additional 1,000 reference titles, for a total in all of 4,000 volumes. The standard 2,000 circulating titles were divided equally among the five major themes – or post objectives – that also guided our speaker programming. These themes were: security and U.S.-Japan relations, economics, American society, arts, and what we called ""toward the year 2000" – the latter reflecting our desire to address the great Japanese interest in futurology. With 400 titles devoted to each theme, it was further decreed that

no more than 100 of them could be more than five years old, and the other 300 should be roughly divided among works published in the previous five years. The concept was that we would collectively work together – with help from the Japanese staff who scanned Japanese newspapers and magazines as well as library support personnel back in Washington – to identify and procure the 60 most important and pertinent books published annually in each of the five subject areas. Further, to maintain the rigidly disciplined nature of the collection, we weeded out the same number of books we added to our shelves each year. A lot of people found this approach reprehensible, or at least astounding – especially the idea that after we had already disposed of tens of thousands of volumes from the old Cultural Centers we were now prepared to discard even perfectly serviceable newer ones to meet some kind of mechanistic formula. It was definitely a rigid approach, but I didn't oppose it. I generally agreed with the thesis that such discipline was a necessary underpinning for our great exertions to obtain the most up-to-date materials – even to the extent of having books airshipped to us for use in programs or to feature on our shelves. And our key audiences appreciated what we were trying to do, and began to look to us as a major source for any research they were doing that related to the United States.

Ray Komai was the design specialist, who worked closely with Dennis Askey on the art work for the post's upscale Japanese-language magazine. Trends was a beautiful monthly product that not only featured modern American art and architecture, but also carried in-depth articles on our other major themes.

In designing the centers, Ray worked with the incomparable Lynn Nyce of the central USIA space design office to came up with a contemporary look. The look featured supergraphics that showed visitors the way to rest rooms, "REFERENCE," or whatever, tubular legs on tables and desks, white walls, large modern prints, and a strict policy of no personal items – including photos, calendars and flowers – on desks. The latter dictum was the hardest for many to swallow. All the public and working spaces of the ACs were intended to give a modern, professional feel. Those of us who worked there were viewed essentially as temporary occupants of the space.

Q: How did you fit into this operation, and how did you get along with Alan Carter?

BLACKBURN: When I took over the Tokyo American Center, which was at Akasaka Mitsuke about a mile from our embassy, it had just been renovated and launched in the new format. We were the experimental ground zero for the new approach. People came to check us out all the time. The Japanese were fascinated by the experiment, stopping by in droves to sample our services or just see what we were up to. In Tokyo, as in other cities with American Centers, the revamped operations received extensive and positive newspaper, magazine, and TV coverage. Alan, justifiably eager to show off the TAC, regularly brought visitors, frequently including Ambassador Robert Ingersoll, when we were having a particularly interesting speaker program or cultural event.

Unfortunately, Alan and I did not get off to a great start. Being the officer charged with

running the flagship operation of the whole program, I saw my responsibilities as divided between those of salesman/cheer-leader on the one hand and internal reporter of system glitches on the other. In the latter role, I was following one of Barry's management principles to the effect that a certain error rate in any new endeavor is to be expected, and no one should be surprised that things don't work 100% as planned. Alan, however, clearly wanted me to be a whole-hearted enthusiast, even in our internal discussions. Early on concluding that I was entirely too negative – and perhaps suspecting, completely wrongly, that I was bitching back-channel to his arch-rival, Dan Oleksiw – Alan started an office folder to document my transgressions, his secretary told me.

The low point was a BPAO conference in Kyoto, where Alan and I had several acrimonious exchanges during what were supposed to be relaxing social occasions – over, as I remember, some rather minor problems I had identified. The arguments didn't bother me so much, as I knew Barry felt my criticisms raised issues that needed to be addressed. What I literally lost sleep over – from fear that, if found out, I would be fired or at least severely reprimanded – was a serious mistake I had made before leaving for the conference. Foolishly I had agreed to let a Japanese avant garde theater troupe use the TAC programming space for a performance the same weekend we were all to be in Kyoto. I should have checked more closely to find out what was in their performance, because the same night Alan and I had our worst argument, back at the TAC a show was presented with a scene in which sympathetically-portrayed PLO soldiers paraded around the stage, their rifles at the ready to confront the Israeli enemy. I never should have permitted such a deviation from policy and good sense. I prayed that none of my bosses would ever get wind of my mistake – and fortunately they never did.

Later that first fall I organized some impressive seminars at the TAC, and put on a week-long video art festival that was the largest of its kind that had been held anywhere in the world up to that point. Having seen that I really was a positive force and an asset to his program, Alan's attitude toward me mellowed. A month or so later his secretary told me Alan had instructed her to remove and destroy the special file he had been keeping on me.

Q: What sorts of activities did you have at the center?

BLACKBURN: We put on lots of speaker programs, seminars, co-sponsored off-site conferences, exhibitions, films shows, and even a few concerts. I was aided by a terrific staff, with 22 Japanese Foreign Service Nationals and a Deputy Center Director, first Mike Haller and then Carol Ludwig. Among the many outstanding FSNs, I was closest to the wise veteran who served as the TAC's senior FSN, Kinji Ando, to arts specialist Kyoko Michishita, and to Matsuko Kyoto, who was the number two in the Infomat. Other notable staffers were programmers Mr. Soga, Mr. Kubo, and Ms. Tatara, chief librarian Mr. Fukuda, and the administrative genius Mr. Kitazawa, who regularly assured me that he would "leave nothing to chance." All the FSNs were thoroughly professional, dedicated to making the new arrangement work, and so cohesive that I could hand them a knotty planning problem in the confidence that after mulling it over they would present me with a workable solution to consider.

The TAC generally had two or three programs a week. In all, I think I presided over more than 200 separate speaker events during my three years in the job. The first program I handled featured Mike Armacost, who was Ambassador to Japan during my second tour there, talking about regional security issues. We had many prominent experts in all fields. For example, Paul Samuelson, the great economist who "wrote the book" – the one we all used when we studied basic economics. On the arts side, we had Isamu Noguchi and Louise Nevelson speak at the center, did a big event honoring the work of Sam Francis, who was living near the TAC at the time, and even cosponsored an event that brought Andy Warhol to Tokyo.

In addition to the challenges of running the Tokyo American Center, I was also designated the Embassy's Cultural Attache. Alan felt that position and the access it afforded should go to the TAC Director rather than the Cultural Affairs Officer working out of the Embassy. Having those two hats, I was invited to a great many cultural events – performances, exhibits, avant guard film showings, and the like. Thanks to the great contacts that Warren Obluck had developed, particularly among composers and print artists, I was relatively quickly able to establish myself as a reasonably plausible member of Tokyo's cultural community.

Q: What was the biggest programming challenge you faced?

BLACKBURN: There were many difficult ones – relating to the Vietnam War, to our sudden opening to China, to increasing trade frictions, and so on – but the Watergate crisis certainly put us in a strange public affairs situation. The Japanese generally were quite high on Nixon, despite the "Nixon shocks" relating to China and our unpegging the dollar-yen exchange rate. They thought Nixon was a tough, effective Cold War leader. In Tokyo, as elsewhere in Japan and around the world, USIS officers suddenly found themselves in the odd position of explaining why our president's transgressions were so serious many Americans had determined that he should be thrown out of office. My Japanese contacts, no matter how versed they were in "American studies," simply could not grasp what was going on. They kept asking me if there wasn't really some sexual or financial scandal behind it all. I tried to explain the seriousness of Nixon's alleged participation in the Watergate cover-up, and to use the crisis as a way of informing Japanese about the arcane workings of our political system. Despite our efforts, the Japanese continued to view the cover-up as a very small matter that had been blown way out of proportion by Nixon's mean-spirited and opportunistic enemies.

Q: Sounds like you had a great time.

BLACKBURN: Well, it certainly was an enormously stimulating period in my life. I became well informed about all sorts of things and met many fascinating Japanese as well as American who participated in our events. In other ways, it was a humbling experience. Perhaps influenced by the Japanese penchant for self-criticism, I became vividly aware of my inadequacies. I soon realized that I would never really know that much about the

subjects my speakers were addressing. I could never keep up with all the must-read books and magazines flowing into our Infomat. When we would have a high-profile speaker with us for a couple of days, like the novelist John Gardner, I made time to read two or three of his novels, but that meant I couldn't fully prepare for other speakers in the same time frame – perhaps experts on alternative energy sources, international trade theory, or Sino-Soviet relations. I also realized that my Japanese was not as fluent as I wanted it to be, and that I was not seeing as much of my contacts as I wanted to. To keep from being too hard on myself, I had to keep telling myself that I was just there to do the best job I could under the circumstances – and not to expect any more than that.

Tragically, this tendency toward excessive self-criticism when working as an AC Director became pathological in the case of my friend and counterpart in Nagoya, John Lepperd – who took his own life while en route to a direct-transfer assignment as CAO in Jakarta. John sent pathetic suicide notes to his bosses, including PAO Bill Miller, who had by then replaced Alan Carter, apologizing for having done such a poor job in Nagoya. We all realized after the fact that John had for some time been crying out for help in different ways, but that we hadn't heard him. I felt terrible about it, and was quite angry at those in the USIS chain of command who should have been more responsive to his pleas. These were the days before we had psychiatrists available to our overseas posts. Currently, there is one assigned to Tokyo.

Q: Are you saying that you think he was suffering from the kind of pressures you were describing as feelings of inadequacy on your own part?

BLACKBURN: Yes. I think we all had the same feelings to some extent, but he quite clearly went over the edge. He said in his letters that he felt he had done a terrible job as Nagoya AC Director, but we all – including his supervisors – thought he had done a fine job. He described his Japanese as mediocre, but he was easily the best of the six of us at the ACs. It was just an awful situation, and we all felt so helpless. I am still in regular touch with John's widow, Hemlata, who lives in Washington.

Q: The Japan program was pretty controversial back in Washington, wasn't it?

BLACKBURN: Indeed it was. In addition to those in USIA whose feathers Alan had ruffled over the years and were happy to take potshots at him, many in the Agency were genuinely concerned – in some cases even alarmed, at what they understood to be going on there. Jim Moceri was sent out by Agency management to have a look at the USIS Japan program and see if it should be, A, strangled in its bed; B, kept alive but applied only to the peculiar conditions of Japan; or C, used as a template for changes elsewhere in USIA's world. After conducting his mini-inspection of the post, Moceri concluded that while the program may have had some validity in Japan, it contained deeply serious flaws. It was, he said, much too mechanistic, it didn't take adequate account of local sensitivities, and it didn't place proper emphasis on warm personal friendships, especially with intellectuals. I am not doing justice to his critique, but I believe that was the gist of it. Alan was summoned back to Washington for what some called a "star chamber

hearing" to respond to Moceri's criticisms. According to those who attended, it was among the most dramatic confrontations in the Agency's history. People stood along the walls of the packed conference room for the four or five hours that Alan and Jim went head to head over nearly every aspect of the program. The upshot was that Alan prevailed, at least as far as Japan was concerned – which was all that he had been arguing for in the first place. The Agency's leaders congratulated him on putting together such a fine and carefully considered program, but reserved judgment about its applicability elsewhere.

As it happened, many of Alan's innovations did spread to other countries in the following years – for example, using modern design to draw trendy young audiences to the USIS centers, placing emphasis on getting the most up-to-date reference materials into the hands of key contacts, and instituting more rigorous distribution systems. In addition, USIS Japan's targeted speaker program, and the heavy demands it put on disparate Washington elements, prompted a full revamping of USIA's field program support apparatus, carried out under the leadership of Chas Freeman and Ed Schulick.

PAOs who came to Japan later, even those like Cliff Forster who had been early critics of the Carter approach, actually changed very few of the basic programming elements, as I saw for myself when I returned to Tokyo as PAO after an absence of 17 years. Yes, the beanbag chairs were gone. The Infomat had become an Information Resource Center. We had gone back to having an Information Officer, instead of a Media Relations Officer, and the Cultural Attache portfolio belonged to the Cultural Affairs Officer. The Audience Record System, now the DRS, was more sophisticated. And we had started having each AC book collection concentrate on a specific theme, and no longer insisted that a book be thrown out for every one that was added. More important was what was kept – the attention to carefully selected audiences, the dedication to constant upgrading of communications and A/V support technology, and a willingness to pass up activities that were "nice to do" in favor of a disciplined focus on our primary objectives. This approach continues to this day, under the leadership of another "true believer" from the old days, PAO Hugh Hara.

USIA INSPECTOR – 1975-77

Q: Let's see now, where did you go after Japan?

BLACKBURN: I went back to the Agency to work on the Inspection staff. It was a little early for another Washington assignment, but I needed to go back for family reasons. Dan Oleksiw was Chief Inspector and took me on.

Q: What was that like?

BLACKBURN: It was exciting going back to work for my former mentor, who I joined on quite a few inspections during those two years. I got a chance to inspect 22 different programs, all but one of them – Hong Kong – outside of East Asia. The job took me to

some fascinating places I never otherwise would have seen. It was like having an intense "mini career."

There's nothing like going to a post as an inspector. Everybody is nice to you, they introduce you to the most fascinating people they know, and they expose you to the most interesting places, the best restaurants, and so on. I got to South Africa, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Brazil, Argentina, Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Greece, the United Kingdom – all sorts of important posts. It was a wonderful education, and I was deeply impressed with so many of the people I met and the dedication and skill they applied to the programs they were carrying out – for example, PAOs like Terry Catherman, Art Hoffman, Lyle Copman, and Mike Pistor.

South Africa, Egypt, and Yugoslavia were particularly fascinating. I was especially blown away by the 1976 USIS South Africa program, which we inspected just before the outbreak of the momentous Soweto riots. The USIS officers and FSNs were using exchanges, center programs, and large representational events to develop terrific relations with key figures in all the racial groups – making friends for the U.S. and also helping lay the groundwork for positive change in that country.

Though we were ready to offer praise, and often did, we were also at the posts to address problems – ones raised by Washington elements or the post itself, or ones we ourselves stumbled upon. Sometimes our analysis was harsh, and I think that on occasion we were probably more critical than we needed to be. There certainly weren't any white-washes.

Q: What about the benefits of the inspections process? The follow through, I thought, was always questionable on inspections?

BLACKBURN: That was true is some cases, but the inspections I went on often led to real improvements, some of them quite major, in post operations. It was often rightly said that the most useful aspect of any inspection was the preparation the post's staff had to go through before the inspectors even showed up at their doorstep. They would complete an elaborate check list that would force them to think carefully about what they were doing – with their publications, their cultural programs, their management, and so on. When we arrived at the post, we would get both the checklist and an "inspection memorandum" that presented the PAO's take on the post. He or she would describe both the strengths of the program and also problem areas that merited special attention during the inspection.

In those days inspections were more subjective than they are today. They focused heavily on broad issues of program management and post morale. Currently there is much more emphasis on checking to ensure that regulations are being followed, and to identify "waste, fraud and abuse." Though even then people complained that we were too willing to shoot from the hip, we did in fact try to be objective and to carefully document any criticisms. And I think the inspections were quite useful to the posts.

To my surprise, I found that many officers at our posts, especially small ones, were

sincerely happy to have us there. These people were often lonely, overstressed from trying to meet every requirement laid on them by their PAOs, DCMs, or Ambassadors, and glad to find a reasonably sympathetic ear. They welcomed the chance to talk at length about their accomplishments and also to think through problems they may have been having with their bosses, those they were trying to supervise, or their support offices back in Washington. I had many long conversations with American officers and FSN colleagues. Sometimes they took my advice, sometimes not. In vain I urged one young officer to quit the Foreign Service and pursue a career path better suited to his decidedly un-bureaucratic talents. Unfortunately, he was later forced, over his strenuous resistance, to take that path by an Agency performance evaluation panel. But even he, as well as many others, clearly appreciated the personal approach and well-intentioned attitude of many of the inspectors of that day.

Sometimes our formal recommendations as well as our informal briefings had immediate impact. In a few cases officers were removed from posts as a result of our inspections, while in others – like the counseling I gave on operating audience record systems – changes came about naturally and thus merited hardly any mention in the final report.

In the USIS Hong Kong inspection team leader Jim Rentschler and I recommended that the post cease publishing Current Scene, an English-language publication used to describe recent developments in the People's Republic of China. Drawing on the results of a survey of all USIS posts, which rated it the least useful of all Agency products, we said that it no longer served its original intention. During that era Bill Payeff was heading East Asia. At a meeting USIA Director Jim Keogh had with our inspection team, Bill argued strongly for keeping the magazine afloat, basically saying that we inspectors didn't know what we were talking about. A few months after that meeting, with Payeff's support, the Agency abolished Current Scene, citing our recommendation as a major reason for the decision! That was not an uncommon inspection scenario.

Q: Who was in Hong Kong then?

BLACKBURN: The PAO was Jack Friedman. He was one of the extremely rare cases when a State Department officer with no USIA experience was assigned as a PAO. Though Jack was very dedicated, his lack of familiarity with the arcane array of Agency products, programs, regulations, and hidden pots of money made it difficult for him to operate as effectively as he might have. Since consolidation, with considerable interchange between officers in all the cones, the Department has done a much better job of basic public diplomacy training for officers such as Jack Friedman.

Q: How did the inspection experience help you in later years?

BLACKBURN: It had a major influence on my understanding of how USIA really did its business around the world. It also gave me a chance to think about the different management styles that might – or certainly would not – work for me. I also made some deep friendships, both at the posts and with other inspectors. The experience, in addition,

steeped me deeply in the process itself – so much so that when it came my turn to be inspected at each of the four posts where I served as PAO, none of those inspections turned up anything but very minor failings.

SENIOR POLICY OFFICER – 1977-78

Q: This brings us to the point, does it not, where you went into the policy guidance shop just as CU had come out of the State Department to be combined with USIA?

BLACKBURN: Yes, that was 1977, the first year of the Carter Administration. I went into the new policy office set up at that time. John Reinhardt was USIA Director and Charlie Bray was Deputy, while Hal Schneidman was the Associate Director for Programs and Policy, I believe it was called, with Alan Carter was his deputy. Technically, and performance evaluation-wise, I worked for first Gib Austin and then Dick Roth, but basically I reported directly to Alan Carter for the next three years. It seems I shuttled constantly back and forth between Alan and Dan Oleksiw. Anyway, Hal and Alan wanted to invigorate the "long-term policy" office – a hardy perennial Agency objective – by bringing in Mike Schneider, me, and several other mid-level officers who might offer fresh approaches.

I was given the portfolio of arms control and disarmament. Though I didn't have much background in the subject, to say the least, I read up on the issues and manfully tried to maintain liaison with the real experts at State, ACDA, and the NSC – with some contact with Defense, as well. In the first flush of the Carter Administration, these issues were high on the agenda. There were many initiatives on the table regarding test bans, strategic negotiations with the Soviet Union, non-proliferation, limitations on arms transfers, and a great many issues to be addressed at the so-called "SSOD," the U.N. Special Session on Disarmament. My job was to try to understand the issues and to help our posts deal with them in the field. It was interesting enough, but USIA was very far on the sidelines, there was not a great deal for our media elements and overseas posts to do to advance our policies, and the initiatives themselves quickly ran out of gas in most cases. For example, rather than viewing the SSOD as a great forum for advancing a global disarmament and arms control agenda, the security community's approach to it became a "damage limitation" operation.

While in that office I was given an additional assignment – to produce a new version of our traditional annual Country Plan instruction, one that would be appropriate for the USIA-CU merger that had just taken place. I worked on it in tandem with Barry Fulton, who by then was doing strategic planning for the restructured Agency. Developing the new approach was more complicated than we had expected it to be, because it soon became apparent that USIA and CU had structured their annual plans quite differently over the years.

Q: Let's be systematic about this. I never had much to do with this sort of thing in the Agency. Can you go into some detail about what you are referring to?

BLACKBURN: The USIA Country Plan would start out with an analysis of the policy framework and then describe those attitudes toward the United States and our policies that needed priority attention in the context of the bilateral relationship. It would state specific themes that would be used to address misunderstandings of – or outright opposition to – our policies in priority areas of concern such as trade, relations with the USSR, and so on – as well as aspects of American politics, values, culture, etc. that needed to be highlighted. Then we would talk about the key audience groups to which we wanted to deliver our messages. That was the way a traditional USIA Country Plan would look. Its objectives were concrete and reasonably substantive, pointing toward achieving some sort of specific result.

In contrast, a CU Country Plan would focus less on the substance of specific messages and much more on processes that would play out over the long term. Its analysis of the programming environment would emphasize areas that needed to be treated by dialogue and exchanges aimed at increased understanding by the U.S. as well as the host country. It might specify fields like international trade, urban planning, or literature, and call for increased numbers of Fulbright student grantees, scholarly symposia, joint research, or academic affiliations in those fields. Often the "American learning process" and ensuring that U.S. academic interests were served was considered just as important as building support for our immediate foreign policy objectives. The CU objective was to devote appropriate levels of resources to advancing U.S. national interests over the long term. Because of Senator J. William Fulbright's desire for this approach, he had long opposed any merger of the more high-minded CU with what he saw as propagandistic USIA – even though both efforts were run out of our same USIS offices at posts abroad.

Many in CU had hoped to keep on doing exchanges planning as before, but Reinhardt and Bray insisted on melding the two approaches. I was the lead person trying to find accommodation between the traditional USIA people on the one hand and the keepers of the CU flame on the other. Over several weeks we looked at various options – such as a CU-type portion of a USIA-type plan, adding exchanges "messages" and short-term purposes to the old USIA plan, and loosening the language of each type of plan, but keeping them pretty separate. These are just some examples of what we considered. In the end, after I had shuffled many drafts between the former CU planners, Barry Fulton, Alan Carter, and Charlie Bray, we found workable compromises that met most needs in that first year and laid the groundwork for future refinements.

Another planning exercise was closer to my heart and produced a more satisfactory result, at least intellectually. That was the work Barry and I did in conceptualizing an "influence structure analysis" exercise. Although lists of key institutions had been a part of Barry's audience record system from the beginning, we had never before had an analytical approach for identifying them and relating them to the individuals in the system. Posts needed this kind of rigor in order to set priorities among types of institutions, among offices, faculties, and other sub-groups within institutions, and among categories of individuals (like some students) for whom we might not keep individual records. These

key institutions would get post attention for cosponsored programs, International Visitor Grant nominations, reference center outreach, and recruitment of audiences for programs and representational events. Dan Oleksiw, citing inspection results demonstrating a need for such an exercise, and Alan Carter, who was ready to accept the idea from the get-go, both gave impetus to our efforts. However, the two of them – ever wary of the other – wanted some control over how our exercise would turn out. They finally settled on a compromise: anything Barry said was okay Alan would agree to, and anything I said was okay Dan would sign off on. That was just fine with Barry and me. The heavy sledding came when the two of us tried to reach agreement. But after many "struggle sessions" we produced the "Influence Structure Analysis Guidelines." Though it sounds dry and bureaucratic from this vantage, the document was widely praised as an excellent planning instrument. Eventually used by virtually all USIS, it was never improved on over a period of two decades. I understand it is still referred to and kept current at quite a few embassies even now, some 25 years later.

CHIEF OF FAST POLICY GUIDANCE – 1978-80

Q: What brought about your move to "fast policy" guidance? Somebody left, I suppose.

BLACKBURN: First let me explain that "fast guidance" was, I believe, an Alan Carter-ism. The term brought some good-natured derision – aimed mainly at the guy with the phrase in his title, me – but actually made the useful distinction that this was an office focused exclusively on day-to-day guidances such as would be used by the State Department Spokesman and our press attaches in the field.

I was moved in the summer of 1978 to fill a gap. I replaced a terrific policy officer named Jim Thurber, whose able deputy, Harry Iceland, fortunately stayed on through my first year on the job. Harry was replaced by another excellent officer, George Kinzer, and we were given great staff assistance by ever-helpful Marg Davy. At the time, Hodding Carter was Spokesman, and a marvelous one he was. As the USIA liaison with Hodding, I had a bird's eye view of the latter part of the Carter Administration – the depressing Iran hostage crisis and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the encouraging breakthrough when we established formal relations with the People's Republic of China. I was on the phone with the State Department Press Office off and on during the day and went over to the Department for the daily noon briefing - and the meetings in Hodding's office that preceded and followed it. My job was not only to get the straight word on current policy, but on behalf of USIA to raise concerns about how our pitches would play overseas, the urgency of getting policy materials to the field, or more parochial issues such as pushing for seats for VOA Correspondents and Wireless File writers when Secretary Vance or Secretary Muskie traveled overseas.

I held morning and afternoon meetings in my office with USIA area office and media policy officers. In the brief morning sessions I gave them a heads-up on the hot items in U.S. foreign affairs, and in the afternoon I provided an insider perspective on what reasoning, sensitivities, and organizational compromises had led to the wording of the

guidances we were all instructed to follow.

Another role I played was as the primary point of foreign policy contact with the Voice of America – on behalf not only of the Agency but also, at least in theory, of the State Department and National Security Council. The idea was that VOA would carry out its responsibilities, as laid out in the "VOA Charter," without interference from other parts of the government. I was the gatekeeper for outsider contacts with VOA. If any Ambassador or State or Agency policy officer had any complaint or advice to offer, it was supposed to come to me for passing along as appropriate. If a factual mistake was picked up by a USG listener, I was to be called immediately, night or day. Some of those came along in the wee hours of the morning, and I immediately notified the VOA Newsroom, which took appropriate action to correct or pull the item.

On the other hand, if the issue was one of news treatment or perceived deficiency in supporting our policy, that was a different matter entirely. Those interventions had to be handled gingerly. If anyone questioned VOA's authority to use its own news judgment, I would explain to the complainer that pushing U.S. policies was not a function of VOA news – but rather a job handled by what were then known as "VOA Commentaries." These segments, which in an earlier incarnation were called "VOA News Analyses" or "VOA Backgrounders," later became the "VOA Editorials" we hear today. Excellent analysts like Howard J. Dunlevy bylined the earlier pieces, but these segments purported only to reflect the views of their writers. In replacing all such opinion pieces with the Commentaries, VOA now had a vehicle for getting out official – and cleared – U.S. policy.

My office was in charge of getting the needed clearances. We also passed along policy documents and treatment suggestions to VOA policy officers, for transmission to the actual VOA writers of the pieces. Of course, we had disagreements almost daily. The Voice of America people insisted that it was essential to use "radio language" to effectively defend our policies, but that approach often ran smack into the face of staid, often extremely "nuanced," State Department formulations. East Asia Area Director Mort Smith, as well as his State Department counterparts, would get apoplectic about phraseology the VOA writers wanted to use in talking about our China policy. Middle East policy was another hot potato. I would look at the draft commentaries and tried to find a middle ground between, on the one hand, the textual purists of the State Department and, on the other hand, the VOA professionals trying to convey our policies in a clear and "listenable" manner attractive to foreign radio audiences. Given the different approaches, I think we actually made the system work pretty well. In the Reagan Administration, after I had left the job, the policy purists won the day. Now, except for the occasional out-of-school piece, we have "VOA Editorials" that explicitly enunciate polices of the U.S. Government. Sadly, they are widely considered boring as well as so blatantly propagandistic as to undermine VOA's credibility and competitiveness with the BBC and other Western international broadcasters.

My "fast guidance" job also included liaison with the White House on policy issues of all

types. Besides day-to-day concerns, for example, I represented USIA at highly classified discussions about what the U.S. was going to counter the Soviets in Afghanistan. However, my main interactions with the White House were in connection with presidential and vice-presidential trips overseas, for which I was the Agency's senior coordinator. In that capacity, I would get an early heads up on planned travel and spread the word internally as to what specific types of non-routine press support the White House wanted from us. A constant message the White House Press Office told me to pass along was: "Make sure your USIS people in the field understand that WE are in charge of this trip. Nothing is to be done without OUR say-so. We want all-out support – no whining, no special pleading, and no arguments about our decisions. Within these strict ground rules we realize there may be some local sensitivities we are not aware of, so will listen to a very limited number of pertinent suggestions passed to us one-on-one from the PAO on the ground." The Carter press advance people were sometimes a pain to deal with, but fortunately they had by those years gained more competence and confidence than they had initially displayed.

I had helped out with President Lyndon Johnson's visit to Bangkok in 1966, and worked at the USIS press center when President Ford visited Tokyo in 1974 or 1975, but this was up close and personal. Though I usually did not go along for the actual trips, I did join a "pre-advance" to Mexico City, and then got deeply involved in Vice President Walter Mondale's high-profile trip to China in 1979. The latter – a real kick – gave me my first look at the PRC. I was there for three weeks, helping both the White House and our new China post on a trip that took Mondale to Xian and Guangzhou as well as Beijing. John Thompson was the PAO, Ted Liu the CAO, and Bill Stubbs the IO. They were a great team, but were already over-worked and clearly needed Agency help in handling a Vice Presidential visit. The formal bilateral relationship was only a year old, Deng Xiao-ping had just had a very successful visit to the United States, exchanges were expanding exponentially, a large foreign press corps had taken up residence in Beijing, and the Chinese were all over us with expressions of friendship and thanks for such products as the VOA Chinese Service. But USIS had almost no infrastructure other than what could be provided at long distance from USIS Hong Kong. Ted and Bill lived in small rooms at the Beijing Hotel, and Ted's office was a converted bathroom that still had tiles on the walls – making for very loud conversations!

Though I didn't actually meet Mondale during the trip, I was very impressed with his performance and got plenty of exposure to some of his people supporting the trip – including his excellent press assistant, Maxine Isaacs, who later became cosponsor of the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage, and Bob Toricelli, who led the advance team in Xian and later was elected to the House and Senate from New Jersey. Some of the political people were nice and capable, while others were difficult. It didn't much matter to me, though, as I was just thrilled to be in China – and to have the chance to help set up Mondale's televised speech at Peking University, to attend two banquets at the Great Hall of the People, to watch the start of meetings between Mondale and Deng Xiao-ping, and otherwise to be a part of such a momentous visit.

I badly fluffed one responsibility I was given, I must confess. That was to take charge of the "mult box" that the correspondents all plugged into to get their sound recordings of press conference proceedings. So that there wouldn't be a forest of microphones on the table in front of Mondale at his farewell press conference in Beijing, the journalists were all told to rely on the mult box. Unfortunately, despite our assurances and what I thought had been adequate pre-testing, it turned out that I must not have connected things quite right, as nothing at all went through it. I felt really stupid, and panicked at the thought that we would have nothing on which to base our official transcript of the event. Mercifully, Jim Sterba of the New York Times had had his tape recorder on and picked up a very, very faint recording. That night secretary and "angel of mercy" Delores Boyer and I were able, word by painstaking word, to reproduce – with a few "inaudibles" here and there – a plausible transcript of the proceedings. I still shudder to think how close I was to the potential disaster of having no transcript at all for that important press conference.

Q: Was that all just before you went to Malaysia?

BLACKBURN: Yes, the China trip was my last major Fast Policy Guidance task, and a great wind-up it was.

PAO KUALA LUMPUR – 1980-84

Q: Okay, tell me about the Malaysia job.

BLACKBURN: I was very happy to be assigned as PAO to Malaysia. I had been fascinated by the country when I first visited it in 1963, and then in 1970 had briefly done dissertation research there on the Malaysian media. On that latter visit I stayed with Jodie Lewinsohn in the grand PAO mansion that I later "inherited." Not only was I pleased with the job, I was nearly ecstatic that I would be living in an abode with a clay tennis court in its front yard.

Before I left for Kuala Lumpur I called – on successive days – on USIA Director John Reinhardt and East Asia Area Director Jodie Lewinsohn. After saying they thought K.L. was an excellent first PAO assignment for me, each had quite different advice about my dealings with the Malaysian FSNs. John said I should exercise strong leadership and try to overcome my tendency to be too easy going and lenient with FSN employees. In contrast, Jodie said she feared that, because I was so awfully stubborn, I would be too demanding and pushy with the staff, so should go easy on them. I never did figure out which one had me sized up accurately – perhaps they both had!

Malaysia was an ideal place to begin my 15 years as a PAO. For starters, support from my Ambassadors – Barbara Watson, Ron Palmer, and Tom Shoesmith – and my DCMs – Lyall Brecken and Mike Connors – could not have been better, and the American and FSN staffs were highly competent. A complete turnover of American staff accompanied my arrival at the post to replace Wes Fenhagen. Tony Sariti came in as CAO, Edie Russo as IO, and Joann Quinton as EO. Craig Stromme, then the JOT, returned as CAO my last

year in K.L. and much later joined me in the EAP Public Diplomacy Office. Among the many standout FSNs were cultural specialist Sharifah Zuriah Al-jeffrie, senior FSN advisor Selvendra Rajendrum, IV/exchanges specialist Dorothy David, librarian Sophia Lim, and my secretary, Helen Lee, who later became the DRS specialist and was replaced by Tina Chee.

I learned to chair a binational Fulbright commission – the Malaysian American Commission for Educational Exchange, or MACEE – and I enjoyed interacting with the excellent contacts my predecessors and the FSNs had developed at all levels of the society. In my first months on the ground, I met political leaders from all the major parties, the educational and cultural elites, and revered figures such as the country's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the President of the High (Supreme) Court, Tun Suffian. The latter had been an Eisenhower Exchange Fellow and chaired the EEF selection committee.

It was exciting to work in a country with such a rich racial composition. Both the post's DRS and our USIS staff reflected the tapestry of Malays, Chinese and Indians – Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians – that is Malaysia. Although the USIS FSNs were by and large excellent and worked together well considering their disparate backgrounds, I had to handle some challenging management problems. When easing out certain long-time staffers and tightening up procedures, I tried to apply lessons learned from my inspecting days.

Americans in Malaysia at that time enjoyed a special status. American investors were setting up semi-conductor factories in large numbers, military cooperation was close, and the Malaysian Government was sending the cream of its Malay students on undergraduate and graduate scholarships to American universities. People wanted to meet Americans, and took pains to explain to us the ins and outs of Malaysian society and politics – typically from the ethnic perspective of the particular speaker. And, best of all, they did it in fluent English, a fact I appreciated after having been at sea so often in conversations in Thai and Japanese during my previous assignments.

Q: Tell me more about the educational exchanges.

BLACKBURN: Malaysian officials, like then Education Minister Musa Hitam, and our Embassy paid considerable attention to the Malay students in U.S. academic programs, especially those who had gone on to study in America. Typically they were young and impressionable. Often they had negative reactions to the permissive environments in which they suddenly found themselves, and for which they were not well prepared. Some analysts believe that Islamic radicalism in today's Malaysia got its first major impetus from disillusioned Malay students who were part of that big wave that went to the U.S. Though we recognized such dangers at the time, overall we thought that having thousands of bright young Malays go to the U.S. was an exciting and hopeful development. Our USIS Country Plan for Malaysia even included promotion of educational linkages as a major objective, nearly up there with our security and trade goals. The focus of the post

on advising U.S.-bound students led us to hire Marti Thomson, who first ran the volunteer-based student advising operation at MACEE and then became the first – and most distinguished – "Regional Educational Advising Counselor" for USIA and later the State Department.

Besides promoting educational exchanges and linkages, I spearheaded the formation of the Malaysian Association of American Studies, an organization that continues to flourish to this day.

Q: Wasn't a new U.S. Embassy constructed in Kuala Lumpur about this time?

BLACKBURN: Yes, it was completed in 1983. All USIS facilities, including our off-site "Lincoln Center," were moved into the new building. I developed a public affairs strategy aimed at both showing off the new facility – which had a terrific design that incorporated Malaysian motifs and did not give one the impression of being the fortress it really was – and encouraging in-person and off-site usage of the library holdings and reference services we had brought over from the Lincoln Center. In carrying out the latter objective, Sophia Lim developed and implemented a brilliant outreach strategy that later was used as a model for other USIS posts throughout the world.

To bring Malaysians comfortably into the Embassy, I dreamed up an art exhibition titled "American Experiences, Malaysian Images." It featured the work of Malaysian artists who had spent time in the United States. Each artist was invited to show one piece completed before going abroad, one while in the U.S., and one after returning to Malaysia. The catalogue we produced gave each artist his or her own spread. It was a beautiful product, all paid for by a grant from ESSO. The show was opened by a Cabinet minister and proved a great success. I was so happy with the idea that I replicated it in Thailand on my next assignment, though in that case with very mixed results.

My work on the Malaysian media led me to pay particular attention to the Malaysian press. I had many excellent contacts, some of whom I inherited from legendary Information Officer Mike Brown and some of whom I developed on my own. Helpfully, a convivial gathering – that Mike had earlier promoted – of Malaysian journalists and foreign information officers was held on Friday nights at one or another of the local watering spas.

My marriage to Winona having come to an end by that point, I married Pek, a Malaysian-Chinese academic about six months before leaving the post. Our celebratory wedding dinner was held under a big tent on the fabled tennis court at the PAO residence. Pek, who currently teaches at American University, takes Washington-based students to Malaysia for summer courses – so I feel still connected to the bilateral educational exchanges I started working on during that assignment.

PAO BANGKOK – 1984-88

Q: From Kuala Lumpur you went directly to Bangkok, right?

BLACKBURN: That's right. "Directly" is definitely the appropriate word. That day was certainly an emotional roller coaster. Just one hour after our emotional, even tearful, farewell to friends, colleagues, and Pek's family in Malaysia, we found ourselves given a joyous, open-arms welcome to Thailand.

Q: What were your first reactions to being back?

BLACKBURN: The first night Pek and I went out to a dinner given by the Fulbright Commission to say farewell to my popular predecessor as PAO, Hal Morton. We had a wonderful evening, and I remember thinking, "What a pity we'll *only* be here for four years."

Those years were in many respects the pinnacle of my career.

Q: How so?

BLACKBURN: Perhaps because I was probably at the top of my form then. The assignment permitted me to make a unique contribution – because of my previous experience in the country and my fluency in the language. No previous PAO had had an earlier posting in Thailand, which is pretty amazing when you think of the huge number of officers who had served there.

By 1984 Thailand had changed tremendously from what it had been when I left in the late 1960s, but the post was to a large extent still stuck in the past. In fact, the Country Plan of that era led off with comments about how big a psychological factor the emasculation of the Thailand field program was to achieving our psychological objectives. Indeed, much was changed. We had closed almost all our branches. Only USIS Chiang Mai remained as a full fledged branch post. We had one FSN in Songhkla, and we eventually lost him, too. But nine years after the end of the Vietnam War, and in the aftermath of convulsive changes in internal Thai politics, it was certainly appropriate that we would no longer have the big field presence – just as we would no longer be making movies, printing posters and "tactical pamphlets," or otherwise producing materials directly supporting the Thai government.

I told the Thai staff that as much as I well remembered the post's past "glory days," it was time to recognize that we were in a different period in the bilateral relationship. To drive home the point I decreed, taking a leaf from the USIS Japan play book and an idea I had successfully tried in Malaysia, that we would redesign all of our printed materials. To start that process, I initiated a logo contest for USIS staffers. I asked them to think carefully about ways symbolically to represent what we were all about in 1984. We got, I think, 57 entries. Some of them harkened back to the old days, using a representation of Thailand's royal barge or Thai and American hands clasped in USAID fashion. Others used spokes of a wheel to depict various functions. Many of the ideas were interesting

and even inspired, but most were easily eliminated when we went to the final cut. We displayed all the entries on a large board and encouraged the staff to come and discuss the pros and cons of each. In the end we selected a nice wavy design that included suggestions of both the Thai and American flags, and put it on all our materials. But the most important aspect of the exercise, I thought, was that we raised consciousness about the fact that we were in a new period of U.S.-Thai relations.

Q: Were you operating under much more stringent budget conditions?

BLACKBURN: No, not really. Happily, I was able to emphasize to the staff that although the times had changed, we still had a great cadre of Thai FSNs – and money for new initiatives was plentiful. It was a time for creativity applied in any direction, including improving the dilapidated physical plant of USIS Bangkok, which in those days was still located on a large and beautiful compound on South Sathorn Road. Not only did USIS have its own property, which included a charming building that served as the Chancery after World War II, but the Embassy had decided to make it the locus for staff recreation activities. So right outside our windows were the Embassy pool, two tennis courts, and a snack bar. Very cushy indeed!

Not long after my arrival USIS Thailand had the chance to pull together on a once-in-a-career challenge. It came about when the New York Philharmonic Orchestra canceled a visit to Malaysia three weeks before a scheduled concert. The issue had been that the Malaysians insisted on a cello piece called "Schlomo: a Zionist Rhapsody" be removed from the program. When it became a big issue, the New Yorkers could not back down without producing a stir among their supporters, so the performance in Kuala Lumpur was scrubbed. That was when NPYO manager Nick Webster called me and asked if we could somehow arrange a concert in Bangkok. I told him I would do my best to get approval from the Ambassador, at the time John Gunther Dean. Most such performances are set up at least a year in advance, but I thought that having such a major American orchestra make an unprecedented visit to Bangkok would be just the kind of event that would bring out Thai leaders and make a strong statement about our bilateral relationship. The Ambassador was enthusiastic and gave the effort his full support – including paying for a large and lavish representational function at the Oriental Hotel. Though it was only a single performance, the event was extraordinary in several respects. First of all, Bangkok at the time had no concert hall, so we had to use a large auditorium at Thammasat University, where elaborate baffles had to be constructed literally overnight – following a rock concert the previous evening – in order to produce reasonably good acoustics. To carry out the many tasks that had to be done within about 15 days, we recruited legions of volunteers to help us, we brought in an organization that donated logistical support, we printed a fancy program, we arranged the ticket sales, we lined up Thailand's Crown Prince to attend as a royal sponsor, and we raised money from American and Thai companies and private benefactors. Frank Scotton, legendary in USIA as a Vietnam counter-insurgency aficionado, was Cultural Affairs Officer at the time and found himself, much to his amusement, leading the out-front effort to solicit support from big multinational corporations in town. Many of the other American and Thai staffers went

all out and distinguished themselves to make it work. In the end we had a great concert, the publicity was tremendous, and we raised $50,000 for the Thai Red Cross. It was really quite something. I felt great about it, particularly knowing that had I not had so much previous involvement in Thailand, I never would have had the confidence or sure-footedness to pull it off. My bosses back in Washington were very impressed, too, and said that they wanted to recommend me, and my key Thai and American lieutenants, for a Superior Honor Award. I replied that I thought the entire staff deserved the award and would not single out a limited group. That was too much for the Agency awards committee, so we had to settle for a Certificate of Appreciation to all of USIS Bangkok.

Q: Wasn't that about the time that WORLDNETs got started? Were you in on that?

BLACKBURN: Oh yes. A year or two after I got to Bangkok, we got one of the Agency's TVRO – that is, "television receive only" – dishes on the USIS compound. That made it possible for us to participate in the WORLDNET dialogues that Charlie Wick and Al Snyder had just introduced into the USIA global structure. Their main use was for long distance press conferences, for which Bangkok was one of the Asian posts that allowed local correspondents to ask questions to American officials talking about major security and economic issues. Under that format the video was transmitted from Washington, with the overseas posts participating via an audio channel. They were very exciting. The Thais were fascinated, and typically one or more TV stations would give coverage to the mechanics of the program, thus supplementing the substantive news value of the press conference itself.

Q: What was the most memorable of your WORLDNETs?

BLACKBURN: Hands down it was the "WORLDNET to end all WORLDNETs" – if I may be so immodest as to say so – we staged toward the end of my tour. The concept was so far out of the box most people in Washington thought, and probably still think, it was simply crazy. It came about because a young Thai woman living in Los Angeles, whose nickname was "Pui," won the Miss Universe contest representing Thailand. She had spent very little time in Thailand, and most Thais had never met her, much less ever seen her. Everyone was thrilled she had won – and extremely curious to learn something about her. Some Thai television producers asked if we would let them use the WORLDNET facilities to interview her. I thought it was a golden opportunity to make some important points about our society, particularly that a charming and beautiful, yet traditional, Thai woman resident in the U.S. can thrive in our open, multiracial, friendly-to-Thailand society. The Washington WORLDNET office contacted her, and she – being aware that it would give her a full hour of exposure to the Thai media – was very willing to do it.

Then the question became how to organize the interview on our end. Every newspaper and every TV station wanted a piece of the action. The country's five nationwide television networks each vied to carry the entire program on an exclusive basis, even if they had to work out of our modest facilities on the USIS compound. And they wanted to give little if any role to the print media. But I insisted on maintaining control – so that it

would get maximum media play. I insisted that this WORLDNET program would be for all of Thailand's TV stations and all of the Thai print journalists, with Khun Ratana of our Radio/TV Section serving as the moderator. Those wanting to ask questions would have to stand in line and ask their questions in turn, alternating between print and TV journalists. Finally, recognizing that our studio was much too small, one of the major TV networks agreed to do the program, under our ground rules.

The upshot was that our hour-long WORLDNET with beautiful Pui was carried live, on prime time, for a complete hour on every TV station in Thailand. From 8 to 9 P.M. that night the only choice before the Thai television viewer, anywhere in the country, was to watch Pui answer questions. There was nothing else on! None of the five networks had wanted to be left out of the action. Pui deftly answered all the softball questions – for example, about missing Thailand and being eager to greet her fans there, but at the same time expressing a deep love for America, which had been so good to her. Pretty fluffy content, but still a positive portrait of our country that was quite different from the usual media emphasis on American crime, narcotics addiction, sexual promiscuity, and violence. Besides the saturation TV coverage, the WORLDNET was on the front pages of all Thai newspapers the following morning.

By any measure, the program was extremely successful. And it had cost us practically nothing. If there has ever been another WORLDNET carried live and in full during prime time on every station in a single country, I never heard of it. But of course there were people back in Washington who were horrified at this whole thing. They thought it was a big waste of whatever time and money had been put into it.

Q: For a beauty contest winner!

BLACKBURN: You, too? Yes, I was criticized – both by feminists and by what I call "WORLDNET purists" – for making a mockery of the WORLDNET medium by using it for a dialogue with a Miss Universe winner. Though too plebeian a usage for their taste, I still think it was a very successful program that achieved genuine public affairs goals. As well as being great fun!

Q: What were some of your major activities dealing with more substantive issues?

BLACKBURN: One public affairs issue which hit us right out of the blue had to do with an early AIDS case that was all too close to home. In 1986 Thailand was still turning a blind eye to the problem, denying that it was a present or potential problem for the country. Meanwhile, many AIDS cases were reported around our bases in the Philippines, suggesting there might be a flicker of truth in the Communist charge that the virus for this "American disease" had been developed at Fort Detrick, Maryland. Knowing that an AIDS crisis would doubtless soon hit the Thai sex trade, we were anxious to demonstrate that the U.S. was doing what it reasonably could to keep AIDS out of the country - for example by instituting a rigorous HIV-testing regimen for sailors given shore leave in Pattaya and Bangkok. The problem was that precisely at this early juncture we had an

HIV-positive FSO officer working in the Embassy! Although he was looking sicker and sicker, he denied having AIDS and no one would challenge his assertion. Finally, after being refused treatment by the leading Thai hospital, he was medically evacuated to Clark Field in the Philippines. Sadly, the officer died not long afterwards, but fortunately the story never hit the Thai press. We were lucky on that one, but, fearing it might come out, I decided to discuss the general issue of Thailand's handling of the AIDS question with the Spokesman for the Thai Foreign Ministry. Without mentioning our Embassy case, I told him that it was widely known in the international community that there were already a number of HIV-positive foreigners in the country, including prisoners of various nationalities who had used infected needles while incarcerated. Although the Thai Government might not yet want to admit to a domestic AIDS problem, when they did do so, I said, I hoped they would not look to blame any particular country, but instead speak of it as a tragic situation affecting both Thais and resident foreigners of many nationalities. Many months later, that was how the story came out, to our relief. Whether my intervention had any effect or not, I still think it was good insurance during that early period – a time when there was so much AIDS panic in Bangkok that many Embassy employees refused to swim in our swimming pool for weeks after the infected officer had used it. And after he left, the officer's bedding and furniture were incinerated by the Admin Section.

Another hot issue of the day was "yellow rain." The U.S. had asserted that Vietnamese aircraft were using biochemical agents against hill tribes in Laos, and villagers gave personal accounts that seemed to corroborate the charges. The public affairs problem was that there was no persuasive hard evidence to support the allegations – and much evidence for an alternate hypothesis that the cause of the "yellow rain" was in fact droppings from swarms of bees. Neither Press Attache Larry Thomas nor I felt comfortable peddling a story that seemed so flimsy, so I consulted DCM Stapleton Roy about what we should do. Fortunately, Stape was way ahead of us. A three man team was just being assigned to the Bangkok Embassy to investigate all yellow rain charges. With Stape's guidance, Larry and I were able to answer skeptical questioners by saying that the Embassy took very seriously charges of Vietnamese use of biochemical agents, that we had no means to verify what happened in earlier reported incidents, that we would carefully investigate each new case, and that full disclosure would be given to the team's findings. In the end no such proof turned up, but Stape's neat formulation allowed us – and the rest of the Embassy there on the ground – to maintain our credibility and self-respect.

Besides those flaps, we gave a lot of attention to economic issues – mainly relating to trade, investment, and intellectual property rights. One great vehicle for addressing them was a high-powered U.S.-Thailand economic seminar that USIS sponsored each year over several days at a beach resort. An officer several years earlier, perhaps John Reid, had started it, with the assistance of our extraordinary senior FSN, M.L. Poonsaeng Sutabutr, who really made it work.

Khun Poonsaeng made many things happen, and was in my view the most effective,

imaginative, and well connected FSN staffer I ever worked with.

Q: In any country?

BLACKBURN: Yes, definitely. Anyway, the leading western-educated economists of the country thought the annual economic seminar was a great event, were delighted to be invited to participate, and gave it their full support. Besides the stimulating interchange, they and their families appreciated the chance to get out of Bangkok for a long weekend. Supachai Panichpakdi, now heading the World Trade Organization, was one of two co-chairs of the Thai planning group for the conference during my days there, and the sessions attracted many others who were – or became – senior officials in the Thai government, including two prime ministers.

It was certainly one of the greatest USIS traditions I encountered anywhere in the world. Besides the leading Thai economists, many of whom made presentations, we supplied speakers from the U.S. or the American business community. Senior officers in our embassy were there, too. Ambassador Dean loved it, as did his successor Ambassador William Brown, because of the opportunity it afforded to hobnob informally and for several days with all those top English-speaking economists. And they could actively participate in a substantive seminar that addressed fundamental and topical economic issues of concern to both countries. It was useful all around. I believe the seminars are still held, though without Khun Poonsaeng, who retired a few years ago, or some of the former luminaries on the Thai side.

Q: I understand you also were involved in programming on narcotics. What was that all about?

BLACKBURN: Yes, we were very concerned about the flow of narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States. At that time many Thais – as well as others – said the root of the problem was "demand pull" from an out-of-control U.S. Questions were raised as to why we were heavily leaning on Thailand when our country had so many addicts and so many drug dealers running loose on the streets. To counter these charges, I led a public affairs effort focused on serious U.S. efforts to reduce demand for drugs in our schools and communities. Working with Thailand's Office of Narcotics Control Board, we put together two large anti-narcotics conferences that highlighted education programs, public service messages, voluntary organizations, and the like in the United States, as well as in Thailand and other countries in the region. The conferences, held in Cha-am near Hua Hin, were both useful and well attended. Besides the USIS speakers we brought from the U.S. – such as grass roots activists and drug program officials – we had senior attendees from the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Agency, and various United Nations bodies. We got across our points very well, I thought, and thus helped provide the climate for promoting more vigorous Thai actions to stem the flow of narcotics passing through the country from the Golden Triangle and Laos.

Q: Did you still have publications at USIS Thailand at that point?

BLACKBURN: Not anywhere as many as before. But while I was there we reinstituted Seripharb (or Free World), the magazine that we had had earlier, but which had gone out of favor and had been dropped a few years before I got there. I thought it was worth resurrecting, to see how well we could market it, especially since we still had a very professional staff on hand to put it out. With an updated image and format, the publication looked good and was a fine medium for putting across our messages. It lasted several years after my departure, but then died along with nearly all the other Agency publications that went by the boards.

Besides Seripharb we also had a number of publications for special purposes. For example, we produced an excellent pamphlet on the USAID program in Thailand, we put out study guides for university professors using American films to teach about the United States, and we worked with RSC Manila on a bilingual set of advisory materials for Thais and Americans participating in high school exchange programs. The latter product, developed under my direction by Elizabeth Mortlock and a Thai professor, was aimed at both the students and the families involved in such activities.

Q: How about books?

BLACKBURN: We still had a modest book translation program, run by a marvelous FSN named Khun Sukhon Polpatpicharn. To give her a boost, and to encourage more attention to the translation of serious books from the U.S., we put on a two-day conference on "The Joys and Sorrows of Translation" at the American University Alumni Association – or AUA – where USIS had two officers, Larry Daks and Bill Royer, supporting the English teaching, library, and other programs centered there. That conference was a big hit with the Thai translators, but I am not sure it really led to any increased production of translated American works.

Another ambitious venture of mine that didn't work out so well was the exhibition of works by Thai artists who had studied in the U.S. Unfortunately, the prominent Thai art critic I recruited to write the catalogue for the show chose to charge the featured artists with lack of originality. Though the wording was fairly mild, they took great offence when they read it – after the show's up-beat opening, fortunately. The show went on, but it was far from the grand success I had hoped for.

More successful was my launching of the American Studies Association of Thailand, an institution similar to the one I started while in Malaysia. One of the big American studies events we held was a three day celebration and symposium devoted to the 1987 bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution.

Q: It sounds like you were very involved in planning events.

BLACKBURN: Yes, I think I was. There were so many opportunities to move in new directions, and I had such great support from the USIS officers and FSNs that I didn't

need to look over their shoulders so much. CAO Frank Scotton and then Ginny Ferris did a great job with speakers, exchanges, and the Fulbright program. Larry Thomas was a superb Information Officer/Press Attache, followed by the capable Ross Petzing. And Larry Daks was simply superb as Director of AUA.

I saw it as my job to have wide contacts in the American, expatriate, and Thai communities – to spot problems and opportunities and to be able to bring people into the USIS and Embassy public affairs orbit as appropriate.

Among my "outside" activities was to serve on the Council of the prestigious Siam Society, where I was recruited to help out with a Ford Foundation-sponsored symposium on "Culture and Environment in Thailand." That proved to be an enormous undertaking. I spent many a Saturday morning over two years to plan the week-long conference in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. It proved a fascinating examination of how cultural forces and the environment had interacted in Thailand from the dawn of recorded history – talking about the arts, the economy, the ecology, and so on. Though I started on it simply because of my own interests, in the end I found that it was very useful to Embassy objectives relating to the environment, and gave me terrific contacts among leading Thai intellectuals.

Q: Did you have much interaction with the Thai royal family?

BLACKBURN: Yes, I certainly did, particularly in the context of the 1988 celebrations of the 60th birthday of His Majesty the King of Thailand. The Thais asked us – as their best friends and treaty allies – to do two things in the public affairs line. The first was to bring a cultural troupe to participate in a festival marking the opening of their new state-of-the-art cultural center. And the other was to contribute a permanent structure or garden at the newly created Rama IX Park – Rama the Ninth being part of the King's formal title. Similar requests were made to other countries. It was clear that the U.S. was somehow going to have to come up with a respectable showing.

We did a lot of brain-storming on what type of cultural presentation would be both appropriate and affordable, and lamented that we did not have the New York Philharmonic hankering to come our way during that period. We knew the British were bringing the Sadler Wells Ballet, the Soviet Union had laid on one of the Bolshoi troupes, and the Japanese planned to perform a full-scale opera. In short, expectations were very high. Finally, I came up with the idea of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band from New Orleans.

Q: Oh, like the jazz performers who came and played with the King in past years?

BLACKBURN: That's right. We thought about Lionel Hampton, who had come in the '50s or '60s, as had Benny Goodman and others, but figured that might be too risky. Instead, I thought Preservation Hall would be perfect, with its rather old African-American performers, who liked the same type of jazz the King enjoyed. So we, with help

from the Arts America folks in USIA Washington, lined up the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, got one of the airlines to pay for their travel, found a hotel to put them up for free, and secured ESSO funding for other local expenses. In the end it didn't really cost us anything except for staff time. They came and performed three times to enthusiastic crowds at the cultural center. His Majesty didn't show up at any of their public performances, but asked them to go to his palace for a private meeting and jam session. Khun Poonsaeng, whose father had been the King's private secretary, arranged everything – including for the Ambassador, Ginny Farris, and me, and our spouses, to attend the event. It was marvelous fun and a great treat to be there at Chitlada Palace for the "session." The evening was amazing in many ways. For example, when His Majesty drove over to the venue for the event, he jumped out of his Rolls Royce, pulled out his trumpet, and played "the King's Anthem" right there. And then he went in and joyfully jammed with the band for a couple of hours, mostly playing his sax. We understood that he especially appreciated being able to play with high-quality performers in their 70s or 80s, as his doctors were saying that it might be too hard on his heart to continue playing after passing his 60th birthday. The Royal Household videotaped the entire wonderful event, but did not feel it appropriate to share the tape with us. I hope someday to see it, but until then I have a kind of mental videotape of the occasion etched in my memory.

Q: But wasn't that sort of an affront, for the King not to go to any of the performances held in his honor?

BLACKBURN: Well, no, I don't think so.

Q: Weren't the people who sponsored all those major productions disappointed? Didn't they at least expect that he would attend the performance?

BLACKBURN: Yes, they might have thought so. But what we heard was that the King, for health reasons and perhaps for other reasons, felt that he couldn't go to all the performances, so it would be better not to go to any of them.

Q: Good logic.

BLACKBURN: That was the reason. I don't think any performers from other countries got to go to the Palace, so we and the band were highly honored. Years later I dropped by Preservation Hall in New Orleans, and noticed that still prominently display the poster we designed on their walls. The older performers who came to Bangkok are no longer active, or have passed on, however.

Q: What happened with the park request?

BLACKBURN: The way they put it was this: "You in the Embassy represent America, our ally and good friend, and we would like you to give us an American garden to go along with the British garden, the Italian garden, the Japanese garden, and even the Chinese garden that we have been promised by those governments." Our first question, to

ourselves, was: "What the hell is an American garden anyway." The second was: "Assuming we can come up with a workable concept, where are we going to get the money to pay for such a garden?" In the early stages we thought it might be nice to supply a grove of dogwoods that would somehow provide the annual good cross-Pacific feelings afforded by the cherry trees from Japan that grace Washington's Tidal Basin. Preliminary research found that the best we could possibly do would be to bring in small trees that had a slim chance of surviving and certainly wouldn't, even under the best of circumstances, be impressive until after many years.

We were really stuck and befuddled until a prominent professor Khun Poonsaeng knew came up with the brilliant suggestion that we consider supplying a Buckminster Fuller style geodesic dome that would provide protective cover for a U.S. Southwest cactus garden. We liked the idea, but realized it would be extremely expensive and complicated to pull it off. Besides, we had no money for such a project. So, under Ambassador Brown's authority and with his full backing, we went to the American business community. We told them that America's reputation was at stake, but that if they would work with us we could together pull off a grand project that would be much appreciated by the Thais, including the King and other members of the royal family. I was confident we could do it, because I knew we could rely on two friends of mine, Malaysian architect Lim Chong Keat and Thai architect Sumet Jumsai, who had been close to Buckminster Fuller and knew quite a bit about the construction of geodesic domes. All we really needed was the money to buy the material, to ship the pieces from the U.S., and to pay for the design of the dome's interior. The Thai professor assured us he would obtain the needed cactus plants.

I proposed that we set up a special committee for the project, with the Ambassador as honorary chairman, me as the executive secretary, and various American Chamber, or AmCham, members filling the other positions, including chairman. Given U.S. regulations, all direct fund-raising would have to be done by AmCham or some other unofficial group. At my recommendation, the planners decided not to accept any donations under $25,000. This was not to be a hat-in-your-hand operation. And it would have been just too complicated to keep track of and give proper credit to a wide range of funding sources. People thought it was nutty to be turning our noses up at smaller donations, but then the companies started to buy into that concept. Different companies signed up one after the other – ESSO, IBM, and so on – and David Rockefeller said he would join if we would set up at tax exempt foundation, which we did. Malcolm Forbes came in, too. And then AmCham got Sealand to ship all the materials from the West Coast for free. So we pulled in somewhere around $350,000 for the dome, and had it constructed.

Q: How big was it?

BLACKBURN: About three stories high.

Q: So it was a big one.

BLACKBURN: Oh, yes. And with a Buckminster Fuller dymaxian map on the ground, and with nice cactus the Thais got from the U.S. and elsewhere, it looked pretty great – and still does. Princess Sirinthorn, the so-called "Crown Princess" presided over the opening, the King was briefed on it, and everybody thought it was just the greatest thing. It ended up a win-win situation that made everybody happy.

So those were the two things we did to honor the King's birthday. They had a very positive impact on the Thai leadership and general public, but neither one cost USIS or the Embassy anything beyond the considerable staff time we put into them.

At the time of the Challenger disaster we did something similar to show unity of spirit and purpose between Americans and Thais. Right after it blew up, Khun Poonsaeng said to me, "You know, the Thai are very upset about this tragedy. We identify with Americans on the space program, and many astronauts, including the first ones back in the late '60s, have had high-profile visits to Bangkok over the years. I think we should have some sort of a ceremony on the Embassy property. I can get some people from the Royal Household and other prominent contacts to come and participate." She talked me into going forward with this idea, and I persuaded Ambassador Brown to support it, though he was very skeptical at first. So within a day or so we had set up a big stage, with large pictures of the dead astronauts, and so on. And we held a very moving ceremony right there on the Chancery grounds.

Such public events, though perhaps inappropriate or even wasteful in other contexts, were important at a time when our relationship with the Thais was in a state of transition. Though our alliance continued with regular joint military exercises such as Cobra Gold, we looked to the Thai to play host to VOA transmitters, and many aspects of our former intimacy remained in place, we were also pulling away from the Thais in other respects. With trade issues assuming increasing importance, our once almost familiar relationship was being replaced by one more cold-blooded and legalistic, so I thought it important to emphasize the human dimension of our relations.

My time as PAO in Bangkok was a period of high productivity, Pek and I enjoyed it a lot, and our daughter Sarah was born there. I was glad to be turning the post over to a consummate pro like Donna Oglesby, but I hated to leave nonetheless.

Q: But the four years were over.

AFRICA AREA DIRECTOR – 1988-89

BLACKBURN: Yes, the four years were over – though they had gone by in a flash. The next thing I knew I was back in Washington as USIA Area Director for Africa.

Q: Explain to me how that happened.

BLACKBURN: Well, it was among the jobs I bid on when I was in my last year in Bangkok.

Q: And they didn't have an Africa Area Director.

BLACKBURN: I had been in Africa as an inspector, and had found the continent fascinating. So I applied and was chosen. A good friend of mine, an Africa hand, seeing my name on the assignments list, called me up and said, "What is going on? That's MY job." I said I didn't know, but had just applied for the job when it was listed. He said, "You don't really want that job, do you? If you pull out, I think they will give me the job." I told him I didn't have any other alternatives, so if Personnel chose me, I guess I should just go with it and do my best. He was pretty unhappy, but later became an Ambassador. We are still pals, so I think he has long since forgiven me for my "transgression."

Q: What was it like being in charge of an area you knew so little about?

BLACKBURN: Of course, when I took up the job many of the long-time Africa hands thought I was a real interloper, never having served on the ground in the area. Keenly aware of my ignorance, I was comforted by a conversation I had with Chas Freeman, who I knew from his time as DCM in Bangkok and who was then the Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa. Chas had never served in Africa either. He said, "Don't worry about being a neophyte. Africa isn't like Asia. Nearly everybody is a neophyte where Africa is concerned. It is such a diverse and complicated place, practically nobody knows that much about the entire continent. Aside from the few genuine FSO Africa experts, most of the supposed Africa specialists generally know only about their part of the continent. Within a couple of months on the job, you'll have as good a perspective on current conditions as anybody, so don't worry about it." Despite allowing for some hyperbole in his comments, that was encouraging advice – and turned out to be largely quite accurate.

I enjoyed the job very much. It was great to work with so many able and enthusiastic junior officers at the overseas posts, most of whom were in need of a fair amount of "mentoring" from those of us at USIA headquarters. And we had a terrific team in the AF area office. Mike O'Brien, a super officer and long-time Africa hand, was my deputy, and Sted Howard, the executive officer, handled with tremendous skill the always complex and fragile administrative issues involved in supporting the Africa posts. I also benefitted from working with Carolyn Smith. She was the AF senior secretary and later served with me both in Tokyo and on my last assignment back in the Department, in EAP/PD. The three of them, and others, somehow kept me afloat during that year.

Africa PAOs, I learned, need more than the usual assistance. Not only do they face the hardships of living and working on the "Things Fall Apart" continent, most are quite inexperienced. Though most were impressive officers with great potential, many of them had trouble getting a handle on their local and Washington resources, working effectively

with their Ambassadors, and managing other fundamental aspects of their programs. Despite their often uphill battles of one kind or another, morale was very good. It was not at all unusual for officers to seek to have their assignments extended. I think the FSOs there like the direct contact with the audiences and the many chances to make a big difference in the lives of the people they work with. But they needed, and still need, an extra level of encouragement and support from headquarters.

Knowing how difficult the Africa assignments can be, I made it a strict policy never to seek a "forced assignment" to any of the posts. I was convinced it would be counter-productive to do so. You've got to have enthusiasm to work well in Africa. If you're not happy to be there, you will just be useless and your tour will be a flop all around. I said I'd rather keep a post vacant than assign the wrong person. Of course, Mike, Sted, and I were always on the lookout for strong officers, and mostly thanks to the two of them, we came up with quite a few during that year. Though in those days we could get away with being rather picky about who we wanted and who we didn't want, I understand that it is much harder to staff the posts these days, even though the pool of candidates now includes the entire State Department ranks.

I tried to travel as much as I could. During my year on the job, I got to 18 of the 35 countries with USIS posts, and visited all those with more than one officer. In addition, I held PAO conferences in Zambia and Senegal that put me in direct touch with all the PAOs.

The two dominant countries in Africa were, and still are, Nigeria and South Africa, and our programs in those two countries consumed a lot of my time. Nigeria was moving toward greater democracy, which opened up many opportunities for new programming, while South Africa was in the final stages of apartheid. I took special interest in South Africa, and visited there three times. I had been deeply impressed by the USIS program I saw there as an inspector in 1976, when the post had amazingly deep contacts among all the racial and ethnic groups of that society and had just opened a USIS reading room in the "township" of Soweto that was still in operation 13 years later when I became Area Director. In 1989 and 1990 Nelson Mandela was still in prison, but it was clear big changes were coming. The post was working closely with the liberal universities, most of which had adopted a "color-blind" policy on admissions and hirings. We came to the conclusion that it was time to bring an end to the Fulbright program's participation in the "educational boycott" of South Africa. I am proud that we helped push along reinstitution of the program even in those years just before the dramatic release of Mandela. That we could do so with such confidence was a vivid demonstration of how much USIS – and the Embassy more generally – was on top of the positive changes taking place in that country, changes we had significantly supported over many years.

Q: I didn't have much exposure to Africa, but I too was impressed with the spirit of our PAOs there. They were enthusiastic. They were young and vigorous – and had great spirit.

BLACKBURN: The problem was to get people to actually go there in the first place. Most officers were reluctant to serve in Africa, for whatever reasons, which made our recruitment efforts difficult. We tried to emphasize the personal satisfactions, as well as the professional recognition, they would get. To spruce up our image – and self-image – I asked each of the posts to send in a piece of contemporary art from their country, preferably a painting, print, or fabric we could put on the office wall. I wanted visitors to be reminded that Africa is a vibrant and interesting part of the world. We had had old-style African statues of half-naked tribesmen, but I didn't think they presented the right picture. The idea worked well, I thought. The more up-to-date art showed our officers that once they got to the field they could make contact with exciting artists working currently in Nigeria or Ethiopia or Gabon or wherever. It was all part of our constant effort to recruit good officers.

Q: But you only stayed in that job a year, so you didn't want to make a career of it, obviously.

E BUREAU DEPUTY ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR – 1989-90

BLACKBURN: Well, I never in any way sought to leave the Africa job, but was asked to become the Deputy Associate Director of the E Bureau, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs,

Q: Who asked you to do that?

BLACKBURN: Bruce Gelb made the decision. He had taken over as Director about four months previously, coming in with the first wave of Bush Administration appointees.

Q: Somebody suggested you, I assume. Who was your "interference?"

BLACKBURN: I don't know for sure. Probably it was Mike Pistor, then the Agency Counselor, who got me on the short list of candidates. But Gelb had already seen me in the context of my Africa work, so perhaps had been satisfied with my performance there. And then I was interviewed by Bill Glade, the incoming Associate Director, who had the final say. I must have made a decent impression on him with my previous Fulbright experience, work with high school exchanges, the New York Philharmonic concert in Bangkok, and the like.

Q: And he was the guy who fired you?

BLACKBURN: Yes, yes. We'll get to that.

When I started in the E Bureau in 1989, it was just as the Iron Curtain was falling. We were opening up to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and there was enthusiasm for starting programs that would take advantage of the new climate for interchange. I worked closely with Walt Raymond, a former CIA officer who Bruce Gelb

assigned to be the overall coordinator of all such programs within USIA. In my new role I traveled to Russia for the Moscow Book Fair, to Warsaw to explore how we might help greatly expand the post's small library operation, and to Vienna, where I led a large gathering of USIA, USIS post, and private sector professionals to discuss our common goals of expanding exchanges with that region.

As I was planning the latter event, I got a call late one afternoon from Bruce Gelb, who, in an accusatory voice, asked why so many USIA people were being paid to go off to Vienna for a conference that could be held in Washington for less money. Fortunately, I was in the office at that late hour, fully on top of the issue, and had the list of participants at my fingertips. I was able to justify the event and each of the people we were sending. At the end of the conversation he had calmed down and said, "Thanks, Paul. That's fine. You're doing a great job." It stands out in my memory perhaps because I didn't hear many such compliments from him during my time in the E Bureau.

Q: What sort of new programs did you work on?

BLACKBURN: For the Bush-Gorbachev summit meeting in Malta then NSC staffer Condaleeza Rice apparently dreamed up the idea – called a "deliverable" in the jargon – that we should announce a new program of greatly expanded bilateral exchanges. The goal was to send a thousand promising young people in each direction each year. The initiative was not prominently featured in news reports, but we in the E Bureau sure noticed it. We had had no advance notice, but suspected that responsibility for operationalizing the pledge might soon fall on our shoulders. We were quite anxious, because reaching those numbers would take a lot of organizing and much more funding than we had available. So I went over to the NSC to talk to Condi Rice and try to find out what was going on. When she explained her deep desire for vastly increased bilateral exchanges with Russia, I said we in USIA completely agreed with her but were concerned about how the new venture would be funded. She said, "Don't worry. We'll get you the necessary funding. But of course we have to get it started right away with whatever can be funded using existing resources." When I asked here if she had any thoughts about how the exchanges should be organized, she answered, "No. I leave it to you professionals to figure all that out." So with those marching orders and reassurances, such as they were, we got together and developed an imaginative but also realistic scheme covering selection, administration, and interim funding for this ambitious initiative. That was the sort of exciting challenge we dealt with.

Q: Did it come off?

BLACKBURN: Yes, it did. Of course, it couldn't all be done right away. The time frame was spread out and various compromises made. I am not sure how long it actually took for the numbers to add up to the target amount, but at least we made a good shot at it right from the very beginning, even with no new money at that stage. In subsequent years a great deal of funding was forthcoming under the SEED – Support for Eastern European Democracy – and other programs.

Q: What else did you get involved in?

BLACKBURN: One Quixotic effort that consumed a lot of my energy was to try to rescue the USIA libraries, which were steadily losing priority within the Agency. An old USIA pal of mine, Ken Wimmel, and I came up with the idea of establishing a separate foundation to raise money for them. The approach would be similar to fund-raising the Smithsonian has done to support its activities. Ken and I brain-stormed a number of creative ideas for op-ed pieces in major publications and direct appeals to the admittedly-limited cohort of people with a strong financial or emotional stake in our overseas libraries or "information centers." We thought, for example, that perhaps the Polish-American community might be interested in sponsoring a cultural center in Warsaw. We put on the table various options about how it could be done, including some far-out suggestions. It wasn't such a bad idea, but it sure didn't fly. Even in the Agency, we learned, there weren't really that many people who cared much about libraries. And when Ken and I presented the concept to Bill Glade, and then to Gelb himself, neither found it an attractive concept given the amount of effort it would take. So it just died then and there.

Q: How were the E Bureau people to work with?

BLACKBURN: I was tremendously impressed by a number of the Civil Service professionals I worked with on various projects. People like Dave Whitten, Judy Siegal, Marianne Craven, Barry Ballou, Addie O'Connell, Bob Persiko, and Nan Bell. Most of the FSOs, and several of the political appointees, were also outstanding.

But I found the job exceptionally difficult and stressful. I now realize that most of the FSOs in that "number two" position – both before and after me – have had problems – especially the ones who were activists. The reason is structural, I think. The incumbent of that position, though carrying a fancy title, is in fact quite vulnerable whenever he or she tries to exert authority. You are deputy to a political appointee who is working for another political appointee. And there are other political appointees – more than 10 in my day – who are part of a network of political relationships and hierarchies that operate outside the usual bureaucracy we know. At the same time, you must exercise some authority over senior and well-entrenched civil servants, some of whom are resistant to change and know your tenure is likely to be a relatively brief one. And you have Foreign Service people who likewise are working there only temporarily. No matter how bright and committed they are, it takes them quite a while to get up to speed, and often they don't have a clear idea of the internal Bureau dynamics that can either facilitate or stymie their efforts. There you are, looking good as the senior FSO in the operation, but you don't really have solid ground under you.

So the trouble I got into wasn't really something so out of the ordinary.

Q: But what was the issue that got you sacked a year into the job?

BLACKBURN: Why did I actually get fired? I was never given a real explanation.

Q: You never were told?

BLACKBURN: That's right. I never have known for sure.

The way the firing was done happened like this: Going into the Agency my first morning just back from my 1990 summer vacation, I ran into Mike Pistor in the elevator. We chatted a bit, and he asked if he could stop by my office. About 15 minutes later he came into my office. He looked extremely glum and seemed uncharacteristically inarticulate. I said, "Mike, you look awful. What's the matter?" He said, "Actually, I do feel terrible." I asked, "Does it have anything to do with this conversation?" "Well, yessss," he answered. So I of course asked, "What is it Mike? Am I fired?" "Yes," he replied, "As a matter of fact, yes, you are." He then told me I should arrange to be out the door within two weeks.

Mike couldn't give me a clear idea of why it was happening, though it was obvious to both of us that I had irretrievably lost the confidence of the Agency's top leadership. Bill Glade, who was my direct boss and might have been expected to wield the ax himself, was extraordinarily solicitous of my bruised feelings, even sending a note saying how much he admired how well I was handling what was obviously a painful situation.

Q: This was Bill Glade, your boss, the man who fired you?

BLACKBURN: Well, yes. He was ostensibly the man responsible for the firing, but I think it was Gelb's decision, though no one was saying so. Before I left Bill said he realized I might have some questions and in a month or so would take me to lunch and explain what happened. Over our later meal at the Cosmos Club he said the reason was that I had been opposed to one policy and had been undermining implementation of another one. I said, "Bill, that doesn't really make any sense. Those reasons don't reflect what I was actually doing, or even thinking. Had we talked about those issues, I could easily have addressed your concerns." He said my response was enlightening, but of course I was still fired.

Q: What is your best guess about the reason?

BLACKBURN: I think Gelb at some point had come to the conclusion that I was not adequately loyal to him. There was friction among some of the senior political appointees in the Agency at that time, and I was perhaps seen as too close to one or two people he did not trust. That is all speculation, but it forms the backdrop for what I think really brought about my downfall.

The Director got particularly angry about an IV program with the former Soviet Union. In that period we were trying to bring over prominent Russian thinkers from an intellectual class that included individuals known to be anti-Semitic. The Embassy in Moscow came

up with a slate of about ten intellectuals they wanted to send under a special International Visitor program to be managed out of USIA. The senior Foreign Service Officer in the IV office, Joel Levy, spotted the sensitive aspects of the project and briefed me thoroughly. His office then went back to our folks in Moscow and told them to carefully weed out any rabid anti-Semites who might still be on their slate. The post did just that, and came back with a strong cable defending their nominees, saying that they had dropped two questionable candidates, and assuring us that Ambassador Jack Matlock, a Russia specialist, had personally reviewed each nomination. When I heard that, I told Joel that, with such a careful vetting, he should go ahead with the program.

But I had made a huge mistake – though one of process, not substance, as the actual IV program was well conceived and went off smoothly. My mistake was not to have briefed Bill Glade about what I was doing. He had been out of town while I was talking with Joel, and I somehow neglected to tell him when he got back. So the issue never got up to Gelb, who one day, out of the blue, was asked by friends in New York why USIA was bringing Russian anti-Semites to the U.S. He was furious when he realized that the project had not been fully cleared by senior political people in the Agency.

Q: Meaning himself?

BLACKBURN: Sure. But he certainly felt that Gene Kopp or Bill Glade should have been brought in on it. So I went to the woodshed. Gelb summoned me into his office for an explanation, with Associate Director for Management Henry Hokheimer asked to sit in on the conversation. He asked why I had so presumptuously taken the responsibility on my own shoulders. I admitted I should have briefed Bill Glade, but said I thought I was essentially following Agency policy. Once the slate had been carefully reviewed, including by the Ambassador himself, there was no reason not to go forward with the project. "The Ambassador!" Gelb fumed, "What does he know about the political situation in the United States?" I was being naive, I realize, but I did present the best defense I could. Still, the Director had good reason to be upset. And he was very angry indeed.

Q: You're saying you didn't inform your superiors as well as you should have?

BLACKBURN: Right. In essence, that's it. Another Director might have written my action off as a matter of questionable judgment or a slip-up of internal communication, but Gelb saw it as much more serious than that. With him so steamed and with the ongoing sniping he was hearing about me from some quasi-political civil servants who did not appreciate actions I had taken, I think my days were numbered from that point on.

Getting fired was very painful, naturally.

Q: He didn't really fire you, did he? He just removed you from your job.

BLACKBURN: That's true. I was never without a paycheck.

Q: He didn't destroy your career, right?

BLACKBURN: Well, it was almost the end of my career, but things didn't turn out that way. This was 1990 and Personnel was on the verge of assigning me to be PAO in Tokyo in 1992 following Rob Nevitt. At the time I was removed from the E Bureau, Gelb was asked if I could be put on track to go to Tokyo two years hence, and he adamantly said he would not sign off on any such assignment.

At that point three extraordinary people came to my rescue and kept my career alive for another 12 years. They were Deputy Director Gene Kopp, Counselor Mike Pistor, and USIA Personnel chief Harlan Rosacker. Each of them had given me strong support throughout my time in the E Bureau, but under these circumstances they were simply marvelous. Mike knew that the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, or ISD, at Georgetown, under David Newsom, wanted to start regularly having a senior officer from USIA as an ISD Fellow, a sort of diplomat in residence. He put me directly in touch with Newsom, and the "parking" deal was done. Gene Kopp gave me a terrific piece of advice. "Paul," he said, "just keep your head down for a while. Stay out of sight. Go over to Georgetown, try to recruit some students, and generally do things helpful for America's public diplomacy, to show that you are making a contribution to our Agency from over there." And Harlan Rosacker ran interference on the Japan assignment, putting the job on hold and advising me on when best to resurface my bid for it. Since I didn't need two years of Japanese, there was no urgent need to fill the Tokyo slot, assuming it was going to go to me in the end. The rescue operation those three carried out on my behalf was the neatest trick I ever heard of, even in our relatively small Agency, where the saving of tottering careers was by no means unheard of.

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF DIPLOMACY, GEORGETOWN – 1990-92

Q: What was it like at Georgetown?

BLACKBURN: After leaving what had increasingly become a snake pit at the E Bureau, I felt I was suddenly the proverbial "kid in a candy store." At Georgetown I found a tremendous range of interesting opportunities, and tried to take advantage of as many as I could. I audited courses – on subjects ranging from "African Politics and the Novel" to "Japan's Political Economy" to one given by Madeline Albright and Allan Goodman on "Emerging Trends in International Relations" – and participated in David Newsom's MA course on the conduct of diplomacy.

I put together my own graduate-level course on public diplomacy, building on materials that Tom Tuch had developed when teaching the same subject earlier at Georgetown, and got excellent advice from other sources, including Walter Roberts, who was teaching public diplomacy at George Washington. I taught the course both of the years I was at Georgetown, and had a great time with it. And the comprehensive syllabus I developed contains materials I can still make use of.

Besides the course, I wrote a piece for The Washington Quarterly on "The Post-Cold War Public Diplomacy of the United States." I was just looking at it the other day, and noted that even then I had emphasized the need for us to overcome the chasm of mistrust and misunderstanding between the U.S. and the Muslim world. The gulf was pretty evident, even to me, ten years ago, and of course today is universally recognized.

ISD had eight Fellows each year I was there, including people from the State Department, CIA, USAID, and the foreign ministries of two other countries. I organized us all in a series of monthly seminars, for faculty and students of the School of Foreign Service, where we in turn held forth on our areas of expertise or current research. In addition, I put together a big-league symposium on "Southeast Asia in the 1990s." For that, we just sent out invitations to a selected mailing list, and about 150 people paid to come attend the sessions. People from all over Washington turned up, including the legendary Paul Nitze of SAIS, much to the delight of us all.

Another conference I co-organized was on "Japan's Future Global Role." It was for a smaller, but very high quality audience. Professor Danny Unger (son of former ambassador Leonard Unger) and I coedited an ISD-published book based on the papers delivered at the symposium. Not allowed to take money for the book, I accepted a "donation" from ISD of 200 complimentary copies, which I used as a terrific presentation item with key contacts I met when I got to Japan. That all worked out splendidly.

And during the second year I focused a lot on Japan – auditing courses, reading, and studying Japanese.

Q: You were still persuaded you had a good shot at going to Japan?

BLACKBURN: At first it was on faith. But in the early part of my second year at Georgetown and just before Bruce Gelb left the USIA directorship, someone from my support group back in the Agency went back to him and said, "Look, Paul has been over there at Georgetown and has been a fine representative of our Agency, so could you sign off on him going to Tokyo?" And he agreed. So I didn't have to wait out Bruce Gelb.

Once the assignment was confirmed, the Agency paid for me to take remedial Japanese at Diplomatic Language Services, just across the river from Georgetown in Rosslyn. I could walk over Key Bridge each afternoon for two hours of study at DLS, which was run by my old friend, John Ratliff. John had been the linguist in charge of my Japanese studies at FSI Yokohama in 1971-1972. The Japanese came back reasonably quickly during my one-on-one tutorials, so that became a pleasant daily interlude.

In fact, the whole Georgetown experience was quite splendid.

PAO TOKYO – 1992-96

Q: So you were refreshed and prepared to go back to Japan.

BLACKBURN: Yes, I was. And again I had the rare good fortune to return to a post where I had earlier served. To do so once was unusual enough, but to do it twice was extremely rare. I never have heard of another case of it happening.

Much to my amazement, the basics of the USIS Japan program to which I returned were essentially unchanged from what they had been during the days of Alan Carter and Barry Fulton. It still had a well-functioning DRS, a program development office for speakers, a first-class press operation, and even Carter-era FSOs back on hand to serve in key positions. My outstanding deputy, Hugh Hara, was formerly BPAO Nagoya and fully steeped in the Carter/Fulton systems approach. Veterans Bill Morgan and later under Emi Yamauchi made sure that the Information Section hummed along at peak efficiency. And I was so fortunate to have Japan guru Robin Berrington and later Art Zegelbone running the Cultural Section. Another stand-out performer was Alex Almasov, who was a most worthy successor to Warren Obluck, Robin Berrington, and me as Director of the Tokyo American Center.

Robin was ideally suited to working with Mike and Bonny Armacost. They were deeply into the Tokyo cultural scene and liked to have frequent artsy receptions at the Residence. That was something Robin loved and was so good at. Later, when the Mondales arrived, Art was equally terrific in assisting Joan Mondale with various cultural projects that were important to her and conveyed good cultural messages.

Though we had had a top-class operation in Japan, it was extremely costly, taking up about half of the East Asia budget. Our FSNs earned an average of $100,000 a year. At one point, because the exchange rate dropped below 90 yen to the dollar, the senior USIS FSN, Mr. Konya, had a salary of some $230,000, which made him the highest paid USG employee in our history! He was getting even more than the President of the United States, who at the time got $200,000. We lost a few positions along the way, had to close down one post, and terminated Trends magazine, but basically did not suffer heavy cuts. The reason was that everyone in Washington recognized that we had an extremely important mission to carry out – in both the economic and security fields.

Q: Was Mike Mansfield still involved?

BLACKBURN: No. He was out of the picture once Armacost took over in 1989, well before my return to Japan in 1992. I had about a year with Mike Armacost, and then worked for the latter three years under Walter Mondale.

But I will tell one Mansfield story. Before departing for Tokyo I saw Mansfield at a reception and asked if I might stop by his office and get his views regarding our public diplomacy effort in Japan. In his usual laconic and to-the-point way he said, "No need for that. When you get to the post, just ask Robin Berrington for his advice. He knows everything about what needs doing." Although I did indeed get plenty of counsel from

Robin, I would have liked to hear from the great man himself.

Q: So what were the major specific issues you were dealing with there?

BLACKBURN: This was still a time when many Americans feared that the Japanese were going to overtake us economically and buy up our most treasured assets. The revisionist "Japan as threat" thesis was in full flower. Its proponents held that the "Japan Incorporated" web of private-government strategic interconnection was not only directly harmful to the U.S., it was also spreading threatening tentacles throughout the world, particularly in Asia.

Q: Setting up a new East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere…

BLACKBURN: That's right. And many in our country felt we Americans were not up to this challenge, because we didn't have the access to the Japanese market we needed. And the trade deficit kept getting bigger and bigger. So trade was a top priority for my whole tour.

Many of the economic issues were very technical and thus hard for USIS to deal with, but we were effective in making the broad case for free trade and open markets through our speakers, the IV program, and our publications. In addition, the press office was in constant motion supporting the constant stream of U.S. negotiators, Cabinet officials, CODELs, and other VIPs.

Q: Did you still have the branch posts?

BLACKBURN: Yes. We had super teams of officers and FSNs at the American Centers in Sapporo, Nagoya, Osaka, and Fukuoka.

Q: What about Kyoto?

BLACKBURN: Kyoto, too, for part of the time. Unfortunately, I had to close it for budgetary reasons. Having looked on Kyoto as the dream USIS post – along with Florence – from my earliest Foreign Service days, I particularly hated being the one to preside over its demise.

Q: I would have thought that would have been one of the last of the branch posts to close.

BLACKBURN: Its cultural position was certainly important. Though we never had a Consulate in Kyoto, the Embassy was always happy we kept a BPAO there. They could send over the visiting firemen and know there was an FSO on the spot to look after them – to show them around, introduce them to important local personages, and the like.

Q: But perhaps the hard issues were not ones of concern in Kyoto.

BLACKBURN: Right. Few of our DRS audiences were interested in our priority issues, and they could be reached from Osaka, which is less than an hour away. When closing Kyoto, we changed the name of our operation in Osaka to the Kansai American Center – to emphasize that we would continue to give a high degree of program attention to key contacts in Kyoto. Though our friends in Kyoto were very unhappy to see us pull out and I wish we could have kept the post open, I understand the new arrangement is working pretty well. Shortly before I left Japan, we also came close to shutting down Sapporo, and after I left, they actually did so.

A bigger issue was whether or not to have a branch operation in Naha, Okinawa. Though it was out of the question to set up a full-fledged American Center there, over the years the Consuls and senior Embassy officers like DCMs Bill Breer and Rusty Deming had encouraged USIS to assign an FSO and some FSNs yo Naha. I strongly, and successfully, resisted the proposition, but Louise Crane, my successor, had a different take and transferred one of the Cultural Section FSO positions down there. My argument, based in part on whatever authority I could derive from having spent two summers in Naha in my college days, was that there was little for a BPAO to do except work as a kind of glorified assistant to the Consul. The audiences for discussion of bilateral issues were extremely small – except when it came to the "100-pound gorilla," that is, our bases on the island. For the latter issue, there were already the officers in the Consulate and the vast military public affairs apparatus.

I said we would send Press Office personnel down on TDY whenever needed. AIO John Lundin was especially effective handling such TDYs. I also pointed out that despite all the IV grants lavished over the years on the two Okinawan dailies, those newspapers never cut us any slack at all on bases issues. If anyone could have any influence on their editorial and news treatment policies, it would only be the Consul or the military brass. Besides, I argued, the Consul's job is more than 50% public affairs anyway, so we should be concentrating on giving public diplomacy training to the Consul and his or her FSN staff – or perhaps assign a USIS officer as Consul. Even after the consolidation of USIA and the State Department, the Department still hasn't taken up either suggestion. Anyway, those were my arguments, and they prevailed for a time.

Q: How was the Fulbright program in those days?

BLACKBURN: The Fulbright program occupied a lot of my time, just as it did Rob Nevitt and most of my predecessors. A senior Japanese Foreign Ministry official and I (as the Ambassador's representative) annually rotated the positions of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the bi-national commission, formally known as the Japan-United States Commission for Educational Exchange (or JUSEC).

JUSEC is one of the very best, most active Fulbright operations in the world. The extraordinary Caroline Yang, who became its Executive Director early in the 1970s, was still there. After leaving the job she became a member of the J. William Fulbright Board of Foreign Scholarships, and now is its Chair. She was replaced by Sam Shepherd, a top-

notch exchanges professional in the field who we selected after an exhaustive open competition – and after successfully fending off Japanese arguments that the job should be reserved for Foreign Ministry retirees.

The Fulbright program in Japan is generously supported by its Japanese alumni. Many of them came to the U.S. after the war, got advanced degrees, and then returned to Japan to make a lot of money. These alums made a substantial contribution, as much as a million dollars each year, and I enjoyed getting to know them – and to thank them for all they had done and were doing to support the program.

The alumni put on an annual golf tournament, which was a big money-making and social occasion. However, unlike for avid golfers like Mike Armacost, Rob Nevitt, and Caroline Yang, for me it was something of an annual embarrassment, because I don't play golf – at least don't play it with skill and enthusiasm. The event was held it at the Totsuka Country Club, and each participant paid a $700 fee. The money covered not only the golf game, but also the chance to win one or more of the terrific donated items – which sometimes included a car and always several international plane tickets. They would raise well over $100,000 from the 150 or so people who attended. I didn't actually have to pay the $700 fee, as one of the more affluent alums would cover expenses for the Japanese and American chairmen, as well as the Executive Director.

So I would go and play, and be a good sport – and actually have a lot of fun, too. One year I won the "booby prize," a very large stuffed animal I gave my young daughter. The Japanese are very smart about these things, and award this prize not to the person who registers the lowest score, but instead – knowing some people might purposely play badly in order to be the worst golfer – give it to the player with the second to worst score. That was me.

Q: Didn't your tenure there overlap the 50th anniversary of the end of the war?

BLACKBURN: It sure did. We spent a lot of time thinking about how best to posture ourselves for 50-year anniversaries of such 1945 events as the fire bombing of Tokyo, the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Battle of Okinawa, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the formal end of the war.

I was particularly concerned that we help the "main island Japanese" better understand what really happened during the Battle of Okinawa and how the horrific fighting there figured so centrally in the American decision to drop the atomic bombs. The Governor of Okinawa at that time, Governor Ota, was considered by many in the Embassy to be very anti-American. He had received a Ph.D. in the United States, had written a history of the Battle of Okinawa, and was very opposed to our bases. Having been on Okinawa in the 1950s, when memories of the devastating battle were still raw for the Okinawans, I recommended that we pay respectful attention to Governor Ota during whatever commemoration the Okinawans thought appropriate for marking the awful tragedy. Following the advice of many of the old Japan hands, Ambassador Mondale and the top

U.S. military brass did just that, I am happy to say. The Okinawans put on a very moving ceremony, and inaugurated a unique peace park that lists the names of all those killed in the battle: Japanese, Okinawans, Americans, Koreans, and Chinese.

To help get us past the August 1995 Hiroshima anniversary, I encouraged Ambassador Mondale to visit that city in 1993 or 1994 and give a speech to the chamber of commerce, as previous Ambassadors had done. Though the speech would primarily deal with commercial matters, we could expect that in the Q&A period he would get a question on the A-bombing. I hoped he would have a chance to say something to the effect that though most Americans had supported that action as a way to bring the war to a decisive conclusion, we who are alive a half century later must look to the future and do everything possible to ensure that nuclear weapons are not used again in the coming fifty years. Words to that effect, anyway. The idea was to get an on-the-record statement that we could refer back to when asked for comments during the actual anniversary period. In the event, the Ambassador never did get to Hiroshima during those years.

At one point, I also favored recommending to the White House that President Clinton include a brief stop in Hiroshima during his 1993 visit to Japan. Despite my argument that such a visit would be a statesmanlike gesture and perhaps help defuse anti-American sentiment when the actual anniversary came along, others in the Embassy adamantly insisted it would be much too risky, so the idea never went forward. Despite my failed efforts to forestall public affairs problems, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki anniversaries came and went without a great deal of the agonizing I had anticipated.

I also got into the middle of the Air and Space Museum's ambitious plan for an exhibition around the plane that dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, the Enola Gay, which ultimately produced a big controversy and much embarrassment for the Smithsonian. The museum proposed to display part of the aircraft and supplement it with a four-part exhibit highlighting the evolution of the war up to mid-1945; the testing and preparations for using the bomb; the actual delivery details of getting it from Tinian Island to its target; and the on-the-ground devastation. This multi-sided concept represented a major departure from the usual celebratory exhibitions at the museum. When the curator, Tom Crouch, and others came to the Embassy, I was the point person to talk with them. I told them that as far as the Embassy was concerned, the Air and Space Museum could make its own decisions, but that I personally applauded the idea of educating the American people about this important part of our history. I also suggested culturally-sensitive ways for them to approach the Japanese and elicit cooperation while maintaining control of the content in the most problematical fourth segment of the exhibit. The Japanese involvement was essentially worked out to everyone's satisfaction, but the curators faced insurmountable "cultural" problems in dealing with the U.S. Air Force veterans! They unleashed a storm of criticism against the entire concept. The veterans didn't want anything in the exhibition about devastation and suffering on the ground – or about the evolution of the war, either. Essentially, they wanted the exhibition confined to technical aspects of its second and third themes: the development and delivery of the bomb by the Enola Gay. The whole scheme fell apart and became a first-class fiasco, one that cost the

director his job. The museum finally mounted a very modest display, but without most of the contextual material originally planned.

Q: It sounds like the military relationship was very high on the Embassy's agenda in those days.

BLACKBURN: Our concerns never seemed to have a moment's rest. In the fall of 1995, just after the U.S. had, with the help of the Japanese, avoided most of the pitfalls surrounding the various 50th anniversaries, we were jolted by the news of a horrible gang rape of a young Okinawan girl. Many of us feared that that dramatic, horrifying event might well become the catalyst for our being forced out of some or even all of our bases in Japan.

USIS closely monitored the Japanese mood, in the media and elsewhere, which suddenly became quite critical of the U.S., especially our continuing to have bases in Japan. Over the months of the crisis, I reported on Japanese opinion at a number of meetings with senior U.S. commanders in Japan (including General Richard Myers and General Pete Pace, currently the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) as well as with senior visiting Defense Department officials such as Secretary William Perry (who had seen devastated Okinawa at the end of the war) and Joseph Nye. The DOD leadership, and senior military officers on the scene, deeply concerned about protecting the Okinawa bases, made sensitive expressions of remorse and apology, and worked with State Department counterparts to fashion policies to reduce our "footprint" on that island.

Meeting over lunch with a group of contacts who were senior editors at the major dailies, I learned that early in the crisis they had met among themselves to discuss what could be done about the growing mood of anti-Americanism – not only on Okinawa but throughout the country. They recognized that Americans were observing this trend and beginning to conclude that the Japanese public wanted the U.S. to remove the bases right away. Believing that such a withdrawal would be very harmful to Japan's interests, particularly at a time when the Chinese were conducting intimidating missile tests in the Taiwan Straits, they decided – in Japanese consensus fashion – to calm down the reporting by their correspondents and use their editorials to support continuance of the bilateral security relationship. Once those policies were implemented by the Japanese mass media leaders, public opinion rather quickly returned to where it had been. In the four main islands, that is, though not on Okinawa itself. I think that gives a good example of how "Japan Incorporated" sometimes operated in the U.S. interest.

Q: Did the Japanese ever get to try the rapists? Or were they tried in an American court?

BLACKBURN: The Japanese eventually tried them, though I don't know exactly what happened. As a result of this awful case, we agreed to changes in the SOFA, or Status of Forces Agreement, that made it easier for the Japanese to indict our soldiers in such instances. One of the reasons the Japanese had been so upset with us over this incident was that our military had let the alleged perpetrator of a previous rape slip out of Okinawa

and get back to the U.S. before anyone could nab him. Understandably, they were highly suspicious that such a thing might again happen in this case.

Q: Did you have speaker programs on security issues as well?

BLACKBURN: Yes, we had many, both by non-governmental and USG specialists. One innovation I made was to introduce a new regional forum for addressing issues related to the U.S. security presence in Asia. I dubbed it SNEAS, or the Symposium on Northeast Asian Security. It was designed to bring American experts together with Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian, and Mongolian security specialist alums of USIA and CINCPAC's long-standing Symposium on East Asian Security, or SEAS. With participation by Ambassador Mondale, Assistant Secretary Winston Lord, and – via digital videoconferencing – CINCPAC Joseph Prueher, later my Ambassador in Beijing – we held the kick-off SNEAS conference in Tokyo in 1996. It was cosponsored by the Japan Institute for International Affairs. The next year SNEAS was mounted in Seoul, I brought it to Beijing in 2000, and later it went to Ulan Bator and back to Tokyo. I don't know if it is still going on, but during those years I felt it made a valuable contribution to our broader security effort.

Q: What was it like working for a former Vice President?

BLACKBURN: Working for Walter Mondale was always interesting. Mondale of course is one of the great American politicians of our era...

Q: By what measure?

BLACKBURN: In my view he represents the highest standards of integrity and public service. Besides that, I found him to be good-hearted and on the right side of issues that I care about. The Japanese were delighted to have him there as our Ambassador. They love to have us send them an "oo-mono" – meaning a person of great prestige as well as substance, someone with the ear of the President, like a Mansfield, Tom Foley, or Howard Baker.

Mondale made an excellent public impression. He particularly enjoyed talking to bright and powerful younger people, the second echelon power structure, if you will. He wanted to get things done, while minimizing long discussions and formal exchanges of platitudes that are so much a part of meetings with older Japanese.

Joan Mondale was enthusiastic about being in Japan. She always seemed to be having a great time, was ever on the go, and made friends easily. Known during her Washington years as "Joan of Art," she had an activist agenda for promoting closer cultural ties between the U.S. and Japan. Her pet project was promoting U.S.-style "public art" in Japan, and in collaboration with CAO Art Zegelbone developed an interesting talk on the subject that she presented at numerous venues.

Q: Did Mondale go out and talk to students, on the campuses and elsewhere?

BLACKBURN: Only to some extent. But when he did, he was terrific. He also had a wonderful touch with the media, and was readily available to correspondents, especially American ones, with whom he held background sessions from time to time.

While many of Mondale's press activities were suggested by us in USIS, he would sometimes initiate them on his own. For example, when a Japanese student was murdered in New Orleans, he was so disturbed by it he told us to set up an impromptu event that morning where he could express his apologies and sorrow. He also wanted to explain that America – despite the horror stories one hears – really is essentially a safe and welcoming country. That personal gesture was something only a big-league American representative could have carried off. It got excellent media play and helped defuse the sense of outrage surrounding the crime.

Mondale had no complaints about Bill Morgan as his Press Attache, but he felt frustrated not having a personal press assistant on his immediate staff.

Q: How come you didn't give him one?

BLACKBURN: He really wanted something we couldn't provide. In Bill and then Emi Yamauchi, the Embassy was served by top-of-the-line Information Officers/Embassy spokespersons. In fact, Bill Morgan had ratcheted up the Press Office operation to meet Mondale's need for early information on the Japanese press by instituting a daily four- or five-page "Quick Read." That document took a lot of Japanese FSN and American time in the early hours, but was available at the opening of business. It was a terrific product and much appreciated by the Ambassador - and everyone else in the Embassy.

Q: But that wasn't enough? Is that what you are saying?

BLACKBURN: Yes. He wanted someone, he told me, who would function like one of the staffers he had had when he was Senator and Vice President. Some enthusiastic young person who loved to go out in the evening and socialize with reporters, who would pick up the gossip, and who could at times drop a hint or give out a little something that might produce a favorable item in the press. He was mostly thinking of American correspondents, not Japanese ones, of course. He said he had no criticism of USIS, but wanted to supplement its outreach to the media by means of someone more directly focused on his day-to-day interests. Realizing that we did not have anyone to assign to him on that basis, Mondale went to USIA Director Joe Duffey and asked for the allocation of a Schedule C political slot. In the end Duffey found the position, and Andy Meyers, who was resident in Tokyo and had previously done some advance work for the White House, was hired to do the job – though several non-USIS people in the Embassy tried in vain to talk Mondale out of the idea.

Anyway, Andy was brought in and we all made the best of what was an awkward

situation. The fact that Andy didn't know the local or international media or have any resources to contribute to his interactions with them – other than their knowledge that he was on the Ambassador's personal staff – meant that he depended heavily on the USIS Information Office, which continued as before to carry out the mainstream media relations program of the Embassy. Though Bill Morgan handled the situation with outward aplomb, I felt I had let his operation down by not successfully heading off Andy's assignment. After a month or two of breaking in, the arrangement sorted itself out. Andy proved pretty easy to work with, and used his advance-man skills to arrange some good public affairs events, such as an Ambassadorial visit to a Japanese super market selling American products. It wasn't a great situation, as I think the Ambassador probably soon realized, but Andy and USIS cooperated to make it work as well as possible.

Q: Were there any Presidential visits during that era?

BLACKBURN: Yes, there were two visits by President Clinton, beginning with the 1993 G-8 meeting in Tokyo. It was Clinton's first overseas trip as President and included a strong speech on regional security issues at Waseda University, an event we helped shape and carry off. The White House press advance people, led by the meticulously-professional Anne Edwards, were in a state of high anxiety, which made us even more anxious than usual to get everything right. I asked for and got a "dream team" of carefully-selected USIA officers assigned on TDY from all over the world. We laid on a great support operation, for which we received many kudos - despite the fact that on the way into town from the airport the press bus I was traveling on with Anne Edwards got into an accident right on the Shuto Expressway (with a police escort, yet). Working in the trenches with Anne on two POTUS visits laid a good basis for our collaboration on the much more complicated and even more high-profile Clinton visit to China in 1998.

Q: What else did you focus on while you were there?

BLACKBURN: Working with ACAO Anne Callaghan, an immensely talented Japanese speaking officer, I spent a great deal of time trying to support – or rescue – American branch campuses that had been set up by U.S. universities in collaboration with Japanese institutions during the heady "bubble" period around 1990. Both the Americans and their Japanese business/academic partners had unwisely thought these operations would make a lot of money. At the peak there were about 30 such ventures all over the country, but the flawed dreams of the educational entrepreneurs who set them up quickly went up in smoke. Besides the effects of the economic downturn, the collaborations suffered from destructive cultural clashes between the Japanese and American partners. Ultimately, none of them were profitable, some folded even before they got started, and only the already-functioning Temple University branch survives to this day.

Q: Were these for American students or Japanese students?

BLACKBURN: Mostly they were intended for Japanese students, though Americans

resident in Japan or on overseas study programs could also attend. The hope was that many Japanese would take courses for one or two years at the branch campus, and then go on to the U.S. for further study. The prospect of large numbers of fully funded Japanese students was of course enormously attractive to the American colleges and universities.

When things began to get difficult, the organizers of these programs looked to us in the Embassy for help. For instance, they wanted us to lean on the Japanese Ministry of Education to afford the branch campuses some kind of formal recognition. Such status would help them with everything from recruitment to student rail passes. The Ministry, a particularly conservative institution, was not inclined to bend over backwards for these not-yet established branches, especially since they showed at best a minimal willingness to follow the regulations applied to Japanese colleges and universities.

I also tried to help American academics teaching at Japanese universities who claimed (often with justification) that they were victims of Japanese prejudice against foreigners. On several occasions they had a chance to voice their concerns directly to Ambassador Mondale, and with my help he spoke to Japanese officials on their behalf.

We gave good advice to the struggling campuses and helped the professors as much as we could, but were less effective in moving the Japanese bureaucracy than I – or they – would have liked. One activity that did bring me satisfaction was my involvement in what we called "the Oiso group." It consisted of ten top American and Japanese professionals in cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries. Some participants were from foundation world, while others - like a Japanese Foreign Ministry official and I – were governmental. We produced a report that took direct aim at some of the fundamental Japanese practices and regulations that impeded the growth of international interchange. Our practical suggestions, and the clear way they were presented, helped form the basis for ground-breaking legislation promoting the growth of NGOs. However, caught completely by surprise by the report, my up-tight Foreign Ministry counterpart on the Fulbright commission was angry that I had been involved in a project that implicitly criticized the Japanese government, especially having done so in league with one – or perhaps more – of his bureaucratic enemies. He called in DCM Rusty Deming to formally complain about my "inappropriate and undiplomatic" actions. Rusty was unfazed by the criticism, agreeing with me that the influential report never could have been done if it had been subject to an internal Japanese clearance process.

CHINA ASSIGNMENT AND LANGUAGE TRAINING – 1996-97

Q: Then you went off to China. How did it happen that you were assigned there? I don't remember that you had any particular background in China.

BLACKBURN: True, I didn't have much, except for my graduate study, my Legislative Reference Service work, and my support for the 1979 Mondale visit. Getting that assignment was a total surprise. Here is how it happened. One day in the spring of 1995 I noticed in my email take a message in transliterated Thai, of all things. When I had

deciphered it, I realized it was from my old friend Harlan Rosacker, Director of USIA Personnel, asking if I would be interested in going to Beijing as PAO. He said I should not mention the communication to anyone except my wife, but to call him if I wanted to discuss the idea.

After consulting with Pek, I called and asked what in the world was going on. Harlan said, "The senior assignments inner circle group – including Director Duffey, Counselor Donna Oglesby, and me – think that you are the Agency's most-qualified person to be running USIS in China at this point. We have two strong candidates among the China hands, but neither has had your large-post management experience. So how about it?" They wanted me to curtail in Tokyo and start language training that summer, arriving at post in the summer of 1997. I said I'd be delighted to have the job, but there was no way I could leave Tokyo before the end of my tour in 1996. Harlan said in that case I would just have a year of language training and do the best I could with that.

Q: You mean, studying on the side?

BLACKBURN: No, it was to be a full-time year starting in 1996. But not the usual two years. Harlan said they would give me all possible support, but did not expect me to reach the S-3, R-3 proficiency normally required for assignment to the position.

I was told that secrecy was necessary so that everything could be worked out more smoothly. Well, this was extremely awkward for me, because it meant that my boss, East Asia Area Director George Beasley, was not in the loop. George was not just my boss, but also the officer I was to replace in Beijing in 1997. Besides that, he was the former head of the Chinese Language School in Taijung and a strong believer in sending people to China with the strongest possible language skills.

So USIA directly contacted Stapleton Roy, the Ambassador in Beijing, to seek his concurrence in the assignment. Stape had known me since he was DCM in Bangkok, when I was PAO and Frank Scotton, now the Beijing PAO, was CAO. He of course consulted Frank, who was taken aback by the news and immediately contacted George Beasley. This backwards way of getting the word to George was very unfortunate in many respects. Among them was that it put me in a bad light. It looked like I had at best been complicit in a deception and at worst had perhaps instigated the whole thing.

Stape Roy was willing to concur, provided that I came equipped with a 3-3, or close to it, in Chinese. Frank told him that if anyone could reach that level in just a year, he was confident I would at least make a good stab at it. I gather Stape okayed the assignment on the basis of that rather vague assurance.

I fully respected the strong views of George, Stape, Frank, and the other leading China-hand candidates for the job. No wonder they had reservations about me. Here I was coming along out of the blue, at 57, not knowing a word of Chinese. Such an age is definitely not the recommended time in one's life to start learning that endlessly complex

language!

Anyway, I had the assignment and was determined to make the best of it. From 1995 until I left Tokyo in 1996 a Chinese-speaking wife of an officer on the Embassy compound taught me some basics of the language for a couple of hours a week. Once I got to FSI in Washington and was tested, the linguist determined that those introductory lessons were enough to get me placed in that semester's only available new class above the beginner level. I joined two other officers, Robin Bordie and Doug Kelly, who had previously lived in China, already spoke quite a bit of Chinese, and clearly were way ahead of me.

Robin and Doug showed enormous tolerance of my presence in the class, and I owe them an awful lot. I got a tremendous push – and pull – from being in class with them, while struggling to move along at their pace. That year of Chinese was, by a long way, the hardest of my Foreign Service career.

Q: I can imagine.

BLACKBURN: For those ten months I was totally consumed with trying to learn Chinese.

Q: Does your wife, Pek, speak Chinese?

A: Yes, some. And that helped provide a supportive atmosphere at home. I also got a boost from Pek's aunt, who was with us at the time and speaks pretty fluent Mandarin. She helped me with drills and in other ways.

As a way of keeping sane and not taking myself too seriously – I would say to myself, "Look. When it comes to the Chinese language, you are nothing but a fuzzy-headed, pudgy, and naked old man with a speech impediment. But come on – how bad is that?" My attitude was simply to give the challenge my all-out best effort. And the teachers were terrifically supportive. After a year, thanks to the instructors, to my fellow students, to my own efforts, and to the leg up I got from previous exposure to Thai tones and grammar as well as to Japanese characters, I finished the ten months having reached an S-2+, R-3.

After that I went to Taiwan for ten more weeks of study and further progress at the Taipei Language Institute. Once I got to Beijing and started working in the language, I continued to improve and eventually reached my cherished goal of the S-3, R-3. I thought that was quite an accomplishment, one that paid a kind of debt I owed to George, Frank, and the others who rightly upheld the importance of Chinese language competence for all officers assigned to China.

PAO BEIJING – 1997-2000

Once on the ground at the post, I got great satisfaction from using the language whenever I could, with strong encouragement from Chinese I dealt with. I had many chances to

speak Chinese in meetings, when making toasts, and in other semi-formal situations. My excellent Chinese language tutor helped me with remarks I made at functions. Some of those presentations were considered so amusing and apt that they were later included in the standard teaching materials used for advanced Chinese language studies by FSOs in Beijing.

Working in China was tremendously stimulating. The energy and excitement of the place were palpable. Though it retains many of the unpleasant characteristics of a totalitarian dictatorship, the country is changing so fast and in so many ways that its future directions are one of the great stories of our age, a fact that accounts for the presence of legions of foreign correspondents there. Every day I would wake up expecting – and unusually finding – some mind-blowing and major change occurring right under my nose.

I had the chance to travel all over China. We had branch posts, known after "consolidation" as the Public Affairs Sections, or PAS, of the local consulates, in Shanghai, Shenyang, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. I got to all of them several times and to many other parts of the country as well.

Q: How big a staff did you have?

BLACKBURN: We had 18 Americans.

Q: You're kidding! I didn't realize we had that many people in China.

BLACKBURN: Yes, it was a substantial number. For example, we had an IO and two AIOs, plus three ACAOs reporting to the CAO, and five officers at the branches.

Q: What did they all do?

BLACKBURN: Well, for example, you needed an ACAO just to run the International Visitor program. China had, and still has, the largest IV program in the world, sending well over 100 people as either IVs or Voluntary Visitors. It was an enormous undertaking. And the Fulbright program had to be handled by an ACAO in our office, because there is no Fulbright binational commission in China. We needed an ACAO to work exclusively on handling a program that in terms of numbers of exchangees almost equaled Japan's, which is run by the Japan-United States Exchange Commission under an Executive Director and more than 20 Japanese employees. And you needed a third ACAO for the speaker program, which involved an array of lectures and seminars throughout China. Then we had a Regional Library Officer, who was responsible for all the Information Resource Centers in China, as well as strengthening our contacts in the Chinese library world.

On the information side, we needed an AIO for press and an AIO for electronic media as well as the Embassy website. In addition, we had a contract American editor of the post-produced Chinese language magazine called Jiaoliu, which we sent out each quarter to a

selected mailing list of about 10,000. And we had an Executive Officer, until consolidation, and a computer specialist, both of whom were sorely needed to keep us afloat in that country.

All the branches were one-officer posts, except Shanghai, which had two.

In our front office, I had a deputy, Don Bishop, and an American secretary, first Maxine Jeffries and then Linda Adams.

Q: How about the Chinese staff?

BLACKBURN: There were about 55 Chinese staffers at all our various facilities. They were officially employed by the Diplomatic Services Bureau, or DSB, and could be removed by them at any time. Though this had happened quite frequently in earlier years, by the time I got there we were essentially able to hold on to the ones we wanted to keep. There were pluses and minuses to the fact that they were not Foreign Service Nationals. On the plus side, it was easy to discharge them, an option I had to exercise a couple of times. They were entitled to two week's notice, but in both cases I delivered the news on a Friday afternoon and they chose to depart immediately. On the minus side, we were constrained by DSB regulations that made it difficult to reward the outstanding performers, as the DSB took a handsome cut of all payments.

I was pleasantly surprised at how good and loyal the Chinese staff was, having over the years heard accounts of their inefficiency and unreliability. That was not my experience at all. And we were getting better employees all the time, thanks mainly to having more control over the hiring process. Even some of the old-timers, like Yang Gengqi, in charge of distribution, were first-rate, while new hires like Gu Hong in the Information Resource Center and Lin Chunmei in the Press Section were fully the equal of FSN counterparts in other countries where I served – in terms of dedication, analytical ability, English fluency, and overall professional skills.

Q: How did the Americans you programmed fare under the rigid Chinese system?

BLACKBURN: There were certainly rigidities, but just as with our experience with managing DSB employees, we found more and more flexibility. For example, by the time I arrived we had growing input into what campuses the some 20 American Lecturers brought over each year under the Fulbright program would be assigned to. We even "sanctioned" one leading university by denying it a lecturer because of our unhappiness with the way they had treated an American professor the previous year. The university quickly shaped up, allowing us to resume placements to that institution. Except for rare instances, the American Fulbrighters were extremely enthusiastic about their China experiences – the students they taught, the seminars they arranged or participated in, and their opportunities for travel all over the country. Although it was a constant struggle to recruit Fulbrighters to go to China, once there on the ground, they were amazed and delighted with what they found.

At this time all of us in the Embassy were witnessing, even participating in, major changes in China. To the astonishment of many, for example, my wife was invited to give numerous guest lectures at both the Foreign Affairs College and Peking University, two institutions once very difficult for Embassy officers or their families to visit without special permission. In USIS we pushed the envelope in many ways. For instance, with "rule of law" being a priority of the Chinese leadership, our post, our speakers, and Fulbright Lecturers organized conferences on such topics as American legal education in America and the relationship of law and the media.

Some of our speakers dealt with more provocative topics. For example, Joshua Muravchik spoke all over the country about America's commitment to democracy. He is a conservative intellectual, often published in the Washington Times, and a powerful, though soft-spoken, lecturer. His straight-forward message to audiences was that America will not feel truly secure in this world until all major countries, especially including China, are democracies. It was the kind of message that you would think could not be delivered to audiences in China, but – handled properly – it could be done.

Similarly, we had speakers address the sensitive but important role of religion in American society and politics. We of course had to program them officially under a more anodyne rubric like "U.S. interest group politics." Still, the speakers were not only able to talk on the campuses, but also to meet with officials in China's Bureau of Religious Affairs about this major factor in American life. Such programs helped us provide needed context for much-resented U.S. expressions of concern about religious freedom in China.

Q: And the Chinese didn't complain?

BLACKBURN: No, they didn't really object, provided we did not circumvent procedures egregiously. They were in most cases interested in hearing what our speakers had to say. Sometimes officials in local areas were reluctant to approve a lecture – and everything had to be cleared in advance – but usually a program could be arranged, even at an alternate university venue. On some occasions, a party cadre in the audience would feel it necessary to stand up and give a lengthy rebuttal to points made by our lecturers. That was just part of doing business in China.

Besides the speakers, we devoted a special issue of Jiaoliu magazine to the subject of religion in America.

Q: Isn't it unusual that you would even have a one-country magazine after USIA shut down so many of them?

BLACKBURN: Yes, it was one of the very few left at any of our posts. The key people we sent it to seemed grateful for it and recipients often commented to us on specific articles. I think it was an important public diplomacy asset – even though we fully recognized that our mailing list of only 10,000, however thoughtfully constructed, was at

best reaching only a small cohort of China's present and future leadership.

Q: Was this all a continuation of activities begun before your time as PAO in China?

BLACKBURN: Yes, very much so. I was fortunate that on my watch the public affairs programming environment in China opened up so quickly and widely, while my predecessors missed out on seeing the fruits of their earlier labors. I hope my successors will benefit in similar ways from things I did.

Q: Were you doing this on your own premises – or with cosponsors outside?

BLACKBURN: Most of the speaker presentations were at Chinese think tanks or on university campuses. We would be there officially as their guests. They would carry the water to get the official approvals needed for the event to go forward.

We also used our own facilities. In the early 1990s USIS opened an information resources center at the Jingguang Center, an "offsite" location away from the three heavily-guarded American Embassy compounds. It was in many respects like the American Centers in Japan, but we also ran the Fulbright and IV programs from there. We used a programming space for some presentations, but we didn't have Japan's simultaneous translation capability, and we had to limit its use to fewer than 50 attendees. Though it was obviously a USG facility, that didn't seem to bother our audiences very much, particularly since many of them were considered reliable "foreigner handlers" by their home offices. The advantage to us was that we could invite individuals from many institutions. Most of our programs there were directed at fluent speakers of English, though on occasion we used consecutive interpretation or had Chinese-speaking lecturers.

Sometimes we held WORLDNETs or other events right at the USIS facility, which was located on the same compound as the Ambassador's residence. Memorable WORLDNETs included interactive dialogues with American officials talking about upcoming APEC meetings, new approaches to environmental regulation, and possible restrictions on Chinese imports because of Asian Longhorned Beetle infestations.

Some of the branches, particularly Chengdu and Shenyang, used regular on-site speaker programs to reach broader communities in which they were located. The Consulate posts also had WORLDNETs and Digital Videoconferences (DVCs) with American speakers. Shanghai became a leader in using the DVC medium.

Q: Tell me more about the beetle problem you just mentioned.

BLACKBURN: A major problem arose suddenly in late 1998 when our Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service – or APHIS – people in the Agriculture Department discovered an infestation of Asian Longhorned Beetles in packing materials used for Chinese exports to the U.S. The Secretary of Agriculture was about to cut off imports from China unless the problem could be solved by some system for certifying that the wood used had been

properly treated. Such an action would have affected the bulk of China's billions of dollars of non-textile exports. The consequences for our bilateral trade as well as for our overall relationship would have been enormous.

I got immediately to work on a public affairs strategy, which we put in place with the help of the APHIS and Agriculture folks. The first task was to get the announcement delayed until some public affairs groundwork could be laid, and to make sure that the official statement both provided a realistic phasing-in period and presented the policy in non-accusatory tones. Our job on the ground was to explain to the local U.S. correspondents as well as the Chinese why this action had to be taken. We set up a one-country WORLDNET with a senior officer in the Department of Agriculture, who carefully explained how the beetles had already destroyed many trees in New York and Chicago, and showed video news clips that backed up his presentation. The Chinese were shocked, and many doubtless suspected us of introducing a non-tariff barrier to reduce the bilateral trade deficit. Besides using WORLDNET and other presentations, we also provided detailed hand-outs – in Chinese as well as English – to explain the problem and how we intended to work with the Chinese to set up an eradication and certification scheme that would keep the beetles out of the packing cases and allow trade to continue as before.

Although we often think that public affairs activities for foreign correspondents don't have much impact on what we do locally, in this case I believe there was a direct connection. Though the Chinese media gave scant attention to our public affairs output, and even refused to accept full-page descriptions of the problem we offered to pay to have placed in Chinese papers, the leadership doubtless was influenced by the long and factually accurate articles written by U.S. journalists we briefed, especially those appearing in the New York Times and the Chicago Tribune. Thanks to our efforts, and the great work of USDA and APHIS officers who gave endless briefings to Chinese exporters and port officials, the new procedures were put in place with so little fuss we all counted it a minor miracle.

Q: It sounds like things had really opened up.

BLACKBURN: That's true. The police state apparatus was still there – as we saw when central authorities told Chinese publications not to accept our Asian Longhorned Beetle placements – but overall bilateral atmospherics were greatly improved by the successful visits of President Jiang Zemin to the U.S. in 1997 and by President Clinton's to China in the summer of 1998.

Q: What was that "POTUS" visit like?

BLACKBURN: I was deeply immersed in that one, which took Clinton to Xian, Beijing, Shanghai, and Guilin. With seven nights on the ground in China, it was the longest peacetime visit by a U.S. President to any single country – exceeded only by President Wilson in Paris after World War One and President Truman in Potsdam at the end of World War Two. The President was accompanied not only by Hillary Rodham Clinton

and daughter Chelsea, but also by Mrs. Rodman, five or six cabinet officers, numerous other dignitaries, and a raft of business executives.

I stayed on top of the planning from the beginning, working with the White House advance team as well as with Anne Edwards and her press advance people. That meant traveling several times to each of the cities on the itinerary and participating in the usual endless discussions of hotel space, filing arrangements, and transportation. In the end we brought on legions of volunteer American residents who supplemented our assigned American and Chinese staffers and provided guidance and other services to the White House correspondents. Again, I asked the Agency to send me a "dream team" of my choosing, and succeeded in lining up most of the people I thought would be most useful. One assignment that gave me particular pleasure was to bring George Beasley back, at his request, to help out as the senior USIS officer for the Xian stop.

The trip was notable for the fact that both the opening joint press conference between Jiang Zemin and Clinton at the Great Hall of the People and also the President's speech at Peking University were broadcast live by the Chinese state media. Getting to the point where that could be made to happen involved complex negotiations with the Chinese, who consistently insisted that they would not allow the direct transmission within China, but would permit foreign broadcasters to carry live coverage from those two sites. The White House judged the trip a great success because of those events – even though the President's most critical statements were not repeated in later broadcasts or picked up in any of the Chinese print media. USIS was also directly involved in a live talk radio program that BPAO Tony Sariti suggested for Shanghai and another long interview that was carried nearly in its entirety on CCTV.

The atmosphere surrounding the trip was almost euphoric. The two leaders talked about working toward a "constructive strategic partnership." It seemed like democracy might flourish in China, and there was even hope for resolving the Tibet issue. The public affairs part of the visit was central to its success, and we all felt somehow that our sleepless nights had been worth it. Of course, in the months that followed, things went south. The democracy movement was squashed, tensions rose in the Taiwan Straits, no progress was made on Tibet, the WTO negotiations ran into serious difficulties, and the government harshly cracked down on Fulan Gong.

Though not normally a fan of Presidential visits, I have to say that the Clinton visit to China in 1998 was certainly one of the highest points of my career. Besides being exciting and fun, it produced a helpful Chinese "party line" that it was okay to be friendly to America, which opened a lot of doors to us. The stress on me had been great, however. For weeks after it was all over, I could not sleep through a full night undisturbed by anxiety dreams.

Q: What were some of the specific consequences of that visit?

BLACKBURN: Now the official word was that "relations between the world's most

powerful developed country and the world's largest developing country" were headed in a positive direction. One senior PRC official responsible for media guidance told me they had sent guidance to the Chinese media that only positive stories about the United States were to be reported by correspondents overseas! That guidance had a limited shelf life, of course.

The new mood helped propel what I think of as a continuing "golden age of American Studies." Just about every educated Chinese, however they might feel about our country, has concluded that his or her future is somehow tied up with the United States. Just as Americans are paying increasing attention to China, they are looking at us – and even more seriously. Their motivations of course are many, but certainly include trying to understand how better to sell to us, to compete with our companies, to latch on to our technology, to fend off our efforts to change them, to learn the secrets of our success in maintaining stability with such a large and diverse population, or simply just how to come to America to build a new life here. The result is that vast numbers of students want to learn more about America.

We strongly supported the American Studies Center at Peking University, the premier academic institution in the country. Just after his speech on that campus, President Clinton presented that Center with a multi-volume special collection on American institutions and ideals. We had worked with the American Studies folks back in USIA to put together the collection, never dreaming that it would be the President making the formal presentation. At one point we had three Fulbright lecturers assigned to Peking University – one teaching American literature, one teaching U.S. constitutional law, and one teaching, among other things, a ground-breaking interdisciplinary survey course in American Studies that attracted more than 200 students. The lectures from the law course, given by Professor Elizabeth Spahn, were put on the university's website in both English and Chinese. We were excited to be doing all this at China's top university – and the likely source of many future leaders.

Another initiative I set in motion was to translate basic American law texts into Chinese. The idea was to create an "American Law Library" that would eventually total 200 volumes. Don Bishop – with help from USIS staffer Yang Gengqi and our Chinese and American legal community advisors – honchoed the program during my time there, our successors Lloyd Neighbors and Rich Stites kept it going, and Don plans to move the project along further when taking over as PAO in the summer of 2003. The opportunity to translate these texts in much demand by the Chinese and get them sold all over the country represented an important breakthrough, one that promotes positive changes at a very fundamental level.

Q: Can you say a little more about the Fulbright program and what you were trying to do with it?

BLACKBURN: Sure. Fulbright has a long history in China. In fact, the China program was the first in the world to get off the ground after World War Two. That Fulbright

operation of course went off to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek. We had essentially no exchanges with the People's Republic of China for the 30 years from 1949 to 1979, the year we set up the current structure for U.S.-China Fulbright exchanges.

During my tenure I promoted the idea of starting a Fulbright commission in China, a proposal that could never have had a glimmer of support just a few years earlier. Unfortunately, the obstacles were simply too great for us to make appreciable progress. Officials at the Chinese Ministry of Education, our counterparts in managing the program, gave me a respectful hearing and several of them bought my arguments about the advantages that would come to both countries. However, China has never allowed such a semi-autonomous binational body to operate outside the tight control of Chinese officialdom, and I had to content myself with the few short steps we made along the steep path toward actually getting one established. Still, I am sure one day a China Fulbright commission will come into being, as it has in nearly all other countries with which we carry out substantial Fulbright exchanges – even many that operate on a much smaller scale.

One specific measure we took in the direction of broadening the oversight of the Fulbright program was to set up an advisory body made up of Chinese and Americans from outside the governmental chains of command. Its first task was to select senior scholars and other individuals from both countries to participate in a "Distinguished Lecturer Program" to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Fulbright program in the PRC. Our inaugural meeting in May 1999 was very productive and encouraging. Unfortunately, it took place the afternoon immediately preceding the U.S. accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, an event that cast a pall over our relations for many months thereafter – and represented the nadir of my Foreign Service career.

THE BELGRADE BOMBING – MAY 1999

Q: Please tell me more about what happened to your operation at that point.

BLACKBURN: Essentially, all but the most routine activities came to a complete standstill. For example, on the calendar for later in May was a major symposium on regional security that we had been working on for months. It was to include security specialists from all over Asia participating in the USIA and CINCPAC annual program called the Symposium on East Asian Security, or SEAS. SEAS had never before had a China stop on its program itinerary. Our cosponsors were the prominent military intelligence think tank called the Chinese Institute for Contemporary International Relations, or CICIR, with which we were working closely for the first time. All was in readiness – for the participants and for a distinguished panel of speakers that included current Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific Jim Kelly. The event was canceled by the Chinese immediately after the bombing. A year later, however, we joined CICIR in pulling off a similar event. That one was a symposium for the annual gathering of SEAS alumni from Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Russia, China, and the U.S. called the Symposium on Northeast Asian Security, or SNEAS, a rotating security "Track II

talkfest" I got started while PAO in Tokyo.

Another unprecedented event on our calendar affected by the bombing was a conference set for September on U.S.-China-Russia relations. In that case we were cooperating with the Chinese Institute for International Relations (or CIIS), the major think tank of the Foreign Ministry. They were cautious about working with us, but with terrific help from American scholar Jonathan Adelman, who had strong relations with the CIIS leadership, we had finally reached agreement on a workable concept that promised to meet all their concerns while achieving our goals as well. That conference was also iced – though it, too, was successfully organized the following year.

Q: What were you doing during the crisis itself?

BLACKBURN: On the Saturday morning of the bombing, the Embassy held an Emergency Action Committee meeting at the Embassy as soon as the senior officers could be assembled. The Regional Security Officer told us there would be a demonstration in the afternoon. We were instructed to tell our American staffers and their families to stay in their apartments in the diplomatic compounds, exercise proper security precautions, and await further news of developments.

As the demonstration got under way that afternoon I rode my bike to a street corner by the Embassy where I could watch what was going on – all the while trying to look like a harmless senior-citizen foreigner. The demonstrations were orchestrated by the Chinese authorities, who worked through the Communist Party cadres assigned to the universities. Two busloads from each of the major Beijing universities came, each with similar banners and slogans to chant, and each bearing a petition to be delivered to Embassy authorities. At first the demonstrations were peaceful, and the Embassy sent representatives to the gate to accept petitions. But the protests got more and more hostile as the afternoon progressed, and the marchers started throwing items such as glass bottles, stones, bricks, paint, and eventually Molotov cocktails. In that early period, I felt pretty safe, being out there on the street along with a large contingent of foreign correspondents and other onlookers, just observing developments and ignoring attention directed toward me.

My daughter was due to perform in a play that evening at the International School, so I was keeping an eye on my watch all the while. Not knowing for sure how hot things were getting in other parts of the city, I decided to go into the Chancery, report to Ambassador Sasser, and then head out to the play. I slipped by the demonstrators and wheeled my bike through the front gate of the Chancery so I could tell those inside what I had been observing on the street. I briefed the Ambassador, the Acting DCM – who was Jim Moriarty – the RSO, and others on what I could understand of the demonstrations, what the American correspondents were doing, which universities had so far marched past, and the general atmospherics. Seeing that the Ambassador was on the verge of returning to his residence to be with his wife, I grabbed my bike, exited the door by the front gate, and peddled off through the demonstrators to find a taxi to get me to the school. I later learned

that my departure from the Embassy was filmed by CNN and frequently carried as part of their coverage of those days. As it turned out, I had left just ten minutes before the Embassy was completely shut down for the next three days. In that short time, the demonstrations got uglier and the RSO urged the Ambassador to stay in the Chancery, where he could be better protected by the Marine guards, rather than return to his less-protected residence. The Ambassador was understandably unhappy about being separated from his wife, though fortunately the Sasser's adult son and some friends were there with her.

Not surprisingly, when I got to the school I learned that the play had been canceled and all the kids had gone home, which I promptly did myself.

During the first day and a half of the crisis, many of our colleagues, especially those in the Chancery and at some of the Consulates, were in significant danger. Though U.S. Marines protected the Chancery from direct assault, officers on the spot engaged in a full-scale destruction of classified materials that might fall into the hands of demonstrators should the Embassy be overrun. In hindsight, it appears the danger was never that close, but several Chinese did jump the compound wall and had to be confronted by Marines in full battle gear before they were persuaded to jump back over the wall.

Except for Shanghai, with its own Marine guard contingent, the other Consulates were protected only by Chinese security guards. In Chengdu those guards were of virtually no help. Demonstrators climbed the compound wall, set fire to the Consul's residence, and smashed their way through the outer door of the Consulate. They were using a bike rack to try to crash into the interior – while screaming that they were going to exact vengeance – when city security forces finally arrived and routed them. Our colleagues were understandably terrified through this ordeal. They were frantically calling the Embassy and local contacts, and getting increasingly agitated by the slow, almost grudging response of the Chengdu authorities. During this most dangerous period I talked with Min Bookbinder, the wife of the BPAO, who was then standing on the roof of the Consulate staff apartment building. She had an all-too-clear view of the still smoldering Consul's residence and described for me the pervasive fear that the apartments were soon to come under direct attack. Chengdu staffers and their families were traumatized during that period, but fortunately the situation soon stabilized.

I was proud of the performance under such conditions of my USIS colleagues – and their family members. Throughout the Chengdu crisis, BPAO Joe Bookbinder performed courageously, as did those in the other two Consulates most heavily attacked, Salome Hernandez in Guangzhou and Thomas Hodges in Shenyang. Shanghai, where Tony Sariti and Teresa Wilkin served, was never seriously endangered, though the staffers there likewise performed with distinction. Conditions were exceptionally stressful for official Americans wherever they happened to be in China during those first days.

Happily, in the end no Americans anywhere in the country reported suffering any physical harm. One Australian and I think a Canadian – who to no avail protested that they were

not Americans! – got roughed up, but only slightly. Canadian lapel buttons were in wide use by U.S. citizens during those days.

Throughout the ordeal we maintained contact with the USIS Chinese employees, especially those with email. Some of the USIS staffers were of great help, for example by translating statements from the White House and the Secretary of State.

The Fulbright professors were another major concern. I was convinced that, with campuses all over the country erupting with anger at the U.S., many of the Fulbrighters and their families would want to be evacuated as soon as possible. But none of them did request to go home. To their great credit, they all hunkered down for those first tense days in their campus apartments, staying in touch by email with Frank Whitaker, the ACAO in charge of the Fulbright program. After a few days their Chinese handlers and colleagues at the universities knocked on their doors and told them it was safe to return to normal activities. The email system Frank had earlier put in place was a great communications tool. We could stay up to date on the Fulbrighters' situations, give them specific advice and information, and keep them apprized of Embassy thinking.

The volume of press queries from international media was almost overwhelming. Information Officer/Spokesman Bill Palmer and his deputy, Tom Cooney, fielded an unrelenting onslaught of questions and requests for on-the-air descriptions of the scene on the ground. I handled some of them, too. People called at all hours of the day and night, both on our regular phones and on the cell-phones they somehow knew we were using.

Throughout the crisis, we were able to maintain the Embassy website. It was regularly under attack by hackers, but our contractors somehow managed to fend them off, or to quickly get it back up whenever it was taken down.

Q: You mean electronically, I assume.

BLACKBURN: Yes, that right. Electronically, not physically. We used the website in many ways besides just communicating with each other. For example, I wrote a statement for the Ambassador, expressing his regret about the mistaken bombing and calling for continued good relations between the two countries. We put that up, with his picture, in both English and Chinese. The Embassy's Gunnery Sergeant, an excellent photographer, took a widely-used picture of the Ambassador looking forlornly out through the broken glass of the front door of the Chancery. The Washington Post and a lot of papers around the country carried it on their front pages. Another he took showed our American flag through an upstairs broken glass window of the Chancery. That one was on the front cover of the Far Eastern Economic Review. We put both these photos, and several others, on our website, and the news organizations picked them up from there. Chinese media handlers I talked with later told me they felt very resentful when they saw what we had done. They said we should have also carried pictures of the devastation and deaths at the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. I explained that that was not our job, but that we had carried numerous statements conveying our regret for the tragic mistake. Our contacts

were generally unaware of the damage done to our facilities when the demonstrators got out of control, and were shocked to hear that we had be showered with rocks, paint, Molotov cocktails, and even human feces.

Once the demonstrations had essentially run their course, we brought the USIS Chinese and American staffers back to work. A few of us had gone in earlier to try to clean up some of the dirt and glass chards, but we couldn't fix the broken windows and there were limits to what we could do to make the premises presentable before the main body of the staff returned. It was pretty bad. Everybody, especially the Chinese, was deeply disturbed by what they saw. Though we were not the primary target of the demonstrators, our compound was directly on the main route the demonstrators walked along. The USIS facility lost about 85 broken windows, while perhaps a ton of rocks and other debris had been thrown into our office space. Besides returning to depressingly messed up offices, the Chinese staffers were still suffering the effects of having had their families and friends urge them to get DSB to transfer them to new embassies and away from the contemptible Americans.

On the first day we were all back, I called the staff together and said, "Look. This is what happened, as best I understand it. Many Chinese think we bombed their Belgrade embassy on purpose. It was not done on purpose. It really was a mistake. We understand that Chinese media and party cadres put that unflattering interpretation on the accident, and that all Chinese feel very angry right now. The mistake was a terrible one, and we are deeply sorry it happened. At the same time, you should realize that Americans are insulted and upset with Chinese who accuse us of doing it on purpose because we feel some kind of hatred toward China and the Chinese people. As you can see, some Chinese felt justified in attacking Americans and causing all this damage to our facilities. We in USIS just have to deal with this tense bilateral atmosphere and get on with our work. After all, we are the Chinese and Americans who every day try to strengthen the basic fabric of relations between our two countries. That is our job, so let's get on with it. But first let's have some meals together and try to relax a bit." And that is what we did.

One incident that sticks out in my memory involved Ambassador Sasser, who behaved with courage and dignity throughout the crisis. During those first days some of the press calls got through directly to him – despite our off-site efforts to help him pick and chose which interviews to accept. At least one, but perhaps more, of the journalists who reached him got a quote to the effect that, being stuck in the Chancery as he was, he felt like a "hostage." His use of that term, plus the wide play given to our website photos, were apparently the motivation for a call from the State Department Spokesman, who – unable to reach me – got through to IO Bill Palmer. The message conveyed was a firm instruction that we were to stop "hyping the drama" of our situation, which was distracting public attention away the priority effort then under way in the former Yugoslavia.

Q: Meaning you should not react to the press queries?

BLACKBURN: Meaning, I guess, that the Ambassador and the rest of us should drastically tone down our on-the-record exchanges with the media. I think use of the term "hostage" had roused fears that the Administration might be facing a reprise of the Iran hostage crisis that brought the curtain down on the Carter Administration. I passed the message on to colleagues in the Chancery, who being still under siege would have preferred more sympathetic attention from Washington. We all felt that, far from "hyping" anything, we were simply factually informing the public about what was actually happening. Though we essentially went on as before, the worst of the crisis was over by then, so there was much less "drama" to talk about.

Q: Did U.S.-China relations suffer permanent damage?

BLACKBURN: Sure, it was harmed, but in most respects it bounced back pretty quickly. In the days immediately following the bombing, the Chinese showed that they did not want the emotions of the moment to overwhelm the benefits China gains from the bilateral relationship. From the get-go they were anxious to protect economic relations and tourism. In fact, American tourists were going about their usual activities through the whole episode – and came up against no particular hostility, as far as I know. And the American business community was strongly encouraged by the Chinese authorities not to pull out either people or investment.

They also wanted to keep our educational ties going. Following the Tiananmen Square tragedy in June of 1989, we suspended the Fulbright program. People in both of our countries remembered that, and thought it had been a big mistake. When relations are sour, that is not the time to cancel educational exchange activities; you need them all the more. So both at the Ministry of Education and on the campuses, officials made a special effort to emphasize to the Fulbrighters and other foreign teachers, especially Americans, that their presence was very welcome. Military-to-military contacts stayed on ice for quite a while, but educational ties and media relations soon were much like they had been before the bombing.

After a couple of months, the overall climate of the relationship improved substantially. We sent a delegation to give senior Chinese officials an explanation of how the targeting mistake came to be made. Another delegation worked out what we would pay the Chinese for the loss of life, injuries, and property damage sustained in Belgrade – and the compensation we expected for the damage done to our facilities in Beijing and elsewhere in the country. We finally agreed on a payment of about $30 million to them. And they agreed to give us about $3 million.

Q: Did we have a good explanation of what had happened? I forget the details.

BLACKBURN: We said that it was a faulty map, and using some charts and maps, explained to the Chinese leadership in some detail how things went wrong. Those charts and maps have never been made available to the American public! I felt, and still feel, that we did a very poor job of providing a satisfactory public explanation. The Chinese

kept insisting that we had done it on purpose, and we had no hard documentation to use in rebutting them. Unfortunately, bureaucratic butt-protecting kept us from admitting our mistakes – except through leaked information that appeared in the New York Times. That put new Ambassador Joseph Prueher and the rest of us in the very odd position of referring our Chinese interlocutors to a newspaper article, rather than giving them an official document – or, better yet, a White Paper – that laid it all out.

With nothing to bring the issue to closure, the bombing has entered the long list of humiliations China feels it has suffered at the hands of anti-Chinese foreigners over the last two centuries. I thought it was a great failure of our public diplomacy, but I was unable to do anything about it – either when there or after I got back to Washington.

CONSOLIDATION OF USIA AND STATE – THE BEIJING PERSPECTIVE

Q: Did the consolidation of USIA and State take place while you were there? What was the time frame?

BLACKBURN: The merger took place on October 1, 1999, nearly five months after the Belgrade bombing, so I was in China for nearly a year of the new organizational arrangement.

Q: But during that year before you got back to Washington in the summer of 2000, not very much happened, did it? The consolidation took place on paper, of course, but physically there not much difference, I gather. Didn't people pretty much go about their business as previously?

BLACKBURN: I wouldn't put it quite that way. For one thing, on the first of October, there was no more USIS. We became the Public Affairs Section. We lost the name. We lost the image. We lost the self-identification.

Q: You are talking about overseas, and from your perspective in Beijing. I am talking about the Washington perspective.

BLACKBURN: Back in Washington things did not change so much right away. That's true. But even at headquarters everyone was very much up in the air. And the East Asia office, my former area bosses, suddenly weren't directly supervising me or rating me anymore.

In the field losing "USIS" was a big change. For more than 50 years we had worked to establish a brand, a name, a reputation for providing service. I remember Jack O'Brien addressing a Rotary Club in Bangkok when I was a JOT. In those remarks he had stressed that just as Rotary is a service organization, so too is USIS a service organization. We really did have an institutional sense that we served the public and that we were responsible for providing helpful, objective information about our country. By suddenly telling our publics that we were dropping "information" and "service" from our name,

becoming instead the Public Affairs Section, we presented a very different image. Now, it seems – and feels – that we represent, essentially, the State Department and its pronouncements on policy. Our primary organizational raison d'etre involves advancing State's interests and giving primacy to its take on foreign policy, even in areas where it lacks the expertise of, say, USTR, Commerce, or Agriculture. Moreover, "telling America's story" is seen essentially as of secondary importance for public diplomacy professionals.

Q: Who are now junior members of one department in the organization?

BLACKBURN: Yes, and overseas our organizational relationship to other sections became quite different. I was no longer the head of a relatively autonomous section, with a distinct mandate and flexible resources to undertake everything from putting on a big seminar to paying for refurbishing the PAO apartment. My colleagues in the Admin Section were solicitous and in many cases avoided taking precipitous action, but some had a kind of "pay-back" attitude and took unilateral actions involving "our" space or personnel without telling us.

In addition to such relatively minor irritants, there was a serious discussion of the ways in which the public diplomacy staff should or should not be treated like FSOs in other sections. DCM Bill McCahill and I had some lively discussions. He candidly expressed his strong view that the position grade for the head of the Public Affairs Section (PAS) should parallel those of the chiefs of the Political Section and Economic Section, which were at the FE-OC level, as opposed to the PAO's FE-MC. He also said that since those two sections did not have deputy chiefs, PAS shouldn't either. And, furthermore, since no vehicles were assigned permanently to POL or ECON, there was no need to have any exclusively for PAS. The message was: "Now that you are part of the larger State Department organization, you should expect nothing more and nothing less than equal treatment, so be prepared to make the necessary adjustments and get with the program."

Q: Was the same thing happening in all countries?

BLACKBURN: Yes, I believe so. It was the new reality, and the arguments we were all hearing from our DCMs had a lot of logic to them. I tried to present an objective and persuasive case outlining the kinds of compromises all parties to the new arrangement should be prepared to make. Citing the legislating mandating that USIA's integration should not entail any diminution in public diplomacy quantity or quality, I stressed that the State Department had not simply acquired new personnel and new resources to manage, it had also taken on unfamiliar responsibilities carrying unique requirements. And to do that job, we would need understanding and full support from the rest of the Embassy, especially the Admin Section.

I argued that PAS should retain a deputy to help run what was still a complex nationwide program. I prepared a lengthy memo for McCahill detailing the ways that my responsibilities differed from those of the heads of other Embassy sections. I showed, for

example, that the job of the Political Minister Counselor, while undoubtedly exceedingly demanding, involved relatively few management tasks. Understandably, any effort to persuade a political officer DCM that the PAO's position entailed more responsibility and administrative skill than that of the Political Minister-Counselor was unlikely to carry the day. Though McCahill and his successors as DCM, Gene Martin and Mike Marine, were not persuaded by my arguments regarding either the PAO grade level or the need for a deputy, the Washington management arm instructed all missions not to take precipitate action until a comparative job analysis could be conducted. The analysis looked at persons supervised, budgets managed, and other quantitative factors. This enlightened approach was very helpful to our morale. The survey, completed after I had departed Beijing, found that most PAO jobs, including the one in China, did not need to be down-graded, even if they were higher than other major sections of the Embassy.

Q: That protected you a little bit. Is that what you are saying?

BLACKBURN: Basically we agreed, in Beijing and elsewhere, to wait a year or two before instituting major changes. That gave our post breathing room to make the transition to a new team, Lloyd Neighbors and Rich Stites in our case, without everyone going through the trauma of a major shakeup.

The General Services Officer (GSO), the Budget and Fiscal Officer, and other key support personnel tried to be helpful, but they were essentially ignorant, as they admitted, of how we operated, especially in the area of contracts. Gradually they appreciated our special needs – for example, that periodicals for our Information Resource Center needed to be ordered on a different schedule and according to different procedures than staff-use periodicals for other sections of the Embassy.

In the case of the USIS vehicles, initially we were allowed to keep the four we had, but soon they were added to a central pool. At first GSO said we should ask for drivers when we needed them. After a short time, however, they realized that we had frequent need for drivers who understood our requirement to make deliveries all over the city, to ferry our speakers around to unusual destinations, and so forth. So we ended up with a modified system whereby drivers were more or less permanently on duty at our two locations – a kind of satellite motor pool, if you will.

In procurement, too, there was a learning process we had to suffer through. The initial impulse was to treat PAS no better than any other section. However, we had so much trouble getting the flexible and speedy support we needed for our routine work – and kicked up such a fuss – that, before too many months had passed, new procedures gave us quick processing when necessary, plus authority to make our own small to medium purchases.

Making these adjustments was aided by the fact that PAS activities in China and elsewhere were given a separate allotment that was funded from the earmark for public diplomacy Congress put into – and continues to insist on – in the State Department

budget at the time of consolidation.

Q: In giving you those early hassles you mentioned, were they acting on instructions from the State Department?

BLACKBURN: No, not in most cases. And I am not sure anyone was trying to hassle us. The basic guidance from Washington was to move cautiously and work out the inevitable glitches in a collegial manner – which is what we all tried to do.

Losing Executive Officer Vince Raimondi, who early on was transferred into the Admin Section and given non-public diplomacy duties, was initially very hard – particularly since we operated out of two facilities separated from the rest of the Embassy. Though we were able to keep two of our top admin Chinese employees, Don Bishop had to assume many of the EO duties in addition to his Deputy PAO responsibilities. Suddenly, we lost the ability to track our spending, professionally rewrite our DSB/FSN job descriptions, plan inventory replacements, order needed building repairs, and the like.

Though never acrimonious, this transition period took up a lot of our energy – and diverted time and attention away from our primary public affairs duties.

DIRECTOR OF THE EAP PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OFFICE – 2000-02

Q: How did you get the assignment back in Washington?

BLACKBURN: I did not have a Washington job lined up until fairly close to my departure from Beijing. My first choice was that of Director of the Office of Public Diplomacy in EAP, or EAP/PD, replacing Bill Maurer. I thought that with my long experience I could be of most use helping my former-USIA colleagues through the first transitional years of consolidation. Some officers in EAP recommended against assigning me to the job, however, because they thought I was too senior and might not be a flexible team player. I believe they were also concerned that, though only an Office Director, I would outrank all the other FSOs in EAP, including the Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

Q: Were you a Career Minister by that time?

BLACKBURN: Yes, I had been a Career Minister since 1996 in Tokyo. For those concerned with how cooperative and collegial I would be, my old friend Rusty Deming, then the Principle DAS in EAP, strongly backed my candidacy, I heard later. He argued that I had always been a cooperative and disciplined subordinate, including when working under him in Japan and then as part of the Country Team in China.

Q: So you started that job when, again?

BLACKBURN: In August of 2000. By that time the "area office" had already moved to a section of the State Department that looked like, at best, slum clearance housing – or "the projects," as I called those accommodations. The former USIA officers were anxious about how public diplomacy money would be allocated, who would control assignments, and so on. Fortunately, Bill Maurer had capably led the first phase of the transition and assembled a great team of officers for me to inherit. Charles Silver was a super deputy, and Craig Stromme was the number three in the office, the PACO as the job was called. Craig and I had worked together back in Malaysia, where he was a JOT and later the CAO during my Kuala Lumpur days. As in our previous associations, he proved to be an invaluable "fixer" who saved my butt many a time during those two years.

Q: These were people who were in the "area office" at the time?

BLACKBURN: Yes. Though I was new to working in the Harry S Truman Building, Craig had already been in the new EAP "Public Diplomacy Office" for more than a year, and Charles had just come into the job after heading the Washington Foreign Press Center. They both knew the score – not only about public diplomacy but also about how the State Department functioned. Besides those two, we had many first-rate desk officers, and Mary Jo Furgal was an excellent Cultural Coordinator. Her job was to keep us tight with our counterparts in my old Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, or ECA. Later Carolyn Smith agreed to serve as my secretary – or "Office Management Specialist" as the new term of art has it – for yet a third time. In sum, I felt exceedingly well supported during my two years in that job.

Q: So there were two sets of desk officers, one the traditional State arrangement and the other made up of former USIS officers handling public diplomacy?

BLACKBURN: That's what it was – and we liked being separate. Some of the State Department people strongly favored folding us into the traditional offices, saying that would be a natural step in achieving full consolidation. We Public Diplomacy Office Directors fought against the idea, arguing that the public diplomacy officers would inevitably become caught up in the routine scut work of traditional State desks. For that reason, they wouldn't be focusing sufficiently on public diplomacy at the posts, wouldn't be abreast of what was going on in the elements of the Department coming under the Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and wouldn't benefit from the creative synergy you get when public affairs professionals work together in the same office. At the initial stage of consolidation, the push toward office integration was a big concern. We were afraid we'd be split up and our influence seriously dissipated.

Q: There was nothing in any of the agreements relating to consolidation that would have protected you on this point, right? I don't know what sorts of ground rules were established, but assume there was quite a bit put down on paper.

BLACKBURN: I don't think anything covered this point. However, we senior former-USIA FSOs saw it as a danger from the beginning, and enlisted first Evelyn Lieberman

and then Charlotte Beers on our side, who gave us their support. And in the end the threat receded, at least as far as EAP was concerned.

We were glad our old area offices moved essentially intact into the regional bureaus. Though USIA lost the early effort to have the former Area Directors become Deputy Assistant Secretaries, at least we became Office Directors and were treated pretty well, in EAP as well as in other bureaus. For example, I had fairly easy daily access to the EAP Assistant Secretary, initially Stan Roth and then Jim Kelly, because I attended his morning DAS meetings.

Q: When you say the other Office Directors, you are talking about relatively senior people who head the geographic offices, is that it?

BLACKBURN: Mainly, that's true. Below the DAS level, the Assistant Secretary had the Executive Office, the Regional Security Programs Office, and the Economic Affairs Office, as well as the geographical offices responsible for China, Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, the Pacific Islands, and so on. He also had a separate Public Affairs Office, headed by Ken Bailes, that worked on guidances for the daily press briefing by the Department Spokesman, Richard Boucher.

My extensive previous experience in Asia made my life in EAP a lot easier. I had at least visited almost all the posts in the region, had been PAO in four of them, and had served overseas with many of the traditional State officers. Initially my immediate boss was Tom Hubbard, who replaced Rusty Deming as PDAS. Tom and I had served together during my first Japan tour. I also had known Tom's replacement, Chris LaFleur, for many years. So I was in no way an unknown quantity or a novice in that job. Most of my EAP colleagues were friendly and accepting, even when ignorant of the whys and wherefores of public diplomacy.

EAP's public diplomacy operations also benefitted immensely from two excellent Civil Service budget officers, C.T. Forrester and Phyllis Mead. Coming over from USIA into EAP/EX, they helped us keep track of the more than $20 million dollars in the public diplomacy earmarked account used for FSN salaries and field programs in East Asia.

Q: Were you able to maintain any control over assignments to public affairs jobs overseas?

BLACKBURN: Yes, essentially I was able to play a strong role in that regard, though personnel matters in the State Department are much more complicated than they were in USIA. The organization is so much bigger, you have to get clearances from DCMs in the field as well as the DAS and others in Washington, and there is nothing like an "area personnel officer" out there committed to looking after your interests. Despite working in what often seemed to be a personnel morass, Charles Silver and I somehow managed to recruit and assign many excellent officers to the overseas posts. We brought some first-rate talent from other cones into the public diplomacy ranks through this process, while a

number of former-USIA officers landed good jobs that previously would rarely have been available to those outside the State mainstream. And I was pleased to be replaced by a top flight officer, Jeremy Curtin. Unfortunately, he was a little too good. Charlotte Beers snapped him away within a few months.

During my tenure I tried to keep my antenna out regarding organizational and administrative matters. In that sense I was always "looking for trouble." I assumed that – because of the complexity and trauma of consolidation – there had to be lingering problems. I urged field officers to raise them and help us collectively find ways to address them. At one point the EAP Admin Counselors from all over the region met in Kuala Lumpur. I asked the PAOs to send me any gripes or suggestions, and pulled them together in a memo for the K.L. conference. Pat Kennedy, head of Administration for the Department and the man most responsible for helping ease the consolidation process, used my memo as the basis for what I understand was a very productive discussion. Thanks to Pat Kennedy, EAP/EX Director Larry Baer, and others who tried to fix any major administrative problems, I felt I was working in a supportive environment. For our part, we tried to avoid bitching, or seeming to pine excessively for the good old days of USIA.

In general, I found that I could operate much as I did when I was Africa Area Director. For example, I held two East Asia PAO conferences during my tenure, one in Beijing and one, after 9/11, in Washington. I had feared that after consolidation there might be front office sensitivities about me traveling or having meetings with groups of PAOs. But no one questioned the value of such activities. Although it was rare for there to be regional meetings of political or economic officers, the admin and consular State people did it all the time. And because I had the public diplomacy earmarked money to use; I wasn't competing for travel money with other parts of EAP.

Q: So you didn't feel your hands were tied?

BLACKBURN: No. In fact, there were some real advantages, even financial ones, to the consolidation. One was that sometimes you could find unexpected sources of money. For example, for the PAO conference in Washington, which gave our field officers a chance to meet Charlotte Beers and other newly-installed leaders of public diplomacy, I wanted to hold a classy representational event, as we would normally do overseas. We thought the Foreign Press Center would be the ideal venue, but learned such an event would cost well over $1,000. I took the problem to Larry Baer of EAP/EX, who told me he thought he could tap a special fund to cover it. I am not sure what the "special fund" was, but we got all the money we needed. In USIA that never would have happened. Not in a million years!

Similarly, during my tenure we decided that it would be valuable to start "democracy commissions" at some of the key embassies in East Asia. These commissions would give out small grants to organizations like those making significant contributions to "rule of law" and democracy. The Public Affairs Section people would administer the

commissions, but grants could be given to organizations that were key contacts of any section of the mission – political, USAID, agriculture, whatever. They offered great opportunities to reach out to new audiences. My idea was that we would put about half a million dollars of public diplomacy funding into getting this project off the ground in about eight countries, but that in future years the money would come from other sources available within the Department, including ESF (Economic Stabilization Funds) and human rights allocations. Similarly for rule of law programs in China.

Q: Just a minute. Before you go any further – isn't there a Congressional mandate for democracy programs to be run out of Washington, for example through the National Endowment for Democracy, or NED, and other institutions connected to the two major parties? What connection is there with them?

BLACKBURN: There is of course some connection. NED, the Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, and other institutions have long promoted human rights in China and other countries. There is also money floating around both the State Department, in different offices and intended for the same purpose. Some of the funding in Washington goes to NED and its affiliates, with the expectation that they will find the appropriate U.S. and foreign organizations to administer programs on the ground. But our embassy-based democracy commissions were to hand out small amounts, generally less than $10,000, to local organizations that could really use such funding.

Q: You just gave small grants, right?

BLACKBURN: Yes, often it would just be a couple of thousand dollars for an environmental group, a women's rights group, a journalist project, or legal advocacy center – to print something, to hold a symposium, or to send someone somewhere in the region for training and orientation.

Q: Could these same institutions be getting money from the National Endowment for Democracy?

BLACKBURN: Sure. Conceivably, actually typically, they could be getting support from NED, USAID, the Asia Foundation, European human rights organizations or other sources. But these are people that the Embassy would also want to know and support. It was not exactly "telling America's story," but the activity built strong contacts with important, influential institutions on the cutting edge of positive changes in those countries.

Q: What you are saying now reminds me of some of the things we were doing in Japan, even as late as 1955, when I was there. We had some little groups that we considered pro-democracy institutions, sometimes built up by a talented figure who had influence. They used to have publications that we would help fund, and our intention was as much to keep them alive with some resources as it was to get the publication out with the messages it was disseminating.

BLACKBURN: Yes, it is quite similar. And very useful in both cases. Because of consolidation, and because USIA brought in the experience and the authority to administer grants, unlike other sections in an embassy, it made sense for us to serve as the secretariat and influence how it operated. These commissions are quite new, since consolidation, and not unique to East Asia, I should add. So during my time in EAP/PD we got the ball rolling on these commissions.

After 9/11, we of course paid particular attention to the Islamic countries of Southeast Asia – especially Indonesia and Malaysia, but also Thailand and the Philippines, with their substantial Muslim populations. We used whatever spare money we could find, in or out of the public diplomacy account, to try to establish relations with – or improve relations with – moderate Islamic forces in those societies. Besides what we had in EAP/PD, I was able to get money from Charlotte Beers' reserve account, a very large account actually, from ECA, and elsewhere. We had strong arguments to make for our Indonesia programs. Greta Morris, our PAO, worked closely with Charles Silver, Craig Stromme, and desk officer Lynn Sever to come up with many great ideas for bringing leaders of moderate Islamic educational institutions to the U.S., for a high-profile post-9/11 journalist group, for special publications, and the like. Because we are now part of State we could much more easily make use of USAID money. For example, we got $500,000 from AID for a special Fulbright program on religious tolerance in Indonesia. That transfer would have been less likely to go to USIA.

A mixed blessing of all this collaboration after consolidation is that now there are many traditional State officers, who had never paid much attention to USIA or USIS, who now know considerably more about our capabilities. In those two years before my retirement, I heard more and more ideas about how the public diplomacy money should be spent. Some of the ideas were terrific, others terrible, but most deserved a fair hearing and a time-consuming discussion. That was not difficult for me, but at posts abroad, it was often hard for officers to handle dubious public diplomacy "suggestions" from their DCMs and Ambassadors.

Of course, we have to be open to new ideas, to new public affairs issues, and to new ways of getting across our messages – even when our teachers are traditional State officers with little experience in our field. No longer can we say, "This is a USIA program. Leave me alone." Instead, when necessary we have to counter with arguments like, "OK, here is how your idea fits with the Mission or Bureau's program plan we all have agreed to. If we do what you suggest, the resource and impact trade-offs will be such and such." For example, a senior EAP officer told me he wanted the speaker office to send a friend of his to give lectures in a certain country. I had to explain that to do so the post would have to abandon its plans for a different speaker to come address a higher priority subject. Nobody likes to hear such a bureaucratic response, but sometimes it is appropriate.

Q: The same problem exists both in Washington and the field, doesn't it?

BLACKBURN: I would say so. Most critical is that we prepare for the day that the public diplomacy earmark goes away, as it certainly will at some point. Anticipating a coming hot debate about the proper boundaries of "public diplomacy," I urged our PAOs in the field to keep careful account of how much they were spending for their major activities. In the future, when the wall goes down, they will be able to explain that they have been funding information and cultural activities at such and such level in the past. They can then argue that, in conformity with Congressional strictures to maintain the size and quality of the public diplomacy effort, the same amounts should be set aside for those purposes – at each Embassy and in Washington – even without a specific earmark.

It's not a great situation. I mourn the passing of USIA as much as anybody, but we had a rough patch in our final days, certainly, and –

Q: As an independent agency, you mean?

BLACKBURN: We never really caught our breath after the end of the Cold War, or after Charlie Wick left.

Q: How did you deal with the field posts after consolidation, especially after you were no longer doing performance ratings or had supervisory responsibility over the PAOs?

BLACKBURN: Actually, I found it not all that different from when I was the Area Director for Africa in USIA. People in the field still depended on my office for much of their funding, including quite a lot of discretionary money. They were still assigned or not assigned with me having a big say-so in their futures. And they needed to explain what they were doing, or had decided not to do, in order to get direct support from my office – and to make it possible for us to run interference for them in their dealings with other parts of the public diplomacy bureaucracy back in Washington, like the IV or Fulbright programs. Some of them sent us "game plans" or other periodic planning documents that looked a lot like the old USIA Country Plans. And they all shared with us the public diplomacy inputs they made into their embassy's Mission Program Plan, and we contributed to the Bureau's commentary on those plans. Not that much different, really.

After 9/11 we were required to report on what the posts were doing to spread the message that America is not hostile to Islam, that we were only after terrorists like al Queda, and that the international community and the U.S. shared the same overall goals. The embassies of East Asia, including the Public Affairs Sections, made tremendous contributions to this effort, and I was glad to see them get credit for their hard-won accomplishments. Making use of the ease of communication afforded by email, the posts reported to my office, often daily, on what they were doing. If a major post didn't report for a few days, we would call them up and ask where the report was, explaining that it was needed for reporting within the Department. In making the process work, I was often reminded of the old days, when the USIA area offices would cajole or berate our PAOs to get information out of them – and some were cooperative and some not so cooperative. Basically the dynamic is the same, even without the old strict lines of authority. The posts

depend on headquarters for information, resources, and Washington back-stopping, and the Washington main office depends on the field for up-dates on activities and, where possible, "evidence of effectiveness."

Q: It sounds like you didn't use cables very much.

BLACKBURN: At least 90% of the written communication in and out of our office was by email. Contrary to concerns I had had that interchanges with the PAOs by email might not be welcomed by DCMs and others at the missions, in today's State Department there are no longer such efforts at tight control. It was a welcome change. We would have been sunk if we had to rely on cables. Nothing would ever get cleared, and, without email, all the essential informal communications would have been by telephone. I am not talking about end-runs here. Within our office and at the posts, we expected that all e-mails would contain a "cc" to anybody – like a DCM – with a need to know about the communication being carried on. And after pulling together highlights from the daily post-9/11 public diplomacy reports from the field, we would forward our wrap-up to more than 50 overseas and Washington addressees – including the two or three people in the Department who needed it for their own reporting up the line.

A few of my public diplomacy counterparts in other bureaus, facing a much more difficult working environment than we did, would got irritated when I said that in EAP the consolidation was working reasonably well. It was true, nonetheless. Our relative success had to do with several factors – good personal relations, the helpful attitude of EAP/EX, and plenty of work already on everyone's plate. Our morale and working effectiveness got a boost when, halfway into my tenure, we into comfortable quarters near other EAP offices. We got space design advice, informally, from Lynn Nyce, provisioned it with up-to-date videoconferencing and other AV capabilities, and decorated it with beautiful mounted fabric pieces sent in from each of the countries in the region.

Q: So you think the current arrangement works just fine?

BLACKBURN: I wouldn't go that far. There are certainly organizational weaknesses that continue. For example, I wish we could have worked out a way for there to be more public diplomacy consideration in policy discussions. I argued for establishing a Deputy Assistant Secretary, or DAS, responsible for strategic communication. My suggestion was not intended to resurrect the failed effort to bring USIA Area Directors into the Department at the DAS level. Instead, my point was that someone – former USIA officer or not – should sit in each bureau's front office and exercise supervisory responsibility not only over the Public Diplomacy Office but also over the daily press guidance function of the Public Affairs Office and the overseas grant programs handled by each bureau's Regional Affairs Office. Currently, the Public Diplomacy Office Director reports to the Principal DAS, or PDAS, of each bureau. That is fine and flattering in some ways, but the arrangement means that the Public Diplomacy Office Director, who has responsibility for supporting programs long-term objectives, works under the supervision of an extremely busy officer whose day is inevitably consumed with short-term crises of the moment.

A "strategic communications DAS" would participate in high level meetings with NSC staffers and others where broad policy issues are discussed, if not decided. As it is, there is no room for a relatively low-level Office Director in such meetings, nor is the PDAS likely to give emphasis to that dimension of our foreign relations. Nor is he or she likely to take notes for briefing the public diplomacy staffers on what transpired there.

My proposal to a group that included Barry Fulton –

Q: Barry was where?

BLACKBURN: Barry was assigned to work with Ruth Whiteside on ideas for improving public diplomacy in the Department – as part of an effort coordinated by Grant Green, the Undersecretary for Management. He and Ruth liked my concept and included it in their recommendations to Secretary Colin Powell. What happened then I do not know. There was a lot of institutional resistance to the idea of adding any new DASes to the Department's organizational structure.

Q: What was Barry doing there?

BLACKBURN: He was working on contract to Grant Green, advising on management issues. He is also at George Washington University at the Public Diplomacy Institute there.

Q: Is he with McKinney Russell and Bruce Gregory at the Institute?

BLACKBURN: I think they are all involved in it somehow, though McKinney also runs the Public Diplomacy Foundation, I believe.

Q: Go on with your comments about organizational issues in the Department.

BLACKBURN: The biggest problem with public diplomacy in the State Department, however, is not whether or not the DAS positions get established in regional bureaus. It is the structure of the office of the Undersecretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Charlotte Beers was rather surprised when I told her that, but I think the case is clear-cut.

Q: That is what I was going to say. You've been talking about a certain level of the issue, whereas you haven't been dealing so much with the senior echelon perspective. After all, that is where the dynamism and energy for public diplomacy has to come from. Leadership from high in the Department is needed to be a unifying force.

BLACKBURN: I completely agree. My previous experience as a USIA Area Director gave me perspective on the problem. When I was Area Director for Africa, I got a lot more guidance and support from the USIA Director than Charlotte Beers was organizationally able to give me. She had neither the staff resources nor the time to carry

out that sort of function. Perhaps not the inclination, either.

One big structural difference is that the Undersecretary, like other under secretaries, is not supposed to be "operational" and does not have a deputy. That may be a nice idea for other parts of the Department, but it certainly causes problems for public diplomacy operations. If there is no deputy, the Undersecretary can only very occasionally afford to travel away from Washington. And, alternatively, if the Undersecretary can't travel to an important overseas conference or event, there is no deputy who can represent him or her. The Department's second most important public diplomacy official is the Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), in this case the very able Pat Harrison. But that person has no responsibility for field programs other than those handled by ECA – and that leaves out speakers, publications, and information resource centers, for example.

Even worse, there is no front office continuity between administrations. In the hiatus between the Clinton and Bush administrations the one ranking public diplomacy official to serve as Acting Undersecretary was Richard Boucher, the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. His spokesman duties, however, were so time-consuming he gave virtually no attention to the broader issues of public diplomacy. So we had no leadership whatsoever. In the USIA days this role during transitions would have gone to the Counselor, a senior FSO who could provide needed leadership until the new team was in place.

The Undersecretary also needs a senior person to perform the functions of the old USIA Counselor – for example to look at morale issues, training, and other big picture issues affecting our profession. The people now in that office have little if any authority. Neil Walsh, the senior FSO there when I retired, mostly worked on liaison with the radio broadcasting elements and held meetings with the bureau Public Diplomacy Office Directors. But he had little organizational heft and could not really represent either the Undersecretary or those of us in the public diplomacy ranks.

When I was USIA Africa Area Director, if there was a question of how resources should be divvied up among different elements of the Agency, you had a Henry Hokheimer or a resource management committee or other means for bringing people to the table and settling the matter. Ben Posner had established the prototype system decades earlier, and it worked well for us in that era.

In the aftermath of 9/11 we sorely lacked any means for setting broad priorities and discussing whether current resources – or new resources – should be directed toward publications for the Islamic world, toward promotion of English teaching, toward book translations, toward high school exchanges, or whatever. We could then have discussed which activities should take the hit. There was really no capability – nobody "up there" – to do that. Instead, decisions were made by Charlotte Beers and her inner circle without broad consultation with experienced public affairs professionals. Had we been more involved, we perhaps could have helped her avoid the public embarrassment she faced

after wasting $15 million for a blatantly pro-America ad campaign that flopped in the Arab world.

At least as serious was the absence of a staff to focus on the substance of foreign policy. Charlotte had no proper policy staff to brief her, to prepare her for senior meetings, or to help us all develop new themes and program directions.

Q: Please tell me a bit about the "global PAO conference" in early 2002 that Charlotte Beers initiated and that attracted so much attention, pro and con.

BLACKBURN: Well, I thought it was a pretty good idea. After all, PAOs all over the world wanted to get a sense of what was going on with public diplomacy in the post-9/11 era and consolidated State Department under the leadership of Colin Powell, Rich Armitage, and Charlotte Beers.

Charlotte's vision was that we would bring everyone together to hear inspirational speakers, from the Department or from outside, much as is done with large corporations introducing new products. At one point she was even thinking of bringing in Martha Stewart. The main concept was that people who have been successful selling products would talk to us, with an implicit assumption that our officers in the field needed to improve their communication skills. The PAOs would be coming to town, not to report on conditions in the field, but to learn something.

Q: Or be inspired. Some of the notes I saw that were made on the conference indicated that inspiration was a big part of it. You have to believe in your product. You have to believe in what you are doing. You should have a sense of mission. It was a sort of pep talk.

BLACKBURN: Oh, definitely that was there. But I think I can take credit for helping turn the conference into more of a dialogue. I said that if the inspirational and teaching part was going to be palatable and useful to our folks, there had to be opportunities for the PAOs to speak up about matters that they considered important. Charlotte's planning team came up with "scenarios" for treating real world public diplomacy problems and hearing from them about their "best practices." The PAOs made some excellent presentations for Department leaders – mostly just Charlotte, as it turned out in practice. Charlotte stayed for the whole conference, and at the end of it gave a brilliant summing up that showed the participants she had absorbed at least as much as she had imparted during the conference. Despite their negative reaction to the communications training component, the PAOs, even many of the most cynical among them, left town with much of the pep and enthusiasm Charlotte had hoped to impart.

And I was glad to have the East Asia PAOs get to town again for an opportunity to share some final thoughts before the transition in my office's leadership – and my own departure for the golden years of retirement.

Not all our interactions with Charlotte Beers went smoothly. At one point Deputy Secretary Armitage instructed her to contribute $5 million of "her" discretionary funds to meet some kind of a Department shortfall. To get that amount, she – without consulting us – scooped up five percent of the funds allocated to us in each of the regional bureaus. She had a perfect right to do so, as all public diplomacy money in the Department was under her broad authority. Later she explained to us that she saluted so quickly because she wanted to show the Department leadership that we in public diplomacy were disciplined team members. Her ultimate objective, she said, was to use this action as a demonstration of good faith and sound financial management that would lay the basis for a substantial public diplomacy increase in the post-9/11 supplemental then under preparation in the Department. Whatever the long-term prospects for her stratagem, we were shocked by her sudden hit on our operations. Charlotte's "five percent solution" – as we dubbed it – meant for EAP public diplomacy that out of a $20 million budget, we had overnight lost half of the $2 million in non-fixed costs I had intended to use for democracy commissions, assignments of retirees to meet emergency staffing needs, and the like.

When all of us in the bureaus protested, Charlotte said she hadn't expected it would upset us so much. She figured we had been sitting on extra money that could be readily sopped up. Happily, she repaired most of the damage by encouraging us to send in specific requests for funding from her "reserve." In the end I got back about two-thirds of the million dollars I had coughed up – for a new publication in Indonesia and for additional funds for the democracy commissions.

THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Q: Where do you think public diplomacy will, or should, go from here?

BLACKBURN: As long as it stays in the State Department it will inevitably be hamstrung. Without some autonomy and with no possibility of a direct link to the White House, public diplomacy may hold its own but can never thrive. Still, I definitely don't think we should try to build a USIA-type structure within the State Department – though I know some of the USIA alums have been pushing that idea. While I recommended reorganizing the Undersecretary's office to give it some USIA elements, I would not give it direct responsibility for field programs, including doing performance evaluations of PAO's. Nor would I put the regional bureau Public Diplomacy Offices directly under it. That would be a recipe for making them much, much less influential than they are now – or are capable of becoming.

Q: And much less effective in the field, I would suspect.

BLACKBURN: Right. Not of much use to the overseas posts either.

I hope the alums will remain active in feeding ideas to Congressional staffers, the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy, and others concerned with how our

profession is faring in the Department. On the table are many large questions – besides the organizational issues. In this post-9/11 era how can we best present our society and our policies to foreign publics? To what extent should we again be concentrating on mass audiences, particularly in the Islamic world? How about secondary students, especially in religious schools? What are the respective roles of radio and TV broadcasting? Are we making effective use of new tools such as the Internet and Digital Videoconferencing? Should we give more priority to English teaching? How about cultural centers? What role is there for hard-copy publications? How can public diplomacy professionals work more effectively not only in the State Department but also with relevant parts of USAID and the Defense Department? Though these are critical questions, those who work on the inside of the Department these days lack both time and encouragement to address them.

Q: Many of the ideas you have touched on there are in the Hyde Bill that came out of the House. I suspect they all came from the alumni.

BLACKBURN: Many straight from Barry Fulton, as well as others, I believe.

Q: When I read it I thought it was quite a hodgepodge, everything but the kitchen sink, everything the Agency was ever involved in. And it is a Congressional committee telling the State Department to do all these things, and then come back and report on a periodic basis. And it was the kind of a bill that I thought the Department would choke on, and couldn't swallow. And they came back with that nasty letter. Did you see it? Did you ever see the letter the Department sent back to Hyde about that piece of legislation?

BLACKBURN: No, I didn't see the letter, but I heard about it.

Q: It was terrible. Just snide and insulting, really. And I thought it made the Department look terrible. And most of all it made Charlotte Beers and her office look bad, because she obviously had to sign off on that letter, or to have been a participant in some way in how that letter was framed. And I thought it just made the whole public diplomacy machinery look bad.

BLACKBURN: There is definitely that problem. Rich Armitage, for example, while a strong believer in the public diplomacy function, is said to want it under much tighter central control. He especially resents the earmark Congress keeps putting in the State budget, believing that the Department leadership should be able to decide what the public diplomacy activities will be and the amount of money given to each of them.

Q: I think that was very clear in that letter.

BLACKBURN: I expect the long-term future of public diplomacy in the State Department will be rocky. The problem is not ill will, organizational turf battles, or even disdain for the function, but rather that many of our activities have low priority within that kind of bureaucracy. Even extraordinarily enlightened State Department leadership, such as that currently given by Colin Powell and Rich Armitage, will inevitably question

why public diplomacy has so much money and so many resources for programs that do not lend direct support to immediate foreign policy interests. The USIA and CU culture of long-term relationships and long-term programs really conflicts with the fundamental State Department culture of short term objectives set by whatever Administration is currently in power. Of course I am not here speaking of the broadcasting, press relations, and spokesman functions within public diplomacy. Those will always have respectful high-level attention.

When I delved into the history of public diplomacy for my course at Georgetown, I found that virtually no major exchanges initiatives – from the Fulbright program to the Humphrey program and right on through – originated in the Executive branch. Instead, they came from the Congress, responding to constituencies within the American academic and foundation communities. Even from the early days of USIA, no Administration has cared deeply about the long-term objectives of public diplomacy. Though they get much lip service and probably would never face total elimination, cultural and educational programs are perpetually threatened by the knife. Recognizing this fact of life, Congress typically gives ECA more money than the Administration requests and earmarks much of it. Lately, they have done the same for the entire public diplomacy budget.

It is understandable that an extremely able bureaucratic player like Armitage would want access to that funding, and that Congress, responding to the domestic constituency that favors exchanges, would try to thwart his efforts. I expect we will see a similar dynamic when the next team comes in to lead the Department. And the one after that as well.

It won't always be a comfortable situation – and there is certainly much one can criticize about current operations - but, in one organizational guise or another, public diplomacy will surely retain its place as a key element of America's foreign policy. While curious to see how the story unfolds, I am deeply grateful to have been along for so much of the ride up to this juncture.

Q: Thank you, Paul. I think this is a good place to stop.

End of interview