Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DONALD McCONVILLE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: February 12, 2001

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vietnamese Program
Vietnamese language

Saigon, Vietnam; Economic Officer: State/AID 1970-1974
Personnel
Economic reporting
Advising Vietnamese government
PL-480 rice program
Environment
Economy
North Vietnamese 1972 offensive
TDY to Cambodia (rice)
Cambodian economy
Vietnam assessment

Seoul, Korea; Economic Officer 1974-1977
AID Mission
Economy
World Bank
Balance of Payments
Textiles
Modernization

State Department; E Bureau; Regional Economic Office 1977-1981
Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN)
Trade Issues
Regional AID Programs
Energy
Ministerial level meetings
Textiles
Personnel

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Economic Counselor 1981-1984
"Look Eat" Policy
Tin
Relations
Prime Minister Mahateer
Chinese
Malaysian students to US
Oil
ASEAN

Seoul, Korea; Economic Counselor 1984-1987
US Ambassadors
Collective policy
US business interests

INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. McConville]

Q: Today is February 12, 2001, Lincoln's birthday. This is an interview with Donald McConville. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Don, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born, and then something about your family?

McCONVILLE: I was born November 22nd, 1935, in Caledonia, Minnesota, which is a small town with about 2,500 people in the southeastern corner of Minnesota, about a dozen miles from the Mississippi, which is the Wisconsin border, and about a dozen miles from the Iowa border to the south. My mother and father actually had gotten married in September of 1929, so the first decade of their married life was in the Depression. They were both from the area. They had both grown up on farms actually. My father was of Irish ancestry and was third generation. My mother was of Norwegian ancestry from a nearby town called Spring Grove and also third generation. Their families had been farmers. My mother was a schoolteacher before she married but wasn't teaching any more.

Q: Had she gone to what amounts to teachers' normal school or something?

McCONVILLE: She had gone to the University of Minnesota for a year or so and then had some additional training and had just done some elementary school teaching, but she didn't work outside the home after she married my father. My father had a series of different blue-collar jobs throughout his life and, of course, during the Depression years had had, like everybody else, a lot of difficult stretches.

Q: Let's talk a bit about that time. Caledonia, what was it, a farming area?

McCONVILLE: A farming area. It happened to be the county seat but a town of 2,500 people that basically served the surrounding farming areas.

Q: Well, your father, you say, came from Irish stock. Do you have any feel for where they came from?

McCONVILLE: It was his grandparents on both side who had come from Ireland. The McConville family comes originally from the north, from, I think, County Armagh. On his mother's side, my great-grandparents came from the south, I think, in County Cork. They had both migrated to Minnesota or Iowa - actually, I think, my grandmother had grown up in Iowa - but it was a different sort of migration. It was probably around the late 1850s; it was the decade after the potato famine. There was an Irish migration of farmers who came up the Mississippi River and settled along the Mississippi, the upper Mississippi.

Q: Many of them came - I think my grandmother came that way - by grain boats that docked in New Orleans, and on the way they'd take on immigrants. So an awful lot came

and then worked their way up the Mississippi.

McCONVILLE: I think it was probably a similar sort of background. In any event, my father's side was all Irish until he married my mother. On my mother's side, her grandparents, my great-grandparents, had migrated from Norway, and that was a time of a lot of migration to the Minnesota area from Scandinavia. My great-grandfather bought a farm outside of Spring Grove, Minnesota, which is about 10 miles from my hometown, somewhere in the 1870s, and, in fact, my cousin is still on that farm. That was the sort of very small-town background that I came from. No one in my immediate family other than mother, who had gone to the University of Minnesota and then some other additional training, had graduated from college at that time. Now, my sister, who was five years older than I was, ultimately was able to go to college and did graduate, so she was the first one in our family that graduated. She graduated in medical technology and was a medical technician in hospitals.

Q: You were born in 1935. Did you sort of stay in that area through grammar school and high school?

McCONVILLE: Yes, all through it. Surprisingly, in my little hometown of Caledonia, Minnesota, it was about 60:40 between Protestants and Catholics there. The Catholics were primarily of Irish or German descent. There were also a lot of people of German Lutheran descent. There were not so many Scandinavians in my little hometown, but once you got anywhere west of there - my mother's hometown was Spring Grove - anything west was Norwegian about as far as the eye could see. But in my hometown, surprisingly, they had a Catholic elementary school and high school there. They had two Catholic churches in this little town. I attended that Catholic grade school and Catholic high school.

Q: Talk a little about Catholic grade school. Was it run by the sisters?

McCONVILLE: By Franciscan nuns, right.

Q: How did you find it?

McCONVILLE: Well, it was a very good experience. In that little small town we had this Catholic grade school and high school, we had a public grade school and high school, and the German Lutherans had a grade school, all in this little town. There had been, at least by accounts, earlier on some tensions between these people of different religious backgrounds, but certainly by the time I was growing up, we all intermingled without having any strife at all, even though we sometimes went to different schools at different times, but we were involved with each other outside of school all the time in this little town, and there was no religious strife at all in my hometown when I was growing up.

Q: In grammar school, elementary school, any particular subjects that particularly grabbed you at that time?

McCONVILLE: Not so much in grammar school that I recall. I always enjoyed reading and I was a pretty good student. I didn't work all that hard, but things came fairly easily to me. I did enjoy reading a great deal. Other than that, I liked a lot of sports. We all worked when we were kids in a little place like that. I, at probably 10 or 11 years old, started working in the summers at least part of the time. There was a local vegetable farm that would hire us kids for picking strawberries and picking beans and picking peas and this sort of thing, and we'd earn a little bit of money. I used to probably make about five dollars a week or something like that. Actually we got paid 15 cents an hour doing things like picking peas. We got paid a nickel a quart for picking strawberries. I had a younger brother who was only 15 months younger than I, and we saved up money for our own bikes and so forth doing this, and then I graduated from that to a paper route and set pins at the local bowling alley. Perhaps the oddest job I had: when I was in high school, there was a fellow who had come originally from Caledonia - his parents owned the dry goods store there - and he'd come back home and set up a pool hall. That pool hall became sort of teenage - not so much teenage girls as teenage boys - and he offered me a job working there running the place while he went home to eat and do other things. I started working there. Other than racking the pool balls and so forth, also there was a little lunch counter there, so I'd do things like make hamburgers and hot dogs and make milkshakes. There wasn't any liquor or beer sold in the place. I'm sure there weren't too many Foreign Service Officers who once worked in pool halls.

Q: By the time you were sort of up and around, looking around, the Depression had ended and World War II started. Although obviously you were pretty young - you were about 6 or 7 or something like that - did that play much of a role? Did it have any influence on you?

McCONVILLE: I certainly have memories of the war. In fact, I have even a very, very vague memory: my mother's first cousin was among the first group who was drafted from the county, Houston County, in actually, I think, 1940 or something, in this draft before the war. I can recall them talking at the time. I think they got drafted for one year at the time. He'd been drafted early in that year of 1941, I think, by the time he actually got drafted, and there was some talk about the possibility of him getting an early release and getting released in time to come home for Christmas, and then, of course, December 7th came along. I just have this memory. We were up visiting my uncle who was on the farm in Spring Grove, Minnesota, and the adults were all sitting around in this room. I didn't appreciate what was going on, except that my memory is of all the adults being very somber, and it was December 7th. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but it was vivid enough that I have this memory of them all being very somber and sad and also talking about my cousin Rags not coming home for Christmas. In fact, he never did get leave. He came home sometime in the summer of 1945, the first time he came home. He'd served in north Africa and in Sicily, I think, and across Western Europe and had something like over 500 days in the front lines in the artillery, but he did come back. He'd been wounded once, but other than that he came back unscathed. I have memories of the little wagon...

Q: Kids went around collecting aluminum.

McCONVILLE: Milk pods that were, I think, used for life jackets or something like that. Yes, collecting aluminum. I remember the little ration coupons, and I can remember VE and VJ Days when there was a lot of celebrating going on and so forth. I remember all the soldiers being around in my hometown, not just those who were there, but on the Wisconsin side there was a camp not too far away and some of the soldiers used to come there on parole and so forth. All of those are memories of the Second World War, and then, of course, during the Korean War, I was in high school.

Q: You were in high school from when to when?

McCONVILLE: From 1949 to '53. The Korean War, of course, broke out in 1950 and then continued. I graduated in June of 1953, and I think the Korean War truce was signed in July of 1953 or something like that. All of us at that time, all the young males, expected to be drafted, and that was just sort of by this time part of what it was to be male in the United States.

Q: In high school what subjects appealed to you most?

McCONVILLE: English literature - like I say, I liked to read, but I also had a fondness for writing, creative writing, and I enjoyed history. Math was not my favorite. I did Algebra I and Algebra II, but it wasn't something I was particularly attracted to. It was probably more particularly English literature and history and reading and creative writing.

Q: You school was it run by...?

McCONVILLE: Also by Franciscan nuns.

Q: How did they respond to writing and all that?

McCONVILLE: They were very dedicated teachers. We that were at the Catholic school actually thought of ourselves as fairly privileged, because these nuns could enforce discipline a little more strongly than they could in the public school. I remember in grade school, for instance, a whack across the knuckles with a ruler or something was not uncommon. The superintendent of the school was the parish priest, and he also wasn't above enforcing a little discipline if need be. But the nuns were particularly dedicated teachers. That's what I remember very much about them. I'm sure the teachers in public schools were dedicated and motivated, but they had lives beyond that, whereas for these nuns this was really most of their lives. The public school in our little community, with a lot of the farm kids and so forth, really wasn't that good. By that time we had sort of an exchange program with the public school, and they didn't offer Algebra II, they didn't offer any Latin, and I'm not sure they had any languages at all there. At the Catholic school we had Latin I and II, they also taught Algebra II, and students at the public school who wanted to take these subjects could come and take them with us. At the same time, we didn't have things like - what do you call? - the workshops.

Q: Shop.

McCONVILLE: So some of our students who wanted to take something like that could do that at the public high school. But certainly our perception was that we were getting a little bit better education at the Catholic school than they were getting at the public school. Looking back at it now compared to the kind of education that my children have had, it was really a pretty inferior education. The whole high school was something like 100 to 150 people as I recall, and our class was unusually small. We had 18 people in our class. I ended up being valedictorian, but that wasn't all that much of an achievement.

Q: You had the Korean War when you were in high school. Were you reading about what was going on, or was it pretty local, what you were picking up?

McCONVILLE: Well, the war itself intrigued me. I used to deliver newspapers; at least in the early years of high school I was still doing newspapers. I think I graduated to things like setting pins and working in a pool hall later on. So I always was a fairly avid reader of the newspaper. There we had Minneapolis Star & Tribune was available down there, as was the St. Paul paper, but also papers from a couple of smaller communities around there: La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Winona, Minnesota. These papers are not the Washington Post or New York Times. The Star & Tribune was a fairly well regarded paper. I was interested enough to read the paper. I knew a very good deal about what was going on with state politics at the time and this sort of thing. I had a little more interest than a lot of other kids in these sorts of things, so to that extent I was intrigued by the greater world around me and I knew pretty early on that I wasn't going to spend my life in that little town.

Q: How about with your family around the dinner table? Was there a give-and-take, discussions of things?

McCONVILLE: My father was a very quiet man and didn't have a lot to say. He was a very decent, very kind man who was very well regarded by virtually anyone who knew him, but he was pretty quiet. My mother was much more intellectually curious, I think, in this sort of thing, and on her side of the family, like her younger brother, who was my uncle, when they got together there was a good deal more talk about what was going on in the world. Yes, my uncle tended to have opinions, as did my grandfather, but he died when I was relatively young, but I remember him. My uncle, for example, later on - he died about a year ago at about the age of 87 - he had taken over this farm from my grandfather and he continued that farm until he retired, and his son is operating it now, but he had been active in local Democratic politics, for example. There's something called a Farmers' Union, which was fairly closely allied with the Democrats, as opposed to the Farm Bureau, which tended to be more associated with the Republicans. He subsequently became a delegate, at one time later on, to the Democratic State Convention. One of his biggest memories - it would have been during the early '50s - Orville Freeman was governor of Minnesota. He was one of the protégés of Hubert Humphrey and his Democratic Labor Party of Minnesota, like Walter Mondale and

others.

Q: I've interviewed his daughter, Connie Freeman.

McCONVILLE: In any event, he was governor of Minnesota for three or four terms. I think they were two-year terms at the time. At one time when he was campaigning, he had come to Spring Grove and they were looking for some farmer to host them for lunch. There weren't many Democrats in that part of the state; they were Midwestern Republicans. So my uncle was selected to host them for lunch. He had two young boys at the time, and I think every time I visited my uncle thereafter, one of the things I could count on: he would wheel out the pictures and show me the pictures of the time that Governor Freeman had lunch at his farm. One of the more amazing events was that, many years later when I was in the Foreign Service, I was on a plane going to Geneva, Switzerland, I believe it was, and we got delayed while we were on the ground. We were all standing there waiting to get off, and I recognized the man in front of me as Orville Freeman. This would have been many years later. So while we were standing there waiting, I introduced myself and I said, "Governor Freeman, you wouldn't remember this, but you brightened a day for my uncle a long time ago," and I started to describe it, and he remembered the event and started to fill in other details. It was amazing. This must have been at least 20 or 25 years later or more, and Freeman remembered the day vividly. I guess that's why politicians are successful: they can remember people like that, people and events.

Q: After high school what did you think about a future? Where were you pointed, and how'd your family feel about it and teachers and that sort of thing?

McCONVILLE: I had this sort of vague idea that I'd like to be a journalist. Little papers we had in high school or something or other, I worked on. My teachers encouraged me in that sort of thinking, but I really didn't have a very concrete idea how you pursued such dreams. I knew I didn't want to spend my life in my little hometown. Unfortunately, I lost both my parents when I was in high school. My mother died of cancer when I was probably in eighth grade or a freshman in high school or something like that, and my father was killed in an automobile accident when I was a junior in high school. As I mentioned before, I did have this sister who was five years older. At that time she had gone to college, partly with some help from an uncle who was a bachelor and had just decided to help her go to college, because it would have been difficult for my father to contribute that much. She, as I said, was studying to be a medical technologist, and I think when my father was killed she was in her final year with sort of an internship sort of thing at La Crosse, Wisconsin, which was about 25 miles away from us on the other side of the Mississippi and was a town of about 50,000 people. My father, after the war actually, had begun working for Trane, a manufacturer of air conditioning units. That was their largest plant, there in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and he worked there in the factory, night shift actually, and it was about 25 miles away. There were quite a few other people in Caledonia who worked there, and they used to have car pools and this sort of thing. It was actually when he had been working late one evening, going overtime, and he was coming home about midnight, was driving home by himself because he had been working

overtime, and the car slid on a patch of ice and went off the highway and turned over. There weren't seatbelts in those days. The car itself had very little damage, but he had been thrown out of the car and his head hit a rock and he was killed that way. It was something I remembered long after that, had he had a seatbelt, he probably would have had nothing more than a bruise or two. In any event, that altered my life a great deal. Now, my sister was able to look after my brother and me, and we did have the house. So I finished high school there in Caledonia. Right after I finished, my sister then, who had been longing to move on and get onto something else, had taken a job in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. My brother was two years behind me in school, and he had his last two years in Eau Claire, but I graduated from Caledonia. But from that point on, I was essentially on my own. I had a notion that I wanted to go to college, but I really didn't know much about it. At that time, since I had been valedictorian, there was a Catholic college in Winona, Minnesota, that offered some kind of financial help to anyone who had been a valedictorian in a Catholic high school in that diocese. So between that and some money from my father's insurance or something, I did go to St. Mary's for a year but with only a vague notion about what I wanted to do except that journalism or creative writing appealed to me.

Q: Was the idea of being a priest at all attractive to you?

McCONVILLE: No, not at all, but I was a fairly serious Catholic at that time. That was one of the reasons I went to St. Mary's, because I had been raised with the idea that it was best if I went to a Catholic college and that also contributed to my going to St. Mary's. That was run by the Christian Brothers, St. John the Baptist of La Salle. They were very big in Chicago and the twin cities, and that's their college in the area. At that time I had only vague notions about what college was, what I ought to be doing, but I went off and spent one year there and then money was running pretty short. Fortunately, while the Korean War had then been over almost a year, the Korean GI Bill of Rights was still in effect, so I volunteered for the draft, to have my name moved up in the draft. As I say, at that time almost all of us my age expected to serve in the military one way or the other. You either enlisted or you were drafted unless you were physically not qualified for the military. It wasn't any great sacrifice. My name moved up, and that way I was able to get drafted into the Army for two years rather than enlisting for three. I went into the Army in December of 1954. Congress in January of the following year, January of '55, ended the Korean GI Bill of Rights, but because I was already in at the time that they did this, I was entitled to the full benefits, and that would allow me then to get the GI Bill to continue college after I got out of the Army.

Q: What did you do in the Army?

McCONVILLE: First, after the initial basic training, I was trained as an aidman, a field medic, at Fort Sam Houston where the Army's medical training takes place. I had always had this longing to go serve overseas somewhere. That appealed to me, the idea of going abroad. So I volunteered to be assigned abroad somewhere and wanted very badly to go to Europe. You were given some sort of a choice or wish list where you could put down if you volunteered to go overseas, and I put Europe as my top choice. I think we still even

had troops in Austria at that time. It was just shortly before Austria became....

Q: It was around '54, I think.

McCONVILLE: So I had Germany first and Austria second or something, and then I had to put down a third choice. The Pacific didn't sound very appealing, because that included Korea which was, even though the war was over, fairly tough duty at that time. So I put the Caribbean as third and, lo and behold, I was assigned to Puerto Rico. At that time, they still had an infantry regiment in Puerto Rico. It was part of the 23rd Infantry Division. It was a division that was formed in the Second World War, known then as the Americal Division, and its patch was the Southern Cross, I think, the stars. It had one regiment in Puerto Rico, one in Georgia, and one in Panama. Because I had put the Caribbean down, unfortunately they needed seven people for Puerto Rico and I was one of the seven. All of us had put the Caribbean somewhere on our lists at the time. As I said, we got down to Puerto Rico in this infantry regiment, the 65th Infantry Regiment. They informed us when we got there that they had plenty of medics and not enough riflemen, so I ended up being a rifleman in a rifle company. For the next nine months then, I was in this infantry company as a rifleman, and I did other things. I became a BAR man and then they needed a radio man - an assistant radio man, I guess it was. They had sent me off to some local radio school for a couple weeks, so I became the assistant company runner and radio man - all of this in about nine months. Then the Army was retrenching, cutting back. As part of the cutback, they deactivated the 23rd Infantry Division. They were going to keep just a single regiment. The regiment that was stationed at Panama was going to be retained as a regimental combat team. This outfit in Puerto Rico was really bizarre in that it had been an entirely Puerto Rican unit during the Korean War and prior to the Korean War, I guess, and some of the Puerto Ricans - in fact, a great many who were drafted in particular (they were subject to the draft in Puerto Rica; they also had many who had volunteered) took their basic training actually in Puerto Rico. That had closed down earlier on. Many of this outfit and some of these people would take their basic training there, then they would be put into that infantry regiment there, and would never leave Puerto Rico in their two years of Army service. The unit hadn't performed very well in the Korean War. It had been entirely Puerto Rican but with American officers. Then it had been broken up and they served in different units in the Korean War where many of them individually had distinguished themselves. It was just a weakness with some of these minority groups. In units by themselves, they sometimes didn't perform as well as they did when they were in integrated units, and part of it was just that the expectations were entirely different. So as part of the follow-up to that, the Army had decided to try to integrate this unit, this 65th Infantry Regiment of Puerto Rico, and we were the integrees or whatever one would call it. But they gave us absolutely no preparation for this. There was no orientation, nothing, absolutely nothing. The bulk of the mainland Americans who were in this outfit came from the big East Coast cities like Philadelphia and New York. It was sort of odd that we'd come from the Midwest, but most of them were from the big East Coast cities where they had fairly significant populations of Puerto Ricans. These were non-Puerto Rican Americans but who had some bad attitudes in some cases towards Puerto Ricans. To plump all of them into this sort of situation and without the slightest bit of orientation, not even a class to tell you

what Puerto Rico was or anything, it was not done well at all. Our chow, for example, our food, was supposed to be half American and half Puerto Rican, except that all the cooks were Puerto Rican. One meal was supposed to be American food and the next meal typical Puerto Rican food, but it was all prepared by Puerto Rican cooks, who made most of it pretty Puerto Rican. I still remember going to the chow hall, particularly when you were out in the field and you didn't have a choice - if you were back in the camp, you could always go off to the PX (Post Exchange) and find something or other - going to get your meal, and it would be rice and beans and pigs' feet. Now, that might be exotic to some, but for a 19-year-old kid coming from a small town, it was not what I was really looking for. So there was a good deal of tension between ourselves and the Puerto Ricans. In our outfits, probably at least three-quarters of the enlisted men, the privates and corporals, were Puerto Rican. Many of these young kids hadn't ever been off the island of Puerto Rico. They spoke very rudimentary English at best. They'd been given a little bit of English training, but many of them didn't speak much English. Then about a quarter of us were from mainland America. The NCOs (non-commanding officers) were almost all Puerto Rican, and virtually all the officers were mainland American. We had an exception. Our particular lieutenant, platoon leader - he was also executive officer of the company - was Lieutenant Gwatea, a Puerto Rican officer, and he was probably the best officer I served under in my two years in the Army. The thing I remember most about the experience was that, even though we got along with each other, there was a good deal of tension that could have been at least ameliorated a little bit if they had made some effort to try to orient us a bit about what Puerto Rico was and some of the customs of Puerto Rico. But they broke up that regiment, and at the time they broke it up the rule was that if you had more than a year to go, you were transferred to a regiment in Panama. If you had less than a year to go, you were sent back to the United States. I had 11 months to go, so I was sent back to the United States and was reassigned to Fort Riley, Kansas, in the 1st Infantry Division, which had just come back from Germany at that time in some sort of rotation that had been there ever since the Second World War. There I went back to the medics and was in a medical battalion but was in the 1st Infantry Division, which is now the Army's best. The outfit that had been in Puerto Rica had been one of the Army's worst. If we had ever had to have been in a battle, it would have been a total disaster, whereas the 1st Infantry Division at that time was one of the Army's best divisions.

Q: The Big Red One.

McCONVILLE: The Big Red One. That was an unusual experience, because again, since it had been recently rotated from Europe, they had brought with them only those soldiers who had a certain amount of time left on their enlistments or whatever, so they had to fill it up fairly rapidly. In this medical battalion what they had done to fill it up was that they had just scoured a lot of soldiers coming in, primarily in the Midwest at that time, and they had brought directly in from basic training without going through even the medical training people who had some kind of medical background and they were primarily pharmacists who had graduated from college with a degree in pharmacy or something or other, and a lot of these guys were then being drafted into the Army. So the great majority of people in that medical battalion were people who had college degrees,

primarily with a medical background, pharmacy in particular but some were biologists and few other related backgrounds like that, but it was a remarkably different sort of setting. Probably three-quarters of the soldiers in our barracks had college degrees or at least a substantial amount of college, so the kind of discussions in the barracks and the atmosphere was much more akin to a college dorm than the usual Army barracks. We often in the evenings would drift over to a place just outside Fort Riley, some beer joints and so forth, and sit around in beer-drinking sessions and so forth. Again, they were much more akin to a college experience than the Army. That sort of renewed my interest. I had gone in with the idea of going back to college, but that reinforced it. That was a very useful sort of experience.

Q: Were you thinking of what to do?

McCONVILLE: Well, again, I had this sort of vague notion about wanting to get into journalism. A college like St. Mary's didn't have a specialty like college journalism, so I just majored in English literature with a minor in political science. I actually got a job there at college, after I came back out of the Army, with the Public Relations Department. Primarily I was in charge of sports publicity. I traveled with our athletic teams, and the local newspaper and so forth, I would call them after the game with an account of the game, and I would do public relations releases, and that was giving me some experience in journalism and I got to know at least the sports editor of the local newspaper and talked to him about careers in journalism and so forth. But all of this was fairly nebulous, and after I graduated in '59...

Q: You had gone back to St. Mary's....

McCONVILLE: If I had had more guidance and so forth, I might have, for instance, tried to go off to the University of Minnesota at that point, but it was probably inertia and I enjoyed the experience at St. Mary's. I had gone back to St. Mary's. As I said, I had joined the Army in December of 1954, so my two years would have been up in December of 1956. However, they had an exception at the time that allowed you to get out a few months early to go to college. In this battalion that I was in, this medical battalion, there were a half dozen or more of us who applied to get out early to go back to college. The easiest thing to do was get acceptance from St. Mary's again to go back to college and to confirm that I had been accepted for the fall semester. We all got turned down because, as the company clerk explained it to me, the regulation provided that you could get this early out only if it could be demonstrated that if you didn't get out early you would miss a full year of school. You couldn't, in other words, just begin at the semester. Well, of course, any university will take you in a semester, so that's practically impossible to establish. But this company clerk was one of these guys who knew his way around all Army regulations, so he had suggested to me that what I ought to do would be to simply write out an affidavit of my own, making up some reasons why I couldn't go to school in the winter semester and I would miss an entire year. He said to say anything you want to; he said nobody was going to check this. So I just made up this affidavit, made up reasons, and signed it, and I was the only one of us who got the early out. It was 16 days before I ended up getting released. We had been out in a field problem for three or four days with

hardly any sleep, and I was feeling particularly tired and grouchy. We got back to company area, and I was notified that I was on KP that day, even though I had hardly slept for three nights. I had come to hate KP with a passion anyhow...

Q: With reason.

McCONVILLE: I still remember this. I was in the mess hall swabbing dishes, and the company clerk came in to see me to tell me that my appeal for the early release had been approved and I would be released 16 days hence. Man, the whole world lightened up, and I was washing dishes with vim and vigor that morning. I still remember that very, very vividly. Sixteen days later I was on my way. I went home and got back to St. Mary's. I was on my own, and my sister by this time had moved to Minneapolis and my brother had graduated. He'd actually joined the Army himself, but he enlisted in the Army. So I was on my own. I had the GI Bill plus a little bit of money I had saved while I was in the Army. I think the top I ever got was about $105 a month. Mustering-out pay was about 300 bucks, and I got this GI Bill and it was enough, and then I got this job at school with the public relations department and that was enough to put me through. I worked summers with a sodding outfit. I put myself through college that way. St. Mary's was the easiest way to do this. But then when I finished it, I had this degree with no real idea of how to pursue things thereafter. I went up to the Twin Cities and started looking for work. I needed to get work of some kind pretty soon. My sister was up there, and I could have gotten some help from her, but basically I needed to get a job. One of the jobs I stumbled across was working with a big local firm in St. Paul called Brown & Bigelow. They are one of the largest manufacturers of advertising products in the United States. They manufacture a lot of calendars and all sorts of products on which you put ad copy. It's all sold by a direct sales force all across the United States. I really didn't have much background or leads to get into journalism per se, so by that time I had been giving some thought to maybe advertising or something else with creative writing. Brown & Bigelow did have a pretty substantial unit for direct mail and various other kinds of advertising copy. I had taken the job with them - they didn't have any openings in that area at that time - in sales administration and customer service; it was actually sales administration. I started out there and had been told that when an opening came along in some of these advertising, copy writing, or direct mail units, I'd have a good shot at getting into that. So I ended up working there for three years. Each time I was about to get a job in advertising, there'd be another cutback and the job would close again while the firm was retrenching. There was an ownership change at the time, and we did a lot of restructuring then long before it became fashionable. It's still a big firm in Minnesota. So I ended up working for Brown & Bigelow in sales administration and ended up being there for three years, knowing that's not what I wanted to stay in and expecting to get into some sort of advertising or copy writing or some kind of creative writing field from there. I did apply for a few jobs in public relations writing and so forth and was considered for a while, but nothing ever really blossomed. I enjoyed working in the Twin Cities, but I knew that I wanted to do something else. As I say, I had had this sort of curiosity and longing to go work abroad. I didn't know just why, but it always appealed to me. So I decided to write to the federal government about government jobs abroad. I wrote to the Civil Service Commission, and they sent me material about the Foreign Service and the Foreign

Service examination. That's what prompted me to take the Foreign Service examination. Other than reading this material about the Foreign Service, before that I hardly was aware the Foreign Service existed. I read this material, it sounded pretty appealing, so I thought I'd give it a whirl and took the written exam. I guess I did pretty well on the written exam. We then had the oral panel. At that time they traveled around the United States, and they came to St. Paul and I was one of the people that they interviewed. It was, as I recall, about an hour and a half or something like that.

Q: Something like that. Do you recall what was asked?

McCONVILLE: I remember one of the questions was, "Let's say that you were in Florida and you traveled diagonally across the United States and ended up in the State of Washington. Tell us something about each of the states that you would cross and what some of their principal industry and products are." It was sort of feeling you out to see about your curiosity and interest. There were some questions about foreign affairs and so forth. I don't have a distinct memory, but one thing that particularly stands out was that one of the requirements, when you pass the written examination and before the oral, you fill out this incredibly lengthy application but it also required an autobiography of 1000 words. As I recall, there was a movie I had seen one time. It might have been The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit or something. It was about somebody having an advertising career.

Q: That was a movie with Gregory Peck, and it was a book. I can't think of the author's name. It was quite popular.

McCONVILLE: Right. The thing that had struck me in that particular movie was that Gregory Peck, as the principal protagonist, in trying to get a job that he had coveted, had been invited to write some sort of an autobiography and had written one that was fairly creative and humorous, and that had impressed his bosses. I didn't think my chance of getting into the Foreign Service were really very good at all, so I decided maybe that would work for me. So I wrote my autobiography in a fairly humorous sort of vein. I did have some talents for creative writing, and, in fact, writing that sort of thing, something of a humorous vein, was probably one of my strongest points. It turned out I got accepted for the Foreign Service. I was the only one they accepted on that visit to St. Paul. It was pretty amazing coming from St. Mary's and having the kind of background that I did and so forth. But probably ten years later at an assignment in Korea I was going up to make my call on the DCM. I remember this. I knocked on the door and he waved me to come on in, and he said, "Well, you've come a long way." I was a bit taken aback. I didn't know what he was talking about. So then he started to relate the story about how he had been on one of these panels. As he started to relate the story, then I began to recall who he was. He had been one of the people who had served on the panel. He mentioned that it had been my autobiography that had particularly struck those people on the panel. I had done pretty well on the test score, so that had been to my benefit, but it was partly that autobiography, the fact that I had done something like this, that had struck these people, and they had something about this in my interview and so forth, that they decided to take a chance on me. They were looking for somebody that was a little bit out of the box, someone other than the guy who had been to the Ivy League schools, and the fact that I

had come from the kind of background where I had lost my parents and had made my own way. It was sort of a stroke of luck, I guess, but that was what did the trick for me.

Q: You entered the Foreign Service when?

McCONVILLE: September of 1962. I graduated in '59, then I worked for Brown & Bigelow for about three years, and then, as I say, I was getting increasingly unhappy. I was doing pretty well with them. In fact, they had started a new unit. Actually there were bought out by something called Standard Packaging, and it was a particularly appealing new unit that they started out that was separate from their other operations. One of my old bosses was put in there as a fairly senior executive, so he had brought me over to this new unit. If you were going to be anyplace in Brown & Bigelow, other than, say, in the advertising copy writing and so forth, which is what I'd really been sort of attracted to them for in the first place, that would have been a good place to be. But by this time I had already begun this process with the Foreign Service. In fact, when he brought me over there, I had told him that I was doing this and that, if they did offer me a position, I would probably opt for it. He said he understood that. It was a fairly long process, as I remember. You took a medical, you had a security examination. There was some guy who came around subsequently to talk to myself and others who knew me. But I heard nothing for quite a while, and then sometime in early August of 1962, I got this phone call saying that I was invited to be in the class starting in September, three weeks hence. What had happened was, I think, I was next in line, that some people had dropped and so they were looking for some fill-ins. I would have been in the class following that if that had not.... So they sort of put it on the basis of, "Either take this or we don't know if we're ever going to take you." It was only about three weeks' notice or something like that. I said, "All right, I'll take it," and so I told my boss and I was off to this unknown adventure.

Q: Had you ever been to Washington before?

McCONVILLE: Never been to Washington, no. Other than being in the Army, I had never been outside of Minnesota. Well, I traveled a little bit with the sports teams and so forth. I had been in New York in the Army, because when we were in Puerto Rico, we went by train actually from Fort Sam Houston up to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, which was a shipping-out point at that time yet for ships that were carrying people to Europe. We went by ship to Puerto Rico, and we had some time when I got some leave in New York. But I hadn't really seen much of the United States by that point, certainly hadn't seen Washington. I remember I had a '57 Ford, and I started off driving from St. Paul. I started off on a Saturday morning and was supposed to report on Monday for class. I got as far as somewhere in Wisconsin and my car broke down, had blown the engine. I was in this little town where it had been towed and met some really amazing people. The guy who owned this auto body shop or repair shop really went out of his way to help me. Everything I owned was in the car, my bags and my clothing and so forth. So he said he'd try and make a call to find a replacement engine and they would work on it through the weekend once they got the engine. In the meantime I was staying in a little hotel there in that town. They did get an engine. It turned out to be from a '58 Ford and it didn't fit. So

the guy finally on Monday tells me that he's very, very sorry but this guy had assured him that it would fit in a '57 Ford and in fact it didn't and there was no way they could make it fit. So he'd lined up another one in the meantime, and he hadn't done business with this guy, but I should go ahead and do it. I called the training outfit in Washington at that time to tell them that I'd be delayed. And they said, "Well, no problem. As long as you're here within the week, we can still accommodate you." So I was trying to get this done. He did get it in; sometime about mid-Tuesday, I think, they finally got this other engine in. They started it up, and all this black smoke started blowing. The garage owner said, "Don't worry about that too much. We're going to take it out now for a test drive." He said it had been soaked in some kind of oil or something to keep it from rusting, and that should wear off. After they had taken off for a test drive and so forth, it was still pumping black smoke. He said he was very disappointed. He called this guy up while I was there, and he just reamed him out over the phone and knocked the price down fairly substantially and finally struck a deal. So they fixed it up enough and said, "I think this will get you to Washington. I'd like for you to tell me. Write me a postcard when you get there and let me know how it comes out." I took off and I had gone about 100 miles or a couple hundred miles, and I thought I'd better check the oil on this thing. So I stopped and checked the oil in Gary, Indiana - I had just gotten out of Chicago - and the oil was down about three quarts or something like this. They had put it up on a hoist. This was something like about eight o'clock in the evening. They said, "The problem is you've got a hole in your oil pan," and probably what had happened was the car that it had been taken from had been in an accident and this had been punctured. They said, "We can get that welded, but you're not going to be able to get that done tonight. It'll have to be tomorrow before there'll be a garage open where you can get it welded." About that time there was this old fellow sitting nearby. He came walking over and took a look. He said, "Put it back up there again. Let me try something." He turned out to be the father of these two men who were the owners of the garage, and he just liked to hang around there. They put it back up, he took this tack with a big head on it and stuck it up in there with some glue on it, and he said, "You know, I think that might hold it for a while. I'd suggest you check the oil every 100 miles or so, but this might work." By that time I would try almost anything. So I took off, and I'd go about 100 or 200 miles and it would be down a half a quart or something, and I'd put a little more oil in it, and I ended up going all the way to Washington. Now, by this time it's like Wednesday or something. I haven't slept in a hotel or anything since about Monday night or something like that, drove into Washington. I remember coming down Wisconsin Avenue and stopping at a filling station and asking about getting a motel or someplace to stay. They suggested I continue on into Virginia, best shot down there. I'd slept in the car for what sleep I did have, and I hadn't shaved for several days. I kept stopping at motels, and they kept telling me they didn't have any room. It might have been true, but I sort of suspect it was because of my appearance. So I finally got to Falls Church and found a motel and stayed there, and then I reported the next morning. I then subsequently took the car to a garage to try to get that fixed, and they said the tack was still holding very well and that it was some other small device that didn't cost very much that was the problem why it was leaking oil, and they replaced that and it didn't have any more problem leaking oil after that. I sold that car nine months later, and it still had that tack in the oil pan. So I had quite an adventure getting there. By this time I'm really beginning to wonder whether I really wanted to join

this Foreign Service, I was getting so frustrated.

Q: Had you developed a significant other at that point?

McCONVILLE: No.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

McCONVILLE: September of '62.

Q: What was your basic officer course like, the people and the training? What was your impression?

McCONVILLE: I was a bit overwhelmed at first. First of all, I had been disadvantaged in coming in three or four days behind everybody else, because by that time they'd gone through some orientation and they'd all sort of gotten acquainted with each other, and I had missed all that. So I was an outsider at that point. But I was an outsider in more significant ways in that many of them had been to graduate school and had been steering towards the Foreign Service for a good while. I really had almost no idea what the Foreign Service was about. Particularly those who had been in graduate schools and so forth, during the lectures that we had in the training, they were constantly asking questions and citing this or that reference. I hadn't had much experience at that and I was wondering how am I going to keep up with these guys. I didn't have that kind of background. The longer I was in it, the more I came to appreciate, as I got to know these people better, that I basically was going to be able to compete with them all right and that was a veneer that was not really that important and some of them were just trying to put on this sort of air. At first it threw me, but it took me a while. I didn't really feel accepted very well for a while in that group. There were two Foreign Service Officers in charge of the class, and to be frank, I wasn't particularly impressed with either one of those two people. One of these guys kept falling asleep all the time. Then after that first eight weeks of training, I think it was, then we went to consular training. We all were sent over to consular training for I don't know how long, a couple of weeks, I think. But the consular training was more like legal training of some sort. You would go over all these consular regulations and laws and rules, and there were about three different tests during that period of time, whatever the consular training was. This was the kind of thing, again, that I absorbed very well, plus by this time I was determined to work pretty hard. I did very well. I came out of the consular course with the top score. I think I had two 100s and a 98 or something like that. There were some other people that had some pretty good scores, but there were a lot of people that didn't do quite that well - some of them had treated it rather cavalierly - and it kind of buoyed my self esteem. I had persuaded myself again that I could hold my own with these people. I can't remember the fellow's name who ran that course, but he had a little interview with each of us...

Q: Not Bill Devlin by any chance?

McCONVILLE: I don't recall the name. During that little interview, I had confided to

him that I had been losing some self-confidence and that going through this consular course had restored some of it to me, and he reinforced that very strongly. I greatly appreciated the support that he gave me, not just that I might be able to do well in consular but not to get fooled too easily by some of these people who like to show off that they read this or that particular book or something or other, that that's not what really counts in the end. Then we got our assignments during that process.

Q: When they asked you what you want to do and where, did you have any thoughts?

McCONVILLE: Well, I'd always had this longing to go to Europe, but I had didn't have any language; most of us didn't; there were some that had had language prior to this but not too many or not very much. I had had a couple years of Spanish in college, but never could really speak the language. Europe seemed rather unattainable for me. I had also felt at that point that I might like working in third-world countries or something other than in the more sophisticated capitals, that might fit me better. Because I had had some Spanish in college, I sort of then leaned towards Latin America as one of my choices. So I know that I put down Latin America as one of the choices. At that time you went off as a junior officer on rotation. There weren't any strict cones at all at that time. You were going to go on rotation for six months each in political, admin, econ and consular in a rotation, but there wasn't any great emphasis that you had to choose beyond that. So I hadn't given much thought to it. Like most of us, I thought political probably would be the thing that would appeal to me. Now, since I'd done administrative work in sort of sales administration, I had come to have a greater appreciation of the administrative function, and that was probably my second choice. And since I'd done well in consular training, that kind of appealed to me, that was probably my third choice. But in any event, I did go to Latin America but my first assignment was Panama. It's sort of ironic in a way, because had I had one more month to do in the Army, I would have gone there a number of years earlier as an Army PFC (Private First Class). In any event, we went through Spanish, and at that time, unfortunately, the training for world language at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) was only 16 weeks, and 16 weeks really wasn't enough. Unless you were in the very fast group, you wouldn't even get through all the books in the 16 weeks. I was in the next one behind that - I didn't get in the most advanced group - and we didn't complete all our books. Then there was a regular phenomenon at that time known as a travel freeze, because they would run out of money in the budget and had to start cutting things. The budget year at that time, the fiscal year, ended June 30th, I guess, and the new fiscal year started July 1 rather than October 1 as it is now. We were supposed to go to our first post in April after we finished with our 16 weeks of language training, but because of the travel freeze, all junior officer assignments were delayed until July 1, so they had to do something with us for that extra three months. I was assigned to work for three months in the Office of Fibers and Textiles in the Economics Bureau (EB) in the State Department. The Kennedy administration was now in, and Kennedy had come in and, as part of the commitments he had made in getting elected, he committed to the textile interest that he would get a long-term cotton textile agreement in place that would put quotas and so forth on cotton textile imports, and in fact he had succeeded in doing such. This office administered this sort of thing. It was an interagency group with Commerce and Agriculture and others. I was assigned to work in that office for three

months, unlike some people who were assigned to these three-month assignments and had nothing to do because they were just an extra in the office and had sort of make work. This Office of Fibers and Textiles was swamped because of the administration of this, and I was finding myself suddenly writing. We wrote a lot of airgrams in those days. There were cables, but with cables you had to be very spare in your writing because they had to be typed out by hand all the time, so a lot of things were done by airgram. Each Friday, the head of the office would come back from an interagency meeting and say, "We're going to inform such-and-such a country that we're going to impose quotas on such-and-such products," then they would set up negotiations, offer negotiations, and we were either sending out the airgrams informing them, asking the embassy to inform them. Some of those we did in Washington and others we did sending it to the embassies to have them done, depending upon the country involved. Or there were negotiations being set up. Now, I didn't travel to any negotiations, but for those that were being done there in Washington, being held in the State Department, I would be assigned to be part of the discussions and take notes and this sort of thing. So I was kept very, very busy for three months. It gave me a lot of practical experience. So it ended up being July before we went off to the assignment. Unfortunately, between that and the fact that we'd had only 16 weeks of language training - I think I came out with a 2 or 2+ or something like that, out of my language training; and in Panama English is very widely spoken.

Q: You were there from July of '62...

McCONVILLE: No, this would have been '63. I joined in September of '62, so it was July of '63 until about July of '65. In fact, my first assignment there was into the consular section for rotation, and I did immigrant visas. Unfortunately, for the immigrants about 95 percent of the immigrants in Panama at that time - there were no quotas for Latin America at that time - were the people of West Indian ancestry who, almost all, were trying to go to the Bedford Stuyvesant district in New York. The big issue was always public charge, whether or not they were in a position to be able to support themselves in the United States. For a great many of these applicants, they were typical to, say, young people in the ghetto or even in much worse circumstances, and many of them had sixth-grade educations at most and no work skills, no job experience, and were going to go off to the United States. The odds of them ending up being unemployed in the United States were very high, so we would have to try to determine that they had some relatives or somebody there that could help them get started. So mostly it was a question of overcoming this public charge issue. But these people spoke English as a first language, English as they spoke it - it was a West Indian form of English. They spoke Spanish, they were bilingual by this time, but they preferred to speak English, so our interviews were conducted in English, unlike the non-immigrants, which were mostly Spanish-speaking Panamanians. So in doing the immigrant visas, again, I was getting very little exposure to Spanish and had to go out and sort of force myself all the time to try to get my Spanish up to a 3-3. That was a big struggle, to come back and get tested and get my 3-3 in Spanish. But other than that, I had gotten through the rotation and actually I had finished up after about four months. They wanted me in the econ section because the commercial officer - they had an economic counselor, an economic officer, and a commercial officer - the commercial officer was transferred out on very short notice, so they wanted me to come

up to the econ section and serve as commercial officer. So I had actually gotten out of a consular assignment after four months - it was supposed to be six - and I started working then as commercial officer. I was in a regular job again as the commercial officer. But in January of 1964 they had the riots in Panama. There had been a flag incident in the Canal Zone.

Q: At the high school.

McCONVILLE: At the high school, right. It finally erupted into a riot where Panamanians were firing into the Canal Zone, and it got very bitter. That particular week happened to be my first tour as duty officer. I was at home. I shared an apartment with another young Foreign Service Officer. We had an allowance. We didn't have quarters; we had to find our own place. I got this call that said, "Are you watching television? Take a look." We turned it on, and there was a riot. They were overturning cars downtown and so forth. So they told me to come into the embassy right away, and I was a duty officer. Well, I got to the embassy. We were in between ambassadors at that time, and there was a chargé d'affaires and DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission).

Q: Who was that? Do you remember?

McCONVILLE: Right offhand I don't remember the guy's name. I remember him well. I can picture his face, but I just don't remember the name. The chiefs of the political section, the economic section, the security officer, military attaché, and that sort of thing were there. I was the only junior officer, and I was there because I was on duty. There were riots all along the Canal and border there, at least in the city of Panama. If you're familiar at all with Panama, one of the main streets of Panama is the border with the Canal Zone. I guess that's maybe a couple of miles away from where the embassy is located. But we were getting all these reports, and, of course, Washington's on the phone and I was being assigned all sorts of various duty. Then sometime in the early hours of the morning, a mob came to the embassy. The embassy was the only place that the Panamanian National Guard protected. The National Guard was their police force basically, but they weren't an army as such. They were just a police force, but they were called the National Guard, *Guardio Naciono*. They had surrounded the embassy to protect the embassy and keep the mob away. But the embassy fronts right on the sidewalk, Balboa Avenue, and the mob was out there and they were throwing rocks and things and Molotov cocktails at the embassy. Some of us were wondering whether we were going to get out of there that night, but the mob finally went away.

Q: Were you getting any assistance from our troops in the Canal Zone?

McCONVILLE: No. All of the gates were closed except one that was sort of an obscure gate that they kept open. They were very preoccupied themselves. They did not provide any assistance to the embassy in the way of any sort of troops or anything. We had the Marine guards there. The USIS (United States Information Service) was located in a separate building perhaps a half a dozen blocks away, and they also had a USIS library, and the Panamanian government didn't protect it, because they said it wasn't diplomatic

property as far as they were concerned, and the library was burned and the USIS building and offices were ransacked. The next morning the station chief had sources that were saying that the mob was now armed and was coming back and would have arms this time. So at some point they decided to evacuate the embassy. In fact, they had already started hauling out classified. When you mentioned the troops, they did have some deuce-and-a-halfs that they had brought around to this one entrance that was being kept open to the Canal Zone.

Q: The deuce-and-a-half being a military two-and-a-half-ton truck.

McCONVILLE: We'd been loading up classified files onto that two-and-a-half-ton truck to haul them over to the Canal Zone, and the files were jam-packed with this stuff and so forth. You know, all of those exhortations to keep your classified files limited and so forth. Like most places, they weren't, and they had tried to start burning them, but every time they would get this incinerator going strong enough, the roof would start to catch on fire. They were in constant contact, of course, with Washington and the White House and so forth, who had been telling them to burn the classified. But at some point late that morning they finally made the decision - I think it was made in Washington - to evacuate the embassy. So we were all, those of us who were there, told to go home - we all had apartments or houses throughout the city of Panama; there wasn't any housing as such - and stay at home and try to be careful and avoid going outside because you didn't know what attitudes the Panamanians might have toward us.

So we were told to go home. As I say, I was sharing an apartment at that time with another Foreign Service Officer, young Foreign Service Officer. There was sort of a funny incident that had happened after I had left that morning. I think the embassy was three or four stories, and the Marines had cases of teargas at each level to start disbursing in case somebody broke into the building or something like that, or maybe to leave in the building if they were told to evacuate it to keep others from trying to get in. But in any event, there was some Marine who had a name that was something like 'gas', and somebody had called out his name and somebody up on the third floor, I think it was, which was the floor where the ambassador and the DCM were, hollered down, "Did you call gas?" He said, "No gas," and somebody up there started pulling these canisters out and tossing them on the third floor. So the whole third floor was full of this teargas. Now, as it turned out, at the very end - they never totally evacuated the embassy - before the last few people got out - it's a chancery really rather than the embassy - before the last few people got out of the chancery, they changed their mind again in Washington and decided that they wouldn't totally evacuate the place. That weekend then, the rest of that weekend, we stayed home listening to the news reports. The Panamanian government was being very jingoistic and so forth. There were 21 people killed in those riots, 17 or 18 Panamanians and three U.S. soldiers. Now, most of the Panamanians were actually killed in some fires that were more involved with looting and so forth, that actually may have been killed by other Panamanians who were keeping them out of their stores or something. In the PanAm building, I think there were five of them that were caught in that fire down there. But it was headlined all over the United States. The next week Time and Newsweek had cover stories on these riots in Panama. So it was a serious situation.

But by Sunday evening my friend and I, the guy I was sharing the apartment with, had gotten so bored being inside that we decided to venture out a bit and see - we had to take our chances - and we started going out. The more we went out, the Panamanians themselves were very friendly and courteous to us. They had a very sharp distinction in their minds between Americans and Zonians. They detested the Zonians, who they felt were always looking down on them and had mistreated them and so forth, whereas Americans generally they tended to like. Most of them had American friends, and a lot of them had gone to school in the United States and whatever. So we found virtually no hostility directed towards us as individuals. The next week then the embassy operated more or less normally, but we didn't have any classified around for the most part. It had all been hauled away. But that following Friday, I believe it was, about a week later, there had been negotiations going on to reach some kind of understanding. The Panamanians had been insisting that the U.S. would have to agree to negotiate on the Canal, to open negotiations on the status of the Canal, and Lyndon Johnson was publicly saying the United States would never agree to negotiate under threat of violence, wouldn't rule out the fact that we might at some point consider that, but we wouldn't make a pledge in advance. So they finally struck some language, and they had settled on the Spanish word 'discuteer' - that's the infinitive form of the verb - and it was put out. At the time it was put out, the Panamanians locally started to point out that the word 'discuteer' in Spanish, rather than meaning 'discuss', had more of an implication of 'to argue about something'. So they in fact had gotten a commitment out of us. When we insisted that was not was intended, they suddenly announced that that was the end of the talks and they were breaking off diplomatic relations with the United States. That afternoon, that Friday, in the embassy we were suddenly told to go back to our houses and apartments and pack small overnight bags and to go over to the Canal Zone. So we all then were over in the Canal Zone in some barracks and so forth over there and had all been ordered to leave Panama. We were in the Canal Zone, which is American territory under the terms of the Canal. Then that weekend they told us - I guess the chargé - that it had now been agreed with Panama that, while they had broken diplomatic relations, they hadn't broken consular relations, so that we would be allowed to operate a consulate until diplomatic relations were reestablished. There were seven officers on the embassy staff who had consular exequaturs for one reason or another. It was the chief of the consular section, and the chief of the political section actually had earlier on been the chief of the consular section and then had moved on. So he still had a consular exequatur because they had never rescinded it, and there were five of us junior officers. Some of them were in the consular section at the time, and some were like myself, who had been in it and had the consular exequatur, no longer in it but still had the consular exequatur. One of those five, incidentally, was Steve Bosworth, who later on went on to be ambassador in Tunisia and in the Philippines and now in Korea. Steve, he and his wife, in fact, were the people who met me at the airport when I arrived in Panama. Steve by this time actually was supposed to have finished up his tour, but had continued on as the principal officer, only officer, at a consulate we had at Colón at the time, and he and his wife had been caught over there in the riots, but he was part of this staff. There were five of us junior officers and consular chiefs. The political guy happened to be actually the most senior, so he was named the consul general. Then we were allowed to bring some staff with us, some communicators and a secretary or something like this, and we were allowed that same weekend to go

back into Panama and run a consulate, and so for the next four months we ran a consulate. We were the embassy in fact. The rest of the people had to stay in the Canal Zone. They went bonkers over there after a while and really didn't have much to do, so they started accelerating transfers and doing a lot of different things to get people moved on elsewhere as time went on. It was four months later before they finally struck an arrangement with Panama to come up with a satisfactory statement that restored diplomatic relations. This absurdity that Panama and we did not have diplomatic relations...

Q: It was something that went on. It was used at that time in some other places. I remember about a year or two later, I was consul general in Saigon and halfway down the diplomatic list, a pretty low-ranking officer. We had broken relations with Cambodia but kept consular relations for a while. I thought there's a conceivability that I might end up with 50,000 American troops and all this [inaudible] American representative. Of course, it never would have happened, but it was of that period where consular relations were a possibility.

McCONVILLE: Well, that's what we had for four months.

Q: What did you do?

McCONVILLE: Well, mostly consular work, but we did some other reporting and so forth. In fact, I was put back at that time to run the special consular services, and so for that stretch of four months I did special consular services. Anyone who's done plenty of that, you have all sorts of weird stories with special consular services. But in any event, that was a very unusual situation, to say the least.

Q: How about Americans there? There must have been a lot of disquiet among Americans in Panama.

McCONVILLE: Well, certainly in the Canal. Of course, the people in the Canal Zone then didn't dare [venture out].

Q: They were a breed apart almost, weren't they?

McCONVILLE: Many of them were. There were some who really enjoyed Panama, loved Panama, made a big effort to cultivate friends and acquaintances among the Panamanians, but the majority tended to look down on Panamanians, tended to stay in the Zone itself, and then there were those that used to brag about the fact that they almost never went into Panama itself. Now, the Canal Zone was self-contained. It was like a little American community. They had practically every kind of organization that you have in a typical small city in the United States, you had there in Panama: the American Legion, the Boy Scouts, Goodwill. They had almost everything, and they had their own stores there in addition to the PX's and so forth on the military bases, which we had access to, but they didn't have access to them, the civilians. They had their own stores there and restaurants and other things, none of them anything very special. They could

live there in that very neatly cultivated Panama Canal area and never venture into the city of Panama itself. Then, of course, we had significant military at the various military bases in the Canal Zone. Living in Panama itself there were quite a number of Americans. There were also people who had dual citizenship and very strong ties to the United States. Almost everyone spoke fluent English. They clearly were distinct from the rest of Latin America. They had more experience with Americans than most other Latin Americans. There were things about Americans that irritated them, but most of them had closer ties with individual Americans than almost anyone else in Latin America. The idea they'd break diplomatic relations with us was the ultimate absurdity. It was having a significant economic impact on them, because virtually all of their economic ties outside were either the Canal or with the United States. Their currency is actually - they call it the balboa; it's got a picture of George Washington on it. They use the American dollar as their currency. They had sent a delegation to the United States to try to argue for some additional economic aid to assist them during this period of time of broken diplomatic relations because of their special relationship with the United States. The striking thing about the arrangement that was made to restore diplomatic relations was that the Panamanians had tried to insist that we would agree to open negotiations on the Panama Canal, renegotiate the whole treaty on the Panama Canal. Amazingly enough, at that time there had still been very considerable thought given to the idea of doing major construction work with atomic explosion, and so President Johnson came out with an announcement that we indeed would reopen negotiations on the Panama Canal, but at the same time he also announced that we intended to build a new sea-level canal in one of four locations, only two of which were in Panama. I think one was Nicaragua, and I don't recall what the other one was. But the effect of it was to say that we would renegotiate the existing treaty and would turn over the Canal to the Panamanians. I think it was like in 15 years or something, and that was what our proposal would be. But in the meantime, we would build a new sea-level canal. They would have the old locks canal, if it was going to be of any value. The sea-level canal might not be in Panama, and that would give us a lot of leverage about what this negotiation might be all about. This was widely praised in the United States. Editorials and other commentary from all quarters of the United States were very laudatory of this brilliant idea. The embassy in Panama - not myself but some of the senior levels - had been very much involved in helping develop this idea along with the State Department and others in Panamanian affairs and so forth. By that time we hadn't named a new ambassador yet. I think I'm getting ahead of myself at some point, because we didn't have an ambassador, of course, during that break in diplomatic relations. Anyhow, they had struck this deal and had come up with the arrangement. We did get a new ambassador then, and I'm trying to remember the name. It was Jack - he later on went on to head the Peace Corps; he was actually Assistant Secretary for East Asia for a while and then went on to head the Peace Corps. He's been an AID (United States Agency for International Development) worker. But the guy who really impressed me was the DCM who came at the time, somebody named Rufus Smith. Rufus Smith was probably the finest all-around Foreign Service Officer I ever knew in my entire service. He had a great deal to do with every success that the embassy had.

Q: Jack Vaughn, was it?

McCONVILLE: Jack Vaughn, Jack Hood Vaughn. He'd been an AID worker actually, an AID employee, a mid-level AID employee, and then I think on a tour of Africa or something. Then Vice President Lyndon Johnson and Bill Moyers, who was with him, had been very impressed by this young fellow they had met in Africa, and when Moyers headed the Peace Corps, he made Jack Vaughn an assistant director for Latin America or something or other, and that led to his appointment as ambassador when Johnson got to be President and so forth. But in any event, that was a totally different period then, because by this time, when we restored diplomatic relations, virtually the entire staff of the embassy had turned over because of this whole process except for a few of us who had been there running the consulate. So we had an almost entirely new group of people in the embassy, a different period entirely. After relations were restored, I was assigned then to complete my rotation in the economic section. As it happened, just as I got in the economic section, the economic officer - it was the economic counselor, economic officer and commercial officer - the economic officer left. So I was given that job, full-time economic officer job. As it just happened, the man who was the economic counselor had a little different background than most Foreign Service Officers. He'd grown up in Nicaragua. His parents were Americans who had grown up in Nicaragua, actually in a coffee plantation there or something like that. He had started working with the American embassy in Nicaragua as a local hire American, and eventually was brought into the Foreign Service. In fact, a number of people, almost all the counselors at that time, everyone between sort of the middle-grade Foreign Service Officers and the DCM were people who had been Wristonized, as they called it at the time, people who had been staff people who had been converted to Foreign Service Officers under the Wriston Program. In any event, one peculiarity about this guy, because he had this coffee plantation - his whole family still owned it in Nicaragua - every year at a certain time he would take three or four weeks leave and go up and oversee the harvests or something up there in Nicaragua of the coffee. I had hardly started in the economic section when he was off on his three or four weeks, and one of our big tasks at the time was to do the economic trends. There used to be the six-month economic reports put out by the Department of Commerce but provided by the economic section of the U.S. embassy. This was, of course, a particularly critical time because they had had this break in diplomatic relations, riots, and so forth, so there was a great deal of interest by those who were interested in the economy of Panama and what sort of effect all of this had on the economy of Panama. They had no economic training of any consequence at all. Now, you could in Panama, because of the fact that it was a very small place, you could go around and speak to a lot of people, interview a lot of people, and get a lot of information. So I started calling people up and going around seeing people, and found doors opened very easily, talked to a lot of people in the business community and various other places, and I wrote an assessment of the Panamanian economy and the impact. Essentially my conclusion was that, while the economy had flattened out, there hadn't been any serious downturn, and they'd probably ride this out fairly well as long as confidence would come back before too long. This economic counselor came back from his three or four weeks in Nicaragua. The thing was due in a few days. He looked at it, made two or three word changes, and that was it, off it went. Some weeks later there was a headline in the Panamanian newspapers, "US Says Panamanian Economy Okay" or something like this, and it's quoting from this Department of Commerce publication, and here this was all my work,

this guy who had had no real economic training. Every word of it was mine. In fact, it proved to be pretty accurate as time wore on. It was a pretty good assessment. As I say, I did like writing and I wrote pretty well, so that part of it came to me pretty easily. I could write the reports well, and I did really enjoy that experience of going out and interviewing a great number of people. It was like a lot of journalistic work in many ways. But my experience in the economic section in Panama persuaded me that I really enjoyed the economic side of economic relations more than the political, just the fact that it's a little more concrete and it just attracted me. In fact, the inspectors came and we had an inspection. At that time they used to write individual reports on each one of you, and I told the inspectors I had pretty much decided I wanted to emphasize economic work. There were some other episodes in Panama. It seemed like every time I was on duty - it was a joke in the embassy - something major would occur. As I say, my first tour as a duty officer had been the week the riots broke out. There was a subsequent time there was an election in Panama, and a fellow named Marco Robles had succeeded as president. He was from the established party. But there had been a fellow who had been sort of a rogue in Panamanian politics for a long period of time named Arias. He'd actually been president briefly during the Second World War and showed sympathies with the fascists, the Nazis and so forth, and quickly there had been a coup that overturned him. He'd only lasted a few weeks or something like. He'd been banned from running for a number of years but had just recently been allowed to run again, and here he was campaigning again and he did very well. He kept insisting that in fact the election had been stolen from him. Our own evidence was that that wasn't true, but he had persuaded a number of people of that. So there were a number of his activists who were starting to throw some bombs around and stir up trouble of different kinds. This particular weekend, again, when I was duty officer - it also happened to be right at the same time as the episode in the Dominican Republic where the U.S. intervened and we had the Marines and the 82nd Airborne in the Dominican Republic - there was a major effort made by the United States to get the OAS to approve our intervention in the Dominican Republic. Averell Harriman was sent out by President Johnson to visit these Latin American countries. He visited 14 countries in six days or something like that. I had just gotten home for supper and suddenly the phone rings and it's somebody saying that there had been some communication from a plane coming up from Colombia or something or other, a military craft of some kind, Averell Harriman was on it, and he'd already been in communication with the chargé. By that time, Ambassador Vaughn had gone off to be suddenly pulled out to be Assistant Secretary for East Asia, and Rufus Smith again was the chargé at that point. Harriman had suddenly decided at the last moment that he wanted to stop in Panama. He was supposed to come there on a military aircraft to Albrook Air Force Base, I guess it was, but he decided he wanted to call on the president of Panama and also seek to persuade him to support it. This is again what struck me: Rufus Smith managed to arrange inside of a few hours for an appointment with the president of Panama for Harriman, who was landing out at the airport and was going to be there for relatively few hours but was going to switch in Panama to commercial aircraft and leave sometime in the early morning hours going back to Washington. In any event, I was being asked to come back down to the embassy because they wanted me to be on hand while this was taking place. There was one group going to meet him at the airport and another group doing something else, and I was supposed to be the person in

between and be at the embassy and be able to communicate with both groups. While this was happening, the new ambassador was arriving - well, I think the new ambassador's arrival was a little bit separate. In any event, Harriman did come, and Rufus Smith did manage to arrange a call on the president and set up that appointment within a few hours of getting the instruction. There was that call made, and then I remember being at the embassy. Smith came back and said that Harriman was leaving on a commercial flight about four o'clock in the morning and that he had insisted that Smith not come out the airport to see him off, but Smith felt somebody from the embassy ought to be there, and since I was the duty officer, I was it. So I went home with an hour's sleep or something and was then back out to the airport to see Harriman off. The plane was delayed for about a half hour and we ended up spending a half hour or so there at the airport, a half hour or 45 minutes. It was just Harriman, myself, and one of his aides. I'd brought some cables for him from the embassy that had come in at the time, and he was reading these cables with this aide. It was probably a half hour or 45 minutes, but sitting there with Averell Harriman, and he was ruminating about his visit down in Latin American and about the fact of what was happening in the Dominican Republic. I don't remember how old he looked at the time, but he was already probably 78 or something like. The guy had hit 14 countries in six days or something like that. I still remember that half hour, 45 minutes or so, to sit there and listen to Harriman rumble on. It was quite an experience.

I think the episode with the ambassador arriving was a separate one shortly thereafter. The ambassador was supposed to arrive at the airport - I was again duty officer. The Dominican thing was still going on, because I was called in to the embassy to see two cables, again on the Dominican situation, and they were classified, so as duty officer, I was supposed to pick up the classified cables and decide whether or not somebody needed to be notified any action. There were two immediate cables, or immediate action cables. I went into the embassy and was sitting up in the communications room. At that time, the communicator had to type these things up, so I was sitting there with him while he's typing this up, and suddenly there's a loud explosion outside. We looked at each other, and I went dashing out the door - we were on about the third floor or something like that - and went downstairs. The Marine guard was there, and he was starting to go out the big front doors of the embassy. I went out with him. We got out there, and there was smoke drifting off and the smell of powder and so forth. Somebody had thrown a bomb at the embassy. The new ambassador, a guy named Chuck Adair, had arrived and all the big wheels in the embassy had been out to the airport to meet him and then were going to convene at the ambassador's residence and have a few drinks with him welcoming him in. I knew they were all there, and I called them and asked to speak to the political counselor, a man named Henry Kaler, and I say, "Henry, we've got a couple things. First of all, we've got two cables on the Dominican situation, at least one of which will require action tonight, and somebody threw a bomb at the embassy." The DCM or chargé - DCM by this time, I guess - Rufus Smith was there. So I repeated it to him. So they all came down to the chancery at that point. I remember one of them came walking back into the embassy carrying the sort of charred remains of this bomb. Then they called over to the bomb squad at the Canal Zone, and they came over to take a look at this thing and promptly told these guys that this was still unexploded sticks of dynamite that they had in their hand there, that the detonator had gone off but apparently the dynamite itself

probably had been sitting somewhere where it had gotten very damp or something for too long and hadn't actually exploded and they were carrying around some live dynamite yet. It had only been actually the detonators that had gone off. Had the dynamite itself gone off, it would have probably blown a hole in the side of the embassy. That was the groups that were so unhappy about the election and so forth, and they tossed this bomb at us. These kinds of things seemed to happen every time I was the duty officer. So it was a very interesting period of time when I was there. I really enjoyed the experience in the economic section, and then by this time, because of all these interruptions, they only had about four months left and they had suggested to me, "Look, we can split that time between admin and political, but it might make more sense - we could really use you in admin - if we kept you four months in admin and make more use of you." I said that was fine with me, because by that point I really didn't think I had a lot of interest in the political side. I really wanted to be in economic, and I thought admin might be a fallback because of my own experience. So I worked in the admin section for four months. Again, there were things about the admin operation that appealed to me, but the economic was clearly my first choice. My next assignment was the Philippines.

Q: Okay. I'd like to end at this point here, and we'll pick this up the next time. You went off to the Philippines when?

McCONVILLE: '65.

Q: '65, so we'll start at that point.

Today is the 26th of February 2001. Don, you were in the Philippines from '65 to when?

McCONVILLE: '65 to '67, another two-year assignment.

Q: What was your job?

McCONVILLE: I was in the consular section there. About three-quarters of the second assignments at that time were in consular. That was the way they were dealing with staffing the consular section. It was a perennial problem. Actually it turned out to be a rather extraordinary experience. It was September of 1965 when I got there, and in October of '65 Congress, enacted the famous immigration law change that had been proposed by President Kennedy and then concluded under President Johnson. That was going to have a major impact in the Philippines. Amazingly enough, despite the fact they belonged to a former colony of ours, Filipinos were still subject to the Asia Pacific Triangle laws of 1924, immigration laws - a quota of 100 immigrant visas a year from our former colony. So it was really extraordinary when you think of it. Of course, there had been a large number of Filipinos that had migrated to the U.S. under work programs, mostly in Hawaii and some in California, during the period when the Philippines were a colony. But there was a tremendous demand from people who wanted to go to the United States - the United States had this aura in the Philippines - and so it put enormous pressure on the non-immigrant side of things with all these people trying to get a non-immigrant visa as a way of getting to the United States and then being able to stay in

some fashion or another. There were about 2,000 non-quota immigrant visas being issued annually. This was primarily two groups. They were all immediate relatives of American citizens, primarily spouses, and they were either spouses of GIs - we still had Clark (Air Base) and Subic (Naval Base) and a few other places there in the Philippines at that point - and these, of course, were mostly bar girls and so forth that these GIs had met. Then the other category were these Filipino workers who had gone to the U.S. particularly during the '30s. It was a very common sort of thing. They would come back for vacation, as they called it, in the Philippines. They often would be staying for two, three, four, five, six months longer perhaps, but they would typically be middle aged, probably around 50 years old by this time. They had been bachelors all their lives - there were many, many more men, of course, who had migrated than women - and they would go back to their villages in the Philippines where, by the standards of the villages, they were very wealthy men. They would seek out a young bride. It would be typically someone in their late teens or early 20s, and from the perspective of the family of the young bride, this was a godsend because she would marry this guy who by their standards was pretty wealthy and she would go off and take care of him in his later years and ultimately be able to help the family out a great deal and ultimately inherit from him. So it was an arrangement of convenience, but there were about 1,000 of those a year getting visas.

I mention this primarily because most of the whole operation in the consular operation had been pretty stable. There had been a very huge demand for non-immigrant visas and an enormous amount of fraud. No document in the Philippines was worth the paper it was written on and there was an attitude that personal relationships were involved in everything. So people of all sorts of prominence in the Philippines were constantly being besieged by wide assortments of people to help them get to the U.S. by sponsoring them or intervening on their behalf. They discharged this responsibility in varying degrees, by writing letters. All the Senators and Congressmen had form letters stacked in their office, and these would be handed out liberally. But if it was a little more important to them, they would send one of the staffers over with the individual. And then if it was more important, they would call personally, and in some instances when it was more important than that, they would come over along with the person. It wasn't just the politicians, it was people from all walks of life, and so you had all of this constant pressure. But other than that, the system had been fairly stable, but with the change in the immigration laws, I think the State Department had projected that immigrant visas from the Philippines would increase from about 2,000 to 5,000 annually. In fact, within the first year we were up to about 20,000 a year, which is the maximum quota of visas that you could issue in any one particular country, even though there was no national quota anymore. In fact, for what was then the third preference category, which was based on being able to establish you were a professional, in the Philippines something like three-quarters of all third-preference petitions worldwide were being sought in the Philippines.

There had already been a large number of doctors and nurses going to the United States on what were called exchange visitor programs. They would go to the U.S. on an exchange visit, which were really devices by the hospitals to bring these people over for anywhere from three to six years or something, and they'd finally be forced out and they couldn't get immigrant visas because there was only a quota of 100. So now these people

were all applying for third-preference visas. At that time, as many as could get an approved petition would normally be able to get a visa, because there weren't the limitations that subsequently were applied so that you had to wait years and years to qualify. But all of this came at a time when, on my second tour as a foreign service officer, I think I'd been promoted from the rank of FS-08 to FS-07. That was when we still had the categories; you began at FS-08 up through FS-01. I was the second-ranking officer in the visa section. The others, outside of my boss, were either staff officers - we had a couple of those, as I recall, normally two or three, maybe three or four - and then junior officers on their first tour on rotation. They would spend six months in the consular section, primarily on the non-immigrant lines, junior officers getting their six months there. So literally I was the second-ranking officer. As it turned out, the chief of the section was retiring that year.

Q: Who was that?

McCONVILLE: His name was Ray Bostianello. He was unhappy about the fact. He was one of these people that had been a staff officer at one time, had been through the Wriston program, converted to a foreign service officer, and he was disgruntled about the fact that he'd never had any subsequent promotion. So he was retiring that year, and he simply was not going to put out any more effort than he thought was minimally necessary, since he was being retired that year and he had no further interest. Now, the consul general himself was a pretty remarkable man named Lou Gleek, who had no previous consular experience whatsoever. He had been a political and economic officer primarily in Asia, and this was his final tour. He had been given this title of consul general, supposedly with an understanding that he in fact would spend a good deal of his time writing political evaluations and so forth and that the consular section pretty much ran by itself. He in fact was a rather amazing man. He taught himself the dialect of the Manila area. The State Department was not training anybody in this dialect at that time, so he was virtually the only officer in the embassy, this very large embassy, who spoke the dialect.

His name would appear regularly in some of the political gossip columns and so forth. He knew virtually everyone in the political and journalistic world in the Philippines. In fact, he actually was a godfather to Ferdinand Marcos' son Bonbon. When I arrived in September of '65, way back, and Marcos was elected as President two months later in November of 1965, here we had the consul general who was actually the godfather of Marcos' first son. But he had had very little involvement with the consular section except for the fact that all of the political types were forever sending cases over to him to do them a favor. Now we had this change in the immigration law where, rather than a well-ordered visa section, very well staffed and so forth, we suddenly went from 2,000 to an annual rate of 20,000 for immigrant visas plus all this handling of petitions and everything else with it. The State Department, in its wisdom, had decided that Manila only needed five additional local employees to handle the change in the immigration law and no additional officers, so we suddenly went from a situation in which we had been very comfortably staffed to one in which we had just enormous crowds there and all sorts of problems arising trying to manage it. Most of this fell on my shoulders because I was

the second ranking man in the visa section and the chief of the section wasn't interested. In fact, once he left, retired, they didn't replace him at that time, and so I was the acting head of the visa section as an FS-07, and it was an extraordinary experience trying to organize all of this. We went through so many different situations with huge crowds, that we came up with solutions. There was an outside cover outside of the office building we were in, so we were able to set up a lot of chairs and a little waiting space out there and put in loudspeakers so we could call people from outside. There was just one thing after another, and I kept handling all of this and resolving all of this, so as a management experience it was a pretty extraordinary experience. Now, in the meantime, as I mentioned, I had decided that my strongest interest in the Foreign Service was in economic work. That's what I came away from my experience in Panama with. I might add, as I mentioned early on in our discussion, when I first came into the Foreign Service, I really had only a vague notion about what the Foreign Service was about and my reasons for coming in were fairly nebulous. I really just wanted to work abroad. My experience in Panama and the training I had had as a junior officer had pretty strongly persuaded me by this time that indeed I thought I liked the Foreign Service and I thought I had a future in it and I wanted to specialize primarily in the economic side of things. But then in addition, my experience in the Philippines was rapidly persuading me that I also wanted to concentrate a lot in Southeast Asia or East Asia generally. I was fascinated by East Asia. I took a trip, for example, on my vacation I took when I was in the Philippines and managed to visit Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Hong Kong on this trip and had been fascinated by all of this, and some of the training I had, like the Southeast Asia area studies, had awakened a great deal of interest in the area. So by this time I was persuaded that I both wanted to focus on the economic side and also wanted to focus on East Asia, so I thought that I needed two things, that I needed to get some economic training and that I also wanted to get some sort of Asian language. I figured that with the Department, while they wouldn't invest in both of those for me, my best shot was for getting Asian language from the Department and getting the economic training on my own, so I started taking courses at the University of the Philippines, night courses, while I was there in those two years, taking economics. I don't know how many credits I got by the time I got out of there, but I was going pretty regularly, a couple of courses each semester, and was getting a lot of economics, formal economics, and the school, the University of the Philippines, was taught in English and it was a very good experience. In fact, where they had the night classes was well within walking distance of the embassy. So I was taking advantage of those opportunities too while I was in the Philippines, and I was enjoying the Philippines immensely. Filipino people fascinated me. It was a very, very positive and warm experience. While the consular work itself didn't particularly attract me, the management experience I was going through was of tremendous value. As it happened, at that time, the inspectors when they came around - and Manila was inspected again like Panama was when I was there - the inspector who inspected the consular section was a very able fellow who actually had an admin background. Following his tour in the inspection tour, he went on to some very significant positions in the administrative side of the State Department. He was very impressed by what I had done in the visa section, so when I talked to him about my future desires, he recommended in the inspection report - and at that time they wrote individual inspections.

Here was some guy coming in and saw a lot of your peers, and he could make judgments a little bit broader than the individuals in the embassy who were writing reports. But in any event, he wrote a very favorable report on me, which was very helpful, but he made the recommendation that I be assigned - you normally then went back for another two-year tour, and that completed your sort of junior officer status; that would be in the Department - for just one year, which was almost never done, and then be given training in - my strongest preference by this time, I decided, was Thai language training; I had been fascinated by Bangkok on my trip over there - Thai language and this six-month economic course that had been developed in the Department a few years earlier and was getting very, very high credit. So, to my amazement, that indeed is what happened. So on leaving the Philippines I was assigned to a one-year tour in EB in what was the Office of Maritime Affairs, but I was also being assigned to the six-month economic, or actually it was going to be Thai language training for a year and then six months' economic course, and then the expectation would be assignment in Thailand. In fact, normally if you took a hard language like that a year, you would expect to have at least two tours minimum in your career in that particular country, which was very fine with me.

Q: Before we move on to that, I'd like to come back to the Philippine experience. You must have found yourself under extraordinary pressure from other people within the embassy to please take care of this visa and that visa, because this was sort of the main currency in trade in the Philippines for the embassy.

McCONVILLE: Yes, that was very, very true, and even before the chief of the visa section left and I was in effect acting chief for the rest of my tour, I handled the overwhelming number of so-called appeals wherever they came. Now, the consul general did a certain amount of this because of all his connections, but he didn't really do consular work as such. He handled it well, and once in a while he would come to me and he'd have me somebody to complete a visa being issued or something. But in any event, yes, there was this pressure both from within the embassy and from anyone you knew, and I learned to deal with that. I had some of that in Panama, because you have it in almost every place you're at, but it was extraordinary in the Philippines. In fact, prior to my coming, two of the junior officers in the visa section had actually had a resolution passed by the Philippine Congress to declare them *persona non grata* because some Philippine congressmen had been upset with what they considered the way they were treated by these junior officers. They hadn't shown them the proper dignity and respect, and it was after I left - the guy who later on became chief of the consular section was a more senior career officer - he actually was pilloried for weeks and weeks and weeks by one of the talk shows on Philippine television. So there were great big pitfalls, but I learned to deal with it. With the people in the embassy, I recognized political and economic officers and so forth in that context, that they had to refer people, and so I would see the people that they referred to me. I made them no promises. I said, "I will treat this person just on the basis of the rules, but I will see the person and I will extend the courtesy," and I dealt with it on that basis. I didn't do any favors to the individuals involved, but I did see the people, and that helped them out a great deal. For most of them, this was sufficient. Now, once in a while someone would start to call me afterwards

and further appeal, and then I'd get pretty tough with them. But I understood that it was important, particularly in the Philippine context, that they at least make this gesture and that, if I saw somebody, that helped immensely in relieving their obligation. The same was true of all these congressmen, senators and so forth. I developed a sense as to how important it was to them. Lou Gleek, as I say, the consul general, had confided in me at one point; he said that there are times when you get a sense that it was so important to these people that you almost had to find some way of dealing with it. He said he used to have a rule with some of the prominent people that he had to deal with all the time that he'd give them one a year, to somebody who was very dubious on a non-immigrant visa, for example, and that they kept insisting they would personally assure would be returning and so forth, that he would issue a visa and insist that the person, when they got back contact him and confirm that they were back, and so the next time this person, the sponsor, tried to appeal to him again, he would insist, "Now, look, you've still got this person who you promised me is going to come back and they still haven't shown up yet, so until then I'm really not going to be able to help you." These were the kinds of things that he used. That was part of the experience as well. I had to deal with all of those pressures, and I succeeded in dealing with them in ways in which I managed not to offend anyone seriously enough that I got into hot water, but at the same time I held the line and it was important for the morale of all the junior officers and staff people who were handling the non-immigrant visa line that I wasn't undercutting them and so forth. So that, too, was part of my diplomatic learning experience.

Q: Did you have the problem of corruption? One, you had the Filipinos who work within the embassy. That's always a problem because they're there - I was consul general in Seoul about ten years later, and I know the problem - but also the problem of corruption, not just money but sex or good times or what have you, with the officers.

McCONVILLE: Yes, there was certainly the problem of corruption. Now, during the time I was there, we had no problems with the American officers. Subsequently there was a guy who was there when I first arrived - and this happened after I left; he was not in the visa section; he was actually in special consular services - who later got into a great deal of hot water and finally ended his career in the Foreign Service because he got involved with some sex scandal related to consular work. But we did have some Filipino local personnel, the FSN (Foreign Service National), who got into trouble. In fact, in the Philippines in any two- or three-year period, almost always there was some corruption problem that would emerge with the local employees. Now, the local employees we had on the whole were people of tremendous integrity. With Filipino people, everything was very personal with them, and if they felt that you were treating them well as an employee, they would show you loyalty that was just beyond belief. They would do almost anything for you. And you had to know they were under a lot of pressure all the time, so I tried to do everything I could to lift the pressure from them, to not put them in a position where they had to make any kind of decisions and so forth that were too significant. And I tried to keep a dialogue going with them so that, if they felt they were under any pressure at times, they could confide in me a little bit. In the usual Filipino way, it wouldn't be directly tell me what the problem was so much as let me know there was a problem and I could move them within our structure and get them out of the direct firing line. But there

were a couple that succumbed during that period, and we had to deal with that. It was an ongoing problem. I had enormous respect for our local employees, and I tried to do everything I could to try to ease the pressure on them. If I saw any of them being badgered at all out there, I would quickly step in and insist that person, if they had problem, take it up with me and not one of our FSNs.

Because embassy pay in a situation like the Philippines was still pretty attractive, the level of education of our staff and so forth was really pretty extraordinary. In fact, we had one fellow who was college educated, came from a very good family - his mother in particularly had had some prominent position in the Philippines - and he was handling a lot of our correspondence. He could write English beautifully and so forth. I would oversee everything that he did, but he would deal with a lot, even our Congressional correspondence. Some years later when I was periodically back visiting the Philippines and I was in the area, he and one or two of the other employees had opened up an office after they retired, opened up an office across the street from the embassy, where they were visa specialists. You can't blame them. I don't know what other future they had in the Philippines, and they probably did this better than a lot of people. In fact, the travel agents in the Philippines - we had some who would make a point of trying to deal with us on an above-board basis and would only send over cases to us where they either were very confident of who they were and would certainly call or let us know about something like that or they would flag it to us in some way or another that they had to take this but they didn't want to be responsible for it, "Red flag; it's up to you." But it was an extraordinary sort of arrangement.

On the immigrant visa side, one of the other things that transpired at this time - this happened to be during the period when the baby boom was passing through the school systems in the United States and they had this tremendous expansion of public schools in the United States to deal with that - they were desperate for teachers. It was the sixth preference at that time. A teacher could qualify; if she had a job in the United States, she could qualify under the sixth preference. They'd get those approved. We would get very substantial numbers of sixth-preference petitions for mostly elementary school teachers. They really weren't all that well qualified - they had degrees from the Filipino schools, but their English was faulty and so forth - but these schools were so desperate for them that they would plead and plead and plead to get these visas approved. With this staffing problem, in the last half a dozen months that I was there - which was the summer; I was due out in September - that summer we were losing five officers in the consular section, five American officers, and as of midsummer we still had not had a single replacement named for any one of those five officers. I happened to be the fifth one who was going to be leaving in September. So by this time, our staffing situation was just extraordinarily severe. We had set up appointment systems for immigrant visas. We had two people doing immigrant visas, and each one would do 50 a day, so we'd have 100 appointments a day. Then if they weren't there or they couldn't keep up with that, I would help them out with the overload. As the staffing situation had gotten more and more severe and Consul General Lou Gleek was talking to me about it, I told him, "You know what's going to happen here come late July or August. We are going to start getting a flood of Congressional inquiries about these sixth-preference petitions for these school teachers,

because all the school systems are going to be screaming that they have to have these people by the beginning of the school year." We already had a couple months' or more waiting list of appointments because the backlog just kept building up. So I suggested to him that we be prepared that when we get those we tell the State Department they're going to have to tell these Congressmen and Senators that we're very sorry but we simply don't have the staffing to be able to handle these people, they'll have to take their turn, and we don't make exceptions except for very dire emergencies, and it's likely to be November or December or later when we're going to get to their cases. Well, this in fact did happen, and we started to get flooded with letters and telegrams from Congressmen and Senators, including such people as then Congressman Hayes, who was very, very important to the State Department budget and so forth, very prominent Congressmen and Senators. So I drafted a proposed response to this in which we explained that we were very sorry but, you know, we weren't going to be able to take them out of turn. We sent it off to the Department in a cable and proposed that they respond to these Senators and Congressmen and we sent them the whole list of the names and cases they were involved with, rather than for us to try to do it directly from there. There was this deafening silence. The time was getting shorter and shorter. Then we got a cable one morning. Lou Gleek, the consul general, had had the backing of the ambassador at this point on this thing.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

McCONVILLE: William McCormick Blair, who was actually a law partner in Adlai Stevenson's firm, and he'd been first assigned by Kennedy to be ambassador to Denmark and then subsequently in the Philippines - of the McCormick farm implement family, a very, very wealth patrician. I still remember that morning. Lou Gleek came into my office with this cable from the Department in which they were telling us no, that we had to find some way of being more responsive. He slammed this cable down on my desk and he said, "Tell them no, goddammit, tell them no." So I started drafting a cable to respond again to the Department along those lines. Later on in the morning, Gleek came in with a second cable and he said, "Look, here's the second cable I just got. Maybe we'll have to modify that a little bit. Take it over and let's get together again." On that cable they named five replacement officers, all of whom were going to be expeditiously shipped out there. They were breaking into people's home leaves, they were transferring people from some other place, breaking assignments, and all five people were going to be showing up within the next six weeks or something like that. So I then drafted a cable as a compromise that we would add, I think, 10 of these teachers to our 100 appointments every day, so we had 10 teachers beyond that, and there would still be people who would be delayed into September and October, but it would at least deal as responsibly as we possibly could with the problem. The Department bought that, and that's how we dealt with it. When I got back to Washington - I left in September, and then when I had my tour in the Department - I stopped by the Visa Office just for a little debriefing over there and so forth, and they told me that, when that initial cable had come in asking them to send this kind of response to the Congressmen and Senators, it had provoked an enormously divisive debate within the Visa Office. There were those who wanted to support us all the way, and there were others who were fearful of the consequences and

they were getting all sorts of pressure from the admin side of the State Department as well who didn't under any circumstances want to offend Congressman Hayes and others, Congressman Rooney, I guess it was. So when the cable had been sent out telling us that we should find a way to be more responsive, there had been great division within the Visa Office about that cable going out, but in fact what it finally had done, it had spurred people to get some assignments on track. It was absurd. As it was, we were just totally inundated, and to have a shortage of five officers by the time the summer was, with no indication of when we were going to get any replacement at all, it was just totally irresponsible on the part of the Department, and this is what it took to pry it all loose. So it was quite an experience for me. At one time - talk about pressure from the outside - Imelda Marcos' brother - she had several of them; the family name was Romualdez, and I think it was Eduardo Romualdez, brother of Imelda Marcos - twice was in my office on visa cases. In both cases, I had to say no. I learned in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia to do this: you could never say no directly; that could be very offensive. You had to leave them with the impression that in fact the answer was no but you had done it in a way that hadn't been offensive to them. You always leave some crack open that would give them some sort of faith. But in his case in both cases they happened to be people from very prominent families who were doctors and who had been exchange visitors and they wanted to go over as immigrants, and there was a very hard and fast rule at the time that you had to stay two years once you were out in the country you'd come from before you could be eligible for an immigrant visa. There was no way to get around it, no way to break that law. So those happened to be the cases in both instances, and I had to finally convince that we really couldn't help them out as much as we would have liked to. But whatever, that was part of my diplomatic learning experience too, particularly for dealing in East Asia and learning how to deal in those cultures, so in that sense too my consular experience there was very rewarding and helped me a great deal in my future career.

Q: When you came back in '67, you went to the right to the Economic Bureau to begin with?

McCONVILLE: In the Office of Maritime Affairs - I was the lowest man on the pole in that office. Again, it was some learning experience about dealing in inter-agency operations. There we dealt with maritime affairs and the U.S. Coast Guard and various others such as U.S. Customs, but other than that, there wasn't that much I learned from it, but it was only a one-year assignment. Now, the one catch to all of this: as I say, I was then supposed to go off to Thai language training. Well, somewhere during that year, I was in the Office of Maritime Affairs and a call from the Office of Personnel asked me to come by. I went down there, and they said they were very sorry to inform me but the Department wasn't going to give any Thai language training for any economic officers for the next few years. They said, "However, we could put you in Vietnamese language training." Of course, that was in the height of the Vietnam War. I said, "Give me some time to think it over," and I spent the weekend thinking it over and decided that, well, I'll go ahead with it. This was a way to get my language, who knows where the future lies, and I would still get the economic training. So I agreed to do the Vietnamese training and did that instead of the Thai, which of course changed my career pretty significantly.

Q: Before we get there, when you were in the Economic Bureau, did you run across or were you vetted by Frances Wilson?

McCONVILLE: Oh, yes, I knew her and knew of her. I came back to the Economic Bureau again before she left. I am very familiar with Frances Wilson. At that time - it was actually a little bit subsequent to that - the State Department had a lot more power in international economic affairs at the time, because we had been negotiators for all the trade agreements and everything. EB assignments were very prized, particularly just a few years later, and Frances Wilson, who was the executive director there for eons and eons, had developed a sort of cadre of people that she'd come to know. There were a lot of positives to that in the sense that they were fairly prestigious positions. A lot of these people she would get in there, and then when they'd get promoted very rapidly - not promoted so much as - she couldn't directly affect promotion - they would come in as an officer in the division and within a year they'd be assistant division chief, then division chief, and then before very long they'd be an office director - and as a consequence of this, they would in fact end up getting promotions very rapidly as well. The drawback was that that was fine for the world that she knew, but there was a lot of world out there that she didn't really know, and a lot of people got shut out that way. I ended up later, as I say, coming back to the EB when she was still there and I was in part of that system, but I also saw it from the other side. It had its pluses and minuses. In any event, it had been useful to me to be in the Economic and Business Bureau and start to get known there.

Then I went off to the Vietnamese language training. The way the State Department - I think they were getting AID to pay part of the bill - there was this CORDS (Civil Operations, Revolutionary Development Support) program in Vietnam as a pacification program down at the district level, district and province levels, and it was a joint U.S. military/civilian advisory role at the district and then also at the provincial level. The chief advisor for a district - what were they called? - the district chief, the Vietnam chief, who would be a military officer himself, would be responsible for conducting military operations with the local militia, the call it, the PF and the RF. So normally the district senior advisor would be a U.S. Army major and he would have some military officers, U.S. officers, on his advisory and some noncoms. AID would be responsible for providing a civilian advisor, and the civilian advisors were primarily people AID was recruiting specifically for this role. And then also, because of manpower limitations, they had gotten the State Department to commit a lot of junior officers to this role. In fact, this particular junior officer class that I was going through the training with had been notified, at the time that they had passed their orals and were being selected for the junior officer class, that, unless they were prepared to commit to a first assignment in Vietnam, it was very unlikely that they would be able to take them. So each one of these people, in fact, under those kind of pressures, had agreed to go to Vietnam, and sometime within the next six months or so the State Department shifted gears and decided they would take in some more junior officers to staff places like Paris and London and so forth. The very people who had declined to go to Vietnam, had turned down their Foreign Service appointments because of that condition, were now being brought in for that reason, were now being brought in and going off to regular Foreign Service assignments. So these young people felt terribly betrayed, with some justification. Now, about half of that class, these junior

officers going through this training, were State Department junior officers in that group. The other half were people that AID had directly recruited specifically for this role. They were not going to have any career in AID; they were simply going to have this assignment for that purpose. This was, of course, during the height of the turmoil on the campuses and so forth, the anti-Vietnam attitudes, the peace movement and so forth.

Q: It's about 1968?

McCONVILLE: This is '68, yes. I had the economic training first, that's right. It was the fall of '69 when I went into this, late '69, so this was right at the height of all of this sort of thing. So the people that AID had recruited were people who had been staying primarily in graduate school, anything to avoid the draft, either because they didn't really want to go to war or because they opposed the Vietnam War and so forth. While this didn't automatically get you out of the draft, most draft boards around the country, for someone who would go into civilian service in Vietnam, would then take them off their draft rolls. So these people in fact were coming there to avoid going into the Army, but most of them, significant numbers of them, were very, very anti-war and some very militantly so. Well, I was not going to the CORDS program; I was going to an economic position. Actually there's a joint State/AID economic office in Vietnam during that period. There were two State Department positions in the joint State/AID economic office, and I was going to one of those, so I wasn't going to the CORDS program. But to put me through the language training, State put me in the CORDS training as well. I suspect what it amounted to was that AID probably picked up the bill for my language training. There was one officer going to the political section, a guy named Henry Sizer, who was also about my same grade. We were the only two in the program who weren't actually going to CORDS. Now, in addition to all these young people, either uniformed service officers or people recruited by AID, the other half of the class for the first 21 weeks - seven weeks of CORDS training plus the first 14 weeks of language training - were Army majors who were being assigned as district senior advisors. I'd gone through the economic training - maybe I'll spend a little bit of time on that first, just to briefly mention that. The economic training had actually followed right on the assignment in the Office of Maritime Affairs. It was relatively new yet at that time. It was highly prized. The State Department had set up this economic training, six-month economic training, primarily because they'd found that they had a great deal of trouble, at least at that point, of recruiting people with significant economic training for the Foreign Service. Most of those people simply had other interests. They had also come to the conclusion by that time that the Foreign Service needed much more economic expertise to be able to deal with the international economic circumstances. So the answer had been: if we can't recruit enough people, let's try to train our own people who have interest in it. They set up that six-month economic course at FSI, and they brought in a lot of professors, some of them full-time but others who worked at Georgetown University, George Washington University, who would simply teach the courses there, who were very high caliber. Because it was highly desired, people who went into it worked very, very hard. So it already had acquired a reputation that, when you went into that six-month economic training, it would be almost like a monastic existence, that you would work very, very hard, literally studying every night until late in the evening and a lot of your weekends

and so forth but you would really get a first-class economic education. It was equivalent to a very strong undergraduate major and going on with some graduate work in economics. So that was, from my point of view, an enormous opportunity, and I went into it with that kind of motivation, as did a number of other people, at least those of us who were similarly motivated. We really worked very hard. I worked there much harder than I'd ever done in any college course. I had the advantage: I had taken the economics in the Philippines, so I'd had a fair amount of economics already by this point, and I'd already been very attracted by it. I'd never had it in college, and I wish now I had because I found the subject very fascinating. But in any event, I really worked hard in that course and did, for instance, all the recommended reading and so forth. I not only read what I was supposed to be reading but any recommended reading and so forth to the extent I could possibly get done. I just soaked it up like a sponge. I was fascinated by the topic, the whole subject. It was in my mind an enormous opportunity. So I did very well in that course, and I was one of the real top graduates. The really top ones had had very strong backgrounds in math coming in, and I hadn't had that much math. I had to get it there in that course, but I was in the upper 10th or 20th percent of the class. In fact, at the end of the course they had us take the graduate record exam as a measuring stick for themselves and so forth. I knew I had a great deal of advantage, because for the normal undergraduate major in economics you have your courses spread over four years, maybe three, but we had it all concentrated in six months and we had a broader scope than anybody in undergraduate studies normally would get. So we would get extremely high scores in the graduate record exam as a consequence. I managed to get actually the highest score they'd ever had in the graduate record exam from the people who had taken this course up to that point. So I really worked hard and I benefited enormously from that. Again, I was coming out of these in a very, very positive mode and then went off to this Vietnamese language training, first in the CORDS training for seven weeks, which was part military and part pacification. I remember walking into this auditorium the first morning - we were being trained over at the old FSI, Arlington Towers.

Q: The garage, actually.

McCONVILLE: I walked into this auditorium for the first session. As I say, I did come out of the economic training where all of my colleagues in the class were all of about the same age. At that time, of course, they had an age limit of 31 for incoming Foreign Service Officers, and the average age was 26. That happened to be what I was when I came in. But these people were now mostly in their early 30s and had had a couple assignments abroad in most cases. When we came, we had our hair cut in normal haircut fashion, normal trim, and wore suits every day in class, and we had a lot of respect for authority and so forth, all these that had existed at the time I first joined the Foreign Service. Well, I walked into this class and here you had half of the room filled by these young people just off of graduate school. Some of them had been dragging graduate school on for a fair amount of time. They had beards and long hair, and they were dressed very, very casually, sweatshirts and tennis shoes. They deliberately were defiant of authority. Many of them, when lectures were going on, would sit there and read a newspaper or something or other. The other half of the room was filled by these Army majors who were all dressed in civilian clothes but all looked like they had got clothes

from the same rack and all had shortly trimmed hair, and they took notes. It was weird. So Henry Sizer and I - he was the political officer - we were kind of the two outsiders but a bridge between the two. We were neither fish nor fowl in this case. Of course, for most of the people, either because of their own conviction or because of peer pressure, all these young people, civilians, were very anti-war, many of them militantly anti-war. The Army majors, of course, were the hawks. And the idea that these people were going to be together for 21 weeks, seven weeks of this training and the first 14 weeks of language - the rest of us were going on to nine or 10 months, I think it was, in language - was an extraordinarily volatile mix, and it was a rude shock for me. I couldn't believe that I was going to be going into a class like this. Well, what was striking by the time the seven weeks were over, certainly by the time of 21 weeks, it was amazing how many of these people, both among the young civilians and the Army majors, had come to break down these barriers and come to realize that they really weren't much different from each other and had developed some real strong bonds of friendship and so forth and certainly understanding at least of each other. Now, on each side you had a far right and far left, militants who weren't going to give any ground whatsoever. The bulletin board would be full of notices about peace marches and so forth, and then there would be other ones tacked up there with "Commie Symp (sympathizer)." So there were some hard right and hard left, and they never really reconciled, but probably 90 percent of the people found that behind the outward facade they really weren't all that much different, and they came to understand and appreciate the perspective at least of the other individual. But, of course, the whole topic of Vietnam was just constantly on our minds, and I needed to rationalize this myself because here I was going to go off to Vietnam, I was going to be involved in this war and I was doing it in a sense voluntarily, and I had some very strong doubts about the wisdom of what we were doing in Vietnam myself. Now, by this time Nixon had come in and he had begun the Vietnamization program. So I had rationalized it to myself to some extent. My own view was that, whatever the reasons and the rightness of our being involved, we had indeed gotten involved and we couldn't simply just turn our back and say, "Well, that's it, folks. We're leaving," because of the consequences for the rest of the world and how they would look on the United States if we were to do that, particularly in neighboring countries in Asia but also for the Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese. There were a lot of South Vietnamese who had stuck their necks out a long way because of us, and we had at least some obligation to try to find a way that we would get out in a way that gave them some sort of a chance. So the Vietnamization program itself made a certain amount of sense as a way of doing this. Then during the period we were there, the Cambodian incursion occurred.

Q: That was in June of 1970.

McCONVILLE: No, I think it was earlier than that.

Q: Or maybe April.

McCONVILLE: Possibly.

Q: The students were still on campus.

McCONVILLE: I remember all this because, as I say, these huge peace marches in Washington were going on and so forth. In the Cambodian incursion, I, too, felt betrayed in the sense that this seemed to be totally at odds again with the whole concept of Vietnamization. It turned out that after I got to Vietnam - and this was true of most of us who ultimately got there - we discovered that one of the consequences of this whole Cambodia thing was in fact that the North Vietnamese and the Communist role in the South was greatly diminished by the loss of these safe areas and so forth just across the Cambodian border. During most of the time I was there, in the delta region of Vietnam the Communist influence had declined very significantly and broad swaths of the delta in fact were under pretty significant government control. So it did in fact have a significant consequence in Vietnam. You looked at it differently when you were there; when it happened, it was something. So they got concerned enough at the White House that actually Henry Kissinger, who was then National Security Advisor, actually came and addressed us, our class - we weren't majors then at that time; we were just civilian - and spoke to us for an hour or more trying to explain what we were doing in Vietnam. It was really a pretty extraordinary experience, for me in a sense too because I also went through this metamorphosis in which I came away with a much greater appreciation that the outward facade often was very misleading and that, just because these kids had beards or long hair and dressed very casually and were defiant of authority, indeed they weren't all that much different. In fact, we had more sophisticated dialogue and understanding, debate, on what was going on in Vietnam than a lot of other people elsewhere. One of the more dismaying things was that some of the senior people from the administration came over to talk to us, people like U. Alexis Johnson, for example, who was - what was the number three position in the State Department at that time? - Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the Department. He came over and gave a lecture, and his whole rationale for involvement in Vietnam was based on the idea that we couldn't let Munich happen again and comparing it to the pre-World War II experience and so forth. Those kind of argument had been long dismissed and set aside in any kind of sophisticated debated on Vietnam, and yet this is what seemed to be propelling and impelling people like U. Alexis Johnson and so forth. This was very dismaying, that people were in fact making judgments based in this kind of context. It was really pretty disturbing. But most of us did end up going to Vietnam. Once I got there, even though I was in the USAID Joint Economic Office and was in Saigon and virtually all of these other people were in these districts around the country, I still had ties to many of them and many of them would come into Saigon and I'd see them when they were there, or when I did quite a bit of traveling around the country, I would see them. And very large numbers of them came to have a very different sort of perspective on Vietnam after they'd spent some time there themselves, even those who had been most militantly opposed, their views were moderated by the experience. For many of those young people who went out to be advisors in those districts, they had more authority in those kind of roles than they would have had for years in the State Department. One of the problems subsequently came to be that when these people were assigned in their second tours to routine junior officer jobs somewhere else in the world, they found it a pretty big letdown. But whatever, it was a pretty extraordinary experience. I did go through the Vietnamese language training as well. The Vietnamese language; it's almost like another variation of Chinese and they do

use Chinese characters, but they also have the Vietnamese alphabet which was devised by a French priest sometime in the....

Q: Actually it's based on the Portuguese alphabet.

McCONVILLE: It was a French priest, I think, that devised the alphabet for them, so you could read Vietnamese without having to know the Chinese characters, although the papers there did have Chinese characters. Still, it was totally different from learning something like Spanish because it's much harder to learn a language in which there's no correspondence with English whatsoever. Again, I worked hard at it and I came out with, I think, a 2+/3 or something like that. Very few people did that well in it. So I went off to Vietnam.

Q: You were in Vietnam from when to when?

McCONVILLE: I arrived in about July of 1970 and I left in January of 1974, so I was there about three and a half years.

Q: A good, solid tour.

McCONVILLE: At the time that I arrived, they didn't have an economic section in the embassy as such. It happened to be just coincidental with my arrival there was a named Chuck Cooper, who was an extraordinarily bright and able fellow, a doctorate from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). He had been at the Rand corporation, he worked for the Council of Economic Advisors and so forth, and he'd been involved in the whole Vietnam operation for some years by that point. He was still only in his upper 30s, I think. He had just come back out there again. He was very well connected within the White House and so forth, and he had come out there on the condition that he would be Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs in the embassy but he'd have no staff over there. He had one staff assistant whom he would put on special kinds of tasks, but other than that the Joint State/AID Economic Office would serve as his staff. We would also serve the AID director. Cooper had been out there before and had been out there within the AID structure. That had left him very unhappy, and he wanted to pursue economic policy with the Vietnamese government independently of the AID operation *per se*, so that our Joint Economic Office, which probably had at least 10 officers or more - two of us were State Department people assigned there; the others were all AID officers headed by the office director, who was an exceptional guy Cooper had brought back out.

Q: Who was that?

McCONVILLE: His name was Bill Sharp. Sharp had a doctorate from Harvard and so forth in economics. Cooper had very strong convictions about persuading the Vietnamese to adopt very dramatic economic reforms, which were basically going to be far more market-oriented. That was his objective, and he had strong backing from very important people in the administration. Sharp was one of his close allies, and Sharp was placed at the head of the Joint State/AID Economic Office. Most of the AID people in there were

all either doctorates or masters' degrees in economics. Here I was with my economic background consisting of primarily this FSI course, although I had a little training at the University of the Philippines. But it turned out to be an enormous opportunity for me in many ways. First of all, one of the problems was, when you went through this FSI economics course - it was an intensive course - but for a lot of people who then went on to fairly ordinary economic assignments somewhere else in the State Department operation, they really didn't have a lot of opportunity to develop and apply this breadth of economic training that they had acquired, so you tended to lose it fairly rapidly unless you got it in such a concentrated dose. Well, I had this great fortune of finding myself working with professional economists, and while I was at a disadvantage to some extent in that I didn't have the depth of economic academic training that they had, still I had enough that I could, by being very desirous of acquiring more, be able to develop this and work with professional economists and get an enormous amount of on-the-job training. Unlike most economic jobs in the State Department, which were reporting on what was going on in the economy and so forth and a lot of other things that didn't require a great deal of in-depth economic background, the Joint Economic Office, State/AID, and I, we were in fact the advisors to the Vietnamese government on running their economy. We worked extremely closely with the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance and so forth, and we in effect were working with them on running the Vietnamese economy. It was an extraordinary experience. Because of that FSI economics course, I had enough background that I could fit into this, and I continued to get an economic education while I was doing it. Now, my first job in the State/AID Economic Office was as what was known as the rice man. It turned out to be a job of pretty considerable consequence. In Vietnam during this period, much of the countryside had been taken over by the Vietcong and all the people had fled to the cities, so the production of rice had fallen dramatically so that in the mid-'60s they had begun importing rice from the United States. In the United States, of course, we had this PL-480 program. They were importing it under PL-480, and that was not the cheapest rice in the world, by any means, but the US government had an interest, and if you're going to import rice, you import it from the United States under the PL-480, because of the political weight of the rice people and rice industry in the United States.

Q: Louisiana and California and Arkansas.

McCONVILLE: Right. You know, almost all rice produced in the United States is exported. At that time we weren't very competitive with anywhere in the world. Much of the rice being grown in the United States was being grown to export to Vietnam. At the same time, what was happening then, more and more of the countryside was indeed becoming pacified, and that was particularly true in the delta where most of the rice was grown, partly as a consequence of the Cambodian incursion. That, and also the fact that the AID effort there had put a lot of resources into developing the high-yielding energy rice varieties down there, and so as a consequence, rice production was growing again rapidly in Saigon. They still at that point hadn't had enough yet to be able to supply the central and northern parts of South Vietnam, Danang, and those kind of areas up there, but they were at least accounting for a substantial amount of the rice in Saigon. Some of my predecessors, they'd first gotten extremely pessimistic about getting this rice out of

the delta and they'd been giving forecasts about how much rice was needed for the upcoming year. As I say, much of the rice being planted and was growing in the United States was actually just being grown for this market and wouldn't have been grown otherwise. So they were forecasting that there were going to be ever increasing amounts needed. Well, at some point this leveled off, and so suddenly the forecasts had proven to be excessive overestimates of the need, and rice was piling up everywhere and they had every possible grain storage in Vietnam filled with rice. Some of it was being eaten by rats. Of course, the price of rice was practically on the floor, and all this sort of thing. So it would have been a big fiasco. Then they went from that circumstance to one in which now they were growing all of this rice in the delta, and one of the big issues with the economic policy was getting the Vietnamese government to raise the price of rice, which they considered to be a big political issue, so that there would be more incentive for the farmers down there to grow it. That was a big issue we had with Vietnam, and that was one of the reasons why all of this was being centered in the economic office rather than the agricultural AID office, because it was so much an economic issue. My immediate predecessor had gone through the circumstance where, between he and the AID agricultural office, they had become overly optimistic about how much rice they were going to get out of the delta and they kept telling Washington they didn't need any more rice. Washington was under all sorts of pressure from the people who were growing it there saying this was causing a calamity in the U.S. rice production, and so forth. It turned out that some of this rice that they were expecting to come out of the delta didn't materialize and suddenly they had rice shortages. The Vietnamese government was panicking because they were fearful that, if rice prices shot up too much and there were rice shortages, this could of enormous political consequence. So they used some of their cash reserves, which had largely been supplied by AID, to go buy rice in Taiwan and in Thailand. This caused a political explosion in the United States because of the fact there was an excessive amount of rice in the United States in storage there because of the expectations that they were going to need more in Vietnam. So this then had been the other side of the coin and there had been tremendous brouhaha about that sort of thing. So as I stepped into that job these were the sorts of things I had to avoid, and I had to come up with realistic projections about two things: first of all, about how much rice we were going to need for the upcoming year and, secondly, to work with the Vietnamese government on rice price policy, finding ways to persuade them and to increase the price of rice to be able to stimulate more domestic production.

Q: How did you find your Vietnamese counterparts?

McCONVILLE: The ones that we worked with were, for the most part, very good. There was a very limited pool of them, particularly on the economic side. AID had been sending people back to the United States for economic training and various other kinds of training, and these people were beginning to return to Vietnam at this point. They had had very good educations and were very young and bright, doctorates and so forth from top schools in the United States, and very much imbued with U.S. and Western attitudes towards economics as opposed to the old Vietnamese style, and so forth. These people were the ones that Cooper was counting on to be able to bring about the kind of economic reforms that he was espousing, and he had enormous standing with them. They had built

small cadres around themselves of people who were like minded, and these people were of exceptional quality. Now, once you got beyond them, then there was practically nothing. The caliber of the typical civil servant was abysmal. Many of these people only showed up for work about once a week or something. So this small handful of people would have to do so much, but those people on the whole were very capable and very gifted and they were a pleasure to work with. In any event, this was one of the big issues I dealt with in the first year over there. Again, I used a combination of some of my economic training. For instance, the agricultural group, which is very, very large, in our AID mission, they had brought in large numbers on, TDY and so forth, of agricultural economists and so forth, who would devise all sorts of elaborate schemes for forecasting, none of which were worth a damn because the input that they had into it, the data, was so bad. But on the other hand, I had dug into this deeply enough to be able to accommodate those with that data. I knew what data actually did have some significant and which didn't. I put together my own little supply-and-demand curves, which by the standards of these guys were pretty primitive, but in fact they worked. So they were of some help to me. I went out and saw rice merchants and farmers and so forth and I traveled a great deal in the delta, going down with the people from the Vietnamese Ministry of Economy - we traveled together down there - and coming up with my own assessments of just how much rice was going to be available. I would send in this report once a month, the rice report, and I would keep everybody informed back in Washington what was going on. In fact, I got to be very, very good at it.

During my tour, we were always pretty close to the mark; we never had another fiasco. But then we went through this series of efforts to increase the rice price, to get the Vietnamese government to do it and then how to deal with that, and I learned things about that. For instance, when you raise the price of rice, one of the most important things was to have rice plentifully available. People were more prepared to accept an increase in the rice price as long as they were confident that they could get the rice. So every time we went through one of the rice price increases, we would work with the Vietnamese to have rice available widely. With any hint of any sort of shortage, they'd get more rice into the market right away and stabilize it at that price. By doing this, then we were getting increasing amounts from the delta, and by the time I actually got my first year done, we were actually making the first shipments up to Danang of delta rice, which was the first time they'd had it up there in probably a decade or something like that. So it was a success story. I was getting an awful lot of practical experience, but at the same time we worked long hours in that office. Only some of the very senior people had their spouses there. The rest of them that were married - I wasn't married myself - had their wives in places like Taiwan or Bangkok or the Philippines and would see them a couple times a year, two or three times a year. So we were all bachelors in effect and we lived near where we worked, so we typically would start very early in the morning and wouldn't usually get out of there until at least seven or 7:30 in the evening, and we routinely worked Saturday mornings. It was standard; you were expected to be there on Saturday morning. Usually about midday on Saturday. Sometime around 12 or one o'clock you'd get off, so you'd have Saturday afternoon and Sunday. But this also stimulated a great deal of camaraderie amongst us. All of this time while I was doing this rice job and was earning a very good reputation for it - and I got a lot of confidence from

Bill Sharp and Cooper and the other people in the office - I was also absorbing an awful lot of what these other people were doing. I was particularly fascinated with the financial work, working with the financial aspect of the economy. So I was learning this on the side. After about a year or so of the rice job, an opening came up on the financial side, and they agreed to put me in it.

Q: Before we leave rice, was rice being used when you were there as a form of payment to civil servants and people like that?

McCONVILLE: The civil servants did have some right to buy rice - I think they got a 100-kilo sack a month or something like that - so that was one of the benefits of being with the civil service. But rice was so readily available at that point that I'm not sure that that was anymore a major factor. But, yes, the civil servants did get some rice.

Q: Did you run across the rice buzzsaw from the Senators from Louisiana and others? If the Delta was beginning to produce its own rice, and a more palatable rice than we were producing in the United States, I take it, I would have thought that people from California and Arkansas and Louisiana would get kind of annoyed that....

McCONVILLE: They were annoyed, and this was, of course, one of the pressures I was under. I, at all costs, avoided a situation like my predecessor had gotten into where we had been underestimating the needs. At the same time I couldn't overestimate or it would depress the market there. But the amounts coming in from the United States that we needed kept falling. We stuck to our guns and we were right. By that time, there had been a greater appreciation in the U.S. that this simply was coming to an end, there wasn't going to be this huge market in Vietnam anymore, and if the rice was there in Vietnam, that era was coming to a close. They hadn't been happy with it, but by this time they had shifted their eyes elsewhere to some extent. It was still always in the background. If you miscalculated and you suddenly ended up with not enough rice in Vietnam and they brought in something from Taiwan or something, the consequences would be profound. There was a lot at stake in this job. Anyhow, after I got through with that, I actually got into the financial side, and before very long I was the head of the financial unit. There were three of us. The other two were AID people, both of whom had come after me, but one had a doctorate in economics and the other a master's in economics, and here I was the head of the unit, and I earned their respect. I had learned an awful lot, and I was fascinated by this. You know, there was always a war going on. By this time the number of American military involved was dropping dramatically. When I first arrived in mid-'70, I think the total number of troops in the country was down to 150,000, and they kept dropping.

Q: And it had been up to a half a million.

McCONVILLE: And then they were scheduled to keep dropping even further. Then, of course, by '73 or the end of '72, the truce was signed and we were down to 50 uniformed military in the country including the Marine guards. So during most of the time I was there, the American troop presence was either falling and the American troops were not

involved in that much more combat themselves. It was in this Vietnamization process, so it wasn't quite as devastating in that way as it may have been earlier on. But the war was still going on all this time. At the same time on the economic side of things, the reforms that Cooper had pushed so vigorously and which the Vietnamese adopted in a series of two major reforms were having an extraordinary impact. It was just absolutely fascinating for me to see firsthand what these kinds of policies could do. A big problem, for example, was the exchange rate had been fixed at 118 piaster to a U.S. dollar through most of the war years because of all the hyperinflation. Inflation had been 30/40 percent; it hadn't been hundreds and hundreds of percent like it was elsewhere, but it still was grossly overvalued. Well, one of the major reforms was to get the exchange rate up to a sustainable rate, and over a period of two reforms they got it up to around 400-and-some pesos to the dollar, and then the black market disappeared, because at that level the black market just didn't have any reason to exist anymore, so the black market in currency disappeared. And they had consolidated customs, tariffs, and so forth, so again black marketing in that sense, because tariffs were dropped dramatically and so forth, was no longer a major factor. Exports had been zero during most of the war years with this greatly overvalued Vietnamese currency - they'd only had about 10,000,000 dollars a year, which had all been rubber, which had been subsidized because of the influence of some of these rubbers growers. But with this new exchange rate, the exports went up the first year like 10 or 15 million; then it was up 20; and the next year it was heading up to 100 million - and to see all these things working, and suddenly because when you had a market working.... AID had a study commission some years earlier on post-war policy for Vietnam, so they had written this enormous volume, volumes - it was probably 10 books - on exports from Vietnam post-war. They had predicted they would get so much for tea and so much for some of these traditional exports. The fact is that, once they got the exchange rate up to a sustainable level and it became economically legitimate and economically rational to begin exporting and to bring in some products and do some work on them and re-export them, and so forth, there was a whole range of things being exported from Vietnam, small manufacturers of one kind or another that nobody had ever mentioned in these books. None of the things that they talked about as being exports ever really emerged. This was going on in places like Korea and Taiwan and so forth, this whole process. This is in fact where some of these economic policies had first been developed. It was just extraordinary to see how this worked and the way that it stimulated all sorts of entrepreneurship, how the Vietnamese people, once given the opportunity, would respond to the market forces and that the economy would become as dynamic as it did in a very short period of time. Then there was the '72 offensive when the North committed 13 divisions and so forth. That was a tremendous shock.

Q: The Easter Offensive, or something like that?

McCONVILLE: '72 was the offensive, and as a consequence of that, that really sort of stunted the economy again because of all the political concerns this raised, plus the fact that, from the point of view of any kind of economic aid, the U.S. Congress now was sort of reluctant to give any more aid, plus you had the tremendous commodity prices at the time and the oil crisis, so that our aid in that last year or so that I was there was being used entirely simply to fund the oil imports. There was nothing left for anything else. But

it showed me just what you can do with sound economic policies and how people respond to that, particularly people with the kind of cultural attitudes that most of Asia have. So that was a lesson that I came away from Vietnam with, was struck with profoundly. But the whole experience - this was part of it - I was enjoying the work so much, even though again there was always this overhang of the fact that the war was going on. They wanted me to stay. I wanted to stay, was tempted to stay longer, but at some point I figured I just had to get out of there if I was going to continue a career. One other sidelight during that period of time - it was again in '72 or early '73 - Cambodia was coming into crisis during this period, and the Khmer Rouge were running over more and more of the country. Of course, this was in the post incursion period. As more and more of the country was overrun by the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia which had been a rice exporter, was suddenly facing shortages of rice. Well, the first year that this happened, in fact it turned out to be a false shortage. They didn't have an economic section in the embassy as such. The AID mission was the economic section of the embassy in Cambodia, and they didn't have anybody over there who'd had any experience with rice and so they had sent of these panic cables to Washington about the need to get rice right away. There wasn't any available right at the moment from the PL-480 or anything they could get there fast enough, so they had to use some of the AID funds and purchase some from Thailand and Taiwan. Of course, this caused a political uproar in that context. Then what happened was the shortage proved to be inaccurate. In fact, there was a good deal of rice around and they didn't need this rice and it got wasted. It had been a big embarrassment. Well, the next year the same thing happened again. Suddenly the Cambodians were saying that there was this acute shortage of rice and they want to go buy rice. So Washington, this bunch of people who dealt with rice and such topics in AID and the Department of Agriculture and so forth, they were extraordinarily skeptical of this reported shortage and they wanted somebody to go over there and find out what the situation truly was, and they wanted me to go over there because they had confidence that I was someone who could find out what was really going on there. So I was asked to go on a TDY (temporary duty assignment) over to Cambodia, so I went over there. Cambodia was getting increasingly insecure at the time. The capital of Phnom Penh was relatively secure, and some small area around it, but then the only other major place that was secure was Battambang Province up near Thailand, which is where most of the surplus rice was produce. In fact, a lot of it was produced commercially up there. They had some big holdings that had produced rice on a commercial scale up there. So I would fly up to Battambang, went with a Cambodian official there, and tried to get at the bottom of all this, and I came to realize what had happened. In fact what had happened was that - you know, since the Lon Nol takeover, the throwing out of Prince Sihanouk, prices through this period had gone up dramatically. To back up just a bit, after all this involvement in Vietnam, when we reestablished an embassy in Cambodia and had a very modest AID mission and it was just the economic section of the embassy, half a dozen people or so, the by-word was supposed to be that we weren't going to get involved again like we were in Vietnam, that we would give these people some resources, they'd largely decide themselves how to handle it, and then we'd just wash our hands of it.

While most other prices had gone up by a factor of something like 150 or 200 percent, the price of rice was actually no higher than a couple years earlier. The Cambodian

government had taken great pride in the fact that they had managed to keep the price of rice stable, and, you know, all the other prices were rising. What this means in economic terms is that the price of rice was deflating dramatically relative to all other prices, and what happened as a consequence of this, and particularly because so much of the rice up in Battambang was being raised on a more or less commercial basis, the people who had been raising it commercially had absolutely no incentive to raise any more rice. They'd lose money raising rice. So there were huge areas up there that had gone out of production. They had also been allowing them to export it previously about a year or two year earlier. The government had decreed they wouldn't allow any more exports, so they had this fairly significant surplus and it had taken a year or so to draw this down. In addition, it was complicated by the fact that there was a significant drought that year. In fact, they were almost literally out of rice up there. There was still some rice up in Battambang, but it wasn't going to last more than a couple of months at most.

I talked to the rice merchants in Phnom Penh again. I had come to learn how to deal with these rice merchants; I had a lot of respect for these Chinese rice merchants. They were very clever and they were very shrewd, but one thing they almost never did, they never lied to you. They wouldn't tell you anything more than you asked. I also found out that if you went around to enough of them, if you kept hearing certain things, they were probably true. So after seeing a lot of these people, they had kept telling me that there really is no rice out there. And in all these areas where people were saying that the Khmer Rouge were occupying the area, and then once the price of rice gets high enough, it will suddenly mysteriously come out of the woodwork. "There is no rice out there. I have cousins and so forth that are out there. There is no rice out there." So I finally came to the conclusion that indeed there was no rice out there, that there was enough to last for a couple more months and then they would literally be out of rice. As you got nearer and nearer to the bottom, suddenly rice would simply disappear because it would become so valuable. So you wouldn't get all the way to no rice before you start having a real crisis on your hands. So I came back and pronounced what my findings were, and nobody wanted to back it in the embassy there, and the AID mission insisted I send out the cable all on the basis of 'McConville says'. So the cable literally went out "McConville says," not the embassy or the AID mission, "McConville says." I wrote this report explaining what happened and the consequence of the fact that the rice prices had been artificially kept so low for so long, what was happening there, and I said that within a couple of months they were going to have a very severe rice crisis, that right now the only rice left was in Battambang and they were still being able to transport it down there but that could be interrupted too. Then I went back off to Saigon, and within about two weeks of my getting back to Saigon, the road was cut between Battambang and Phnom Penh, so that rice that was up in Battambang now could not get down there. And within days, they had a terrible rice crisis. Soldiers were breaking into rice stores and stealing rice and there were riots, and Washington panicked. "We've got to get rice over there right away." We had some rice in Saigon, so we were able to get the Vietnamese to agree that some PL-480 rice that we still had there, would be flown over to Phnom Penh, and some of it we arranged to ship on small craft up the Mekong River. We had an amazing guy there in the AID mission who could deal with all these little small craft captains and pay them enough to get them to take this chance to take it up there. Suddenly then I was the guy

who had told everybody this was what was going to happen. They wanted me to go right back to Phnom Penh and to oversee this operation of getting the rice rationed and so forth to people and to get the rice prices increased and get something done about it. Two weeks earlier, as I say, nobody wanted to have anything to do with my forecast; it was all my forecast, not theirs. I came back and I was king of the roost. I told everybody what was happening. It was a couple weeks of the weirdest thing, getting that rice out there. That experience in Cambodia was something else. At that time the ambassador was in Washington, on home leave or something like that.

Q: Which ambassador is this, Graham Martin or...?

McCONVILLE: No, he was in Saigon. I'm talking about the ambassador in...

Q: Oh, John Gunther Dean?

McCONVILLE: No, that was long before him. It was a guy - I can't remember his name now - who was a career foreign service officer. His whole attitude had been we won't try to tell these people what to do in this kind of thing. So he was off in Washington for some reason, and Tom Enders was the deputy chief of mission. Enders was a diametrically opposed sort of personality. So when I came in, Enders was all, "What is it we have to do? I want to know," and I told him. Of course, my whole report had explained that so much of this had to do with the price and one of the first things you had to do was get the rice price up to some kind of realistic level so there would become incentive to plant rice at least for the next year, and there was still some possibility they could get some rice in the tail end of that year. I still remember this meeting. Enders was about six foot seven inches tall. He's sitting in this meeting and he's got the AID mission director, his economic counselor, and he's sitting in the room, and he looks at me and says, "What should the price of rice be?" I said, "We've got to do a good deal more analysis for that before you can say specifically what it should be, but it has to come up dramatically." He said, "Name me a price," so I said, "Twenty-five" whatever the currency was, and he turns to the AID director and says, "You go over to the Ministry of Economy and you tell that's part of the agreement. We've got to have that price up to 25." Then I told him, "First of all, if you're going to raise that price, you've got to have plenty of rice around." I said, "I can assure you from my own experience that people will be more willing accept an increase in the price of rice as long as they feel confident there's plenty of rice around. That's what really panics them when they don't think there's any rice around." So indeed that's what they did. Then Enders wanted me to stay over there and he wanted me to do the whole financial. He wanted to get involved dramatically with getting their economy back. So I told them I really didn't have the depth for that, and we ended up sending one of our really well-qualified analysts to go over there and work there for a year or so. Then I had to keep going back from time to time to keep helping with this rice situation. I did about half a dozen two- or three-week TDYs in Cambodia during this period, and it was getting dicier and dicier over there all the time. In fact, before I sent off this cable in which I stuck my neck way out, I had to somehow reassure myself that indeed there wasn't going to be rice coming out from these areas around Phnom Penh, that these rice merchants had convinced me would not happen. These areas were shaky as far as security

was concerned, but some one from the Ministry of Economy in a UN vehicle would go out into these areas. I persuaded them to take me with them, and we went out and toured around, because I had my neck out so far, and I came away reassured that indeed there was not going to be any rice coming out of those areas. When the ambassador there at the time learned that I had done this, he gave me a bit of a lecture for having done it. He said, "I appreciate your professionalism, but...," but it was my neck going out there. But whatever, I did this, and in fact there was a lot of consequence involved to what I had done. But the irony of all of this was there was almost no one in the State Department working on economic issues in Vietnam. They had one FS-05 or something like that, and he was of no consequence. So all of the people who were aware of all this were people in AID, people in USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), people at the National Security Council and the White House and so forth, but no one in the State Department. I recognized that within the State Department I was going to get almost no credit for this, because no one knew about it, and they certainly didn't know of the stakes that were involved or appreciated it. Like those people in USDA and AID and so forth, when they had a crisis, I was the guy they wanted specifically, and in fact I did the job, but it really wasn't going to be doing me much good in the State Department. So I finally accepted the fact that, if I wanted to get somewhere in the Foreign Service, I simply had to get another assignment out of Vietnam. I did, and I'm going to Korea, Seoul. That was my first tour there, '74 to '77. When I first arrived there, it was a joint State/AID economic office, but AID was phasing out, and during the second half of my tour it was totally a State operation. But again that experience in Vietnam, particularly working with all the professional economists, was a terribly enriching experience. It didn't do me an awful lot of good in my State Department career except in the sense that I learned more economics out there.

Q: Well, this is the great fun of the Foreign Service. Well, this probably is a good place to stop. So we'll pick this up in 1974 when you left Vietnam. By the way, when you left Vietnam, how did you feel things were going in Vietnam at the time you left?

McCONVILLE: Well, unfortunately it was pretty clear things weren't going well. The truce had been signed, of course. I left in January 1974. Like most of us who had been there for a while, I had a network of colleagues, some from AID, a few from State, but many of them had been there quite a bit of time and they had spent an awful lot of time in areas all over Vietnam. They were extremely knowledgeable, and most of these people, who I had enormous respect for, were very despairing of the way things were going, that the idea that the Vietnamese government would be able to sustain this long after the truce, that things were going downhill. And the economy was suffering too as a consequence, and the fact that the only economic aid we were getting at that point really was to buy the petroleum because of the huge increase in the price of oil at that time. I left in January of '74. It was April of '75, of course, when Saigon collapsed. I think when I left in '74, I expected that was likely. It always troubled me deeply, particularly the economy, because after those reforms were enacted I came away convinced that, had they been able to stop the war, South Vietnam had the kind of people around in some of the economic policy positions, they had the economic reforms in place, and just the entrepreneurship and the work ethic of the Vietnamese people was such that, had they

been able to stop the war, Saigon or the South Vietnamese at least had all the makings of being another eventual economic miracle and that you could have another repeat of a Taiwan and a Korea there. I still believe that's true, if they can ever get rid of the communist and socialist government they have. They tried to open up a bit to the West, but from all I understand, most of the bureaucracy, the communist bureaucracy, has never really been willing to do anything more than fairly superficially for them. They're doing better now than they were before. They've opened up some, but it's still a big disappointment. I have no doubt that, had they been able to stop the war and pursued those kind of policies, if you're looking now 25 years later, Vietnam would be another one of the Southeast Asian success stories from an economic perspective.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll pick this up in 1974 when you arrived in Korea, and we'll talk about what you were doing there and all at that time.

***

This is April 2, 2001. Don, you were in Korea from 1974 to when?

McCONVILLE: '77, three years.

Q: And what was your job?

McCONVILLE: I was an economic officer in what was when I first arrived there a joint State/AID economic office like I had been in in Saigon. The head of the office was actually an AID officer. He's another guy, a Ph.D. economist, another Ph.D. from Harvard, a very bright and able economist. There were, I think, a total of five of us in the economic section, and three of them were AID and two State, and we had a commercial office which was still at that time part of the State Department, but they were a separate unit down the hall. The economic counselor was also the AID director, a guy named Mike Adler. That went on for about a year and half. At the end of that year and a half, midway through my tour, they wound down the AID operation - Adler was the last director - and so during the last half, second half, of my tour there, the economic counselor was John Bennett, who came and was head of the economic commercial, and they also put AID and USDA underneath his umbrella. He was kind of a supra-economic counselor, and an exceptional officer too, whom I learned a great deal from. That experience again in the first year and a half there was working again with these AID economists as well as back in the State Department role with their usual reporting. In fact, my focus was on finance, particularly balance of payments, and then also on trade, and these happened to be two of the very significant issues at that time in Korea. Korea was rapidly becoming, along with Taiwan, one of what would really become the economic tigers of East Asia. This was sort of becoming apparent in Korea at that time. It still wasn't all that widely understood elsewhere, but Korea as recently as the early '60s had been one of the poorest countries in the world with a per-capita income of less than 100 dollars. Then with the coup and Park Chung Hee taking over the military government, although he was nominally elected and subsequently on several different occasions. Whatever you might say about the political side of things, economically Park

Chung Hee was very deeply committed to surrounding himself with technocrats and taking their advice in modernizing Korea. So they had increasing numbers of US-trained Ph.D. economists in the government. Most of them had been sent over originally by AID. It was one of the biggest benefits of the years of AID there. We had an exceptional relationship with them. The AID mission, when they sometime in the '60s - maybe in the '50s - had built these two buildings, and one of them housed the AID mission, and the identical building next-door housed what had been the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance. By this time it was solely the Ministry of Economy. The Ministry of Finance was building a block or two away. The AID economic people had been so closely involved with the Korean economy that we had an exceptional relationship. Now we were at the tail end of this, but it was striking in that we still had a meeting once a month - it was chaired by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) resident representative there - and meeting with an assistant minister from the Korean government and some of his staff, and the head of the US economic section, my boss, and myself, and we would meet and go over the monetary situation in Korea and a lot of their financial planning. It was extraordinary access that we still had, it was quite fascinating for me again to further my education in economics. This was during the height of the first major oil crisis, and, if you recall that period, one of the consequences when OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) had first dramatically raised their oil prices, and with all its consequences for much of the developing world including very particularly Korea, which was totally dependent on imported oil, this caused a very serious balance-of-payments problems. But at the same time one of the other consequences of this was that the international banking system had huge amounts of money that were generated by these oil-producing countries and were looking for places to put that money. And they had really begun in a major way to start lending to developing countries. Now, previously, developing countries had largely been limited to the World Bank or the other regional international lending institutions and bilateral aid as a way of financing the development since it was very difficult for them to get significant commercial funds. But because of all of this money now that the international banks had, they were beginning to really in a significant way begin lending to the more creditworthy developing nations, and Korea was one of them that fit this bill. Now, Korea again had a very significant balance-of-payments deficit, but there were those that were close to the situation who could see that they had tremendous growth potential and were growing at a very significant rate already. So a major part of my job ended up being keeping very well informed and keeping the Department and others informed about the financial situation, particularly the balance of payments in Korea. We had just a constant parade of bankers coming through, American bankers seeking this kind of information. We put out a lot of reports on it and had them handy. They were unclassified for the most part, and we kept certain portions of them unclassified that we could pass out to the American bankers. So this was a very fascinating sort of experience. I literally became such an expert on the balance of payments in Korea that the IMF resident rep - when the World Bank people and some of the others, the Asian Development Bank people would come over from missions, they didn't have a resident there, and he would set up their meetings and so forth, and I was always on their schedule to discuss balance of payments, because I had become a pretty significant expert in this just by the fact that I became so immersed in it. That was a very, very satisfying experience for myself, and we did very, very well in the way we

projected. In fact, we were at odds with the US Intelligence community and so forth, who were much more pessimistic about Korea's outlook, and we got into some rather detailed battles with them over what was happening and, in fact, proved to be correct with our estimates. In any event, then the other dimension that I had there was the international trade role. Korea at that time was still very, very heavily dependent on textile exports. In fact, of their exports at that time textiles were far and away the biggest. They were still exporting things like wigs and plywood and some fairly simple manufactures, black-and-white televisions for example. In fact, it may be one of the last places in the world where they were building black-and-white televisions. Virtually all the black-and-white-televisions still being sold in the US were being manufactured in Korea at that time. But this was all in the first wave, and they were building a steel mill at that time and shipyards that were coming on line and so forth, but it was still all fairly basic.

Textiles were hugely important to them, but this was also the period when in the U.S. just a few years earlier the Nixon administration, under enormous pressure from the textiles states, had committed itself to getting a long-term textile agreement covering synthetic fabrics, not just cotton. The long-term agreement on cotton textiles had dated back to the early 60s. In fact, if you recall, I had mentioned I had that three-month assignment in Washington before going off to my first assignment in Panama when we were held up by the travel freeze and had worked in this Office of Textiles and Fibers at that time. That was with the long-term cotton textile agreement. Here this was a decade later and with enormous pressure the U.S. had forced Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong to become significant members of what was now a long-term agreement on synthetic textiles as well as cotton textiles, or synthetic and wool, among some of the industrial nations. The EU and so forth were members. Henry Kissinger wrote an entire chapter on one of his books on this whole episode of getting those agreements established and the pressures that were used and the pressures that were being brought on the Nixon administration. This was just a few years after the agreement was in place and was functioning, but during the period I was there, there were some very significant textile negotiations with Korea at that time on extending and continuing their agreement. I was the point person in the embassy for these. Again, it was something that I found I functioned very well in. It was headed by USTR (United States Trade Representative), and the State Department had an important role along with Congress and the Labor Department, and these negotiators came to have a lot of confidence in me as being the local guy to help them understand the Koreans. So for all the negotiations in Korea, I was part of the delegation. In fact, they even talked about bringing me back to Washington for some negotiations. That never quite came about, but I got very extended exposure to it and established a pretty good reputation with these people. Being someone from the State Department, you were always under some suspicion that you were more interested in Korea's perspective than that of the U.S., but I came to be able to build confidence and trust among them that I was pursuing the same interest as they were in helping them understand how they could best accomplish this with Korea and still do no more damage to our other interests than we needed to do. All this negotiating experience was of very considerable value to me.

Q: Could you comment on how you perceived it at the time, sort of the style of Korean negotiations?

McCONVILLE: The Koreans I found to be - and this was the reputation they had with these people as well - they were extraordinarily tough negotiators but also very pragmatic in the end. You could strike a deal with them. You probably would have to go on and on and on through the nights and have a number of sessions, but in the end they understood strength and they would squeeze you for as much as they thought they could squeeze you. The Koreans are, behind their somewhat stoic facade, a very emotional people, and you had to be careful to be sure that you respected their dignity and that you didn't offend them, but at the same time they understood and appreciated hard-nosed negotiating tactics. Once you struck a deal with them, they kept the deal. Again, if they could find any sort of loophole at all, they would take advantage. If you had some kind of power over them to be able to punish them in some way or other, they would not be happy about that but they would respect it. Now, if you were too crass in the way you exercised this power, they could get highly offended, and they were capable of cutting off their nose to spite their face, if it was something that deeply offended them. But at the same time, if you wielded this pressure in a way that they recognized it was there, they knew that you would use it, they would take it right up to the point where they felt they had gotten as far as they could, then they would strike the deal and they wouldn't be offended by it, they would feel that was the way you do business. It was an exceptional experience for me that was to pay off a lot in my subsequent career.

Q: I was wondering whether the negotiators had to keep going back for instructions.

McCONVILLE: No, this was something very unusual about textile negotiations. Textile negotiations are different than virtually all other negotiations in the United States government, in that the team is comprised of, as I say, USTR, State, Commerce and Labor. The Treasury Department would play a role sometimes. Long ago people at senior levels in the U.S. government had come to the conclusion that if they were going to try to thrash these kinds of things out at senior levels within the government, they would be bogged down interminable. So they had evolved a system whereby the team that did the negotiating basically just made all the decisions themselves. They never referred anything back to Washington, and the people who were there were empowered to simply strike whatever deal they thought they could strike. Your negotiating teams are always accompanied by advisors from the industry and union. They would not be in the negotiations; they'd be in a hotel room, and you would go and confer and consult with them, and I was exposed to them as well during this period of time. You, in effect, were negotiating with them at the same time you were negotiating with the Koreans, and you were quite aware that the Korean government was doing the same thing with its industry. The arguments within the negotiating team away from the table could be extremely heated, and again it was a matter of part of the leverage that you had within the government yourself to be able to bring to bear. But, see, you didn't have any instructions. There was never a written instruction of any kind whatsoever. You simply made these decisions yourself on the spot. You'd have to get a consensus among the negotiating team. This was pretty extraordinary and it made for a very unusual set of negotiating circumstances. I was exposed at great length to this whole process while I was there and had earned a reputation among these people as someone who was pretty

good at this game. Korea during this time continued to make great strides economically. Despite the fact of the oil prices and so forth, which was threatening a recession, I think growth was never under seven percent, and by the time I was leaving it was back up to 10 or 12 percent a year or more growth rates. We used to joke that a Korean recession was defined as two consecutive quarters of growth of seven percent or greater. It was truly exciting to see all this happening, and, again, coming away from Vietnam and Saigon where I'd seen some of these market-oriented principles work, even though they got stunted in Vietnam, and then to get all this reinforced in Korea, it opened my eyes in a huge way as to the significance of the economic policies of developing countries and their ability to be able to modernize and to ultimately climb to a level where they were at very strong self-sustaining growth and being able to transform and modernize their countries. That was a great experience in that economic office. I was there for three years, and then my next assignment was off in Washington. By this time I'd been abroad for almost seven years.

Q: I want to go back to Korea. When you were in Korea, both negotiating and, say, Congressional visits and all, were there problems of payoffs? The Koreans were used to passing money around. Did this impinge on the work you were doing?

McCONVILLE: Not really. In the textile negotiations, first of all, the U.S. textile interests were very strong in the United States; they had exceptional political influence, and they weren't about to give anything more than they had to. Now, on the Korean side there could have been corruption involved. You negotiated an overall quota with Korea product by product by product. It's a tremendous series of products that you would negotiate on. But once they had their overall quota, they divided it up among their producers, and there could have been corruption on that side of things, although, again, it was such significant interest that whoever was doing it was always going to be under tremendous scrutiny. If they were being too favorable to one or the other, there would have been a lot of counter-pressure. So there really wasn't, certainly from the American side, any kind of pressure to be corrupt or otherwise do something under the table. As I say, in every negotiation, the advisors, as they were called, were there at the hotel room and you would be consulting on a very, very regular basis. It was a pretty open process in that sense, in that in any sort of deal you struck, these people from the industry and unions were going to know every detail. It was also an education to watch these people operate. They worked the various industry associations or were with the union, and they would do a great deal of posturing when they were all together about how tough they were and how demanding they would be, but they recognized that some of these things couldn't be negotiated. They never wanted to admit to their fellow lobbyists or advisors that they would concede or be weak in any way, but they would confide to us individually - not so much me as the chief negotiator and others in the negotiation - what they could really accept. They never wanted to admit it openly, because they would have to go back to their membership and then defend this, and they would want to appear that they had battled it down to the very end and gotten the best deal that they could get. If they got back there and got too much heat, then they never wanted to be in a position of having openly accepted the deal. They would threaten to raise hell about it and so forth. It was educational too in terms of seeing how some of these process work. The chief

negotiator was a guy named Tony Jurik, and he was in USTR, which at that time didn't officially exist as such. It was a small office in the State Department. The textile operation had been set up primarily because of the significance of the textile industry, to have someone close to the White House who was going to negotiate these agreements. The State Department head of the office at that time - it was actually a division of the Office of Trade - was a guy named Mike Smith, and Mike was a State Department Foreign Service Officer. He subsequently became the chief negotiator and the decided that his best career track was to stay in Trade, and he was a major player behind the scenes in getting USTR established as a permanent agency and getting himself named as the first U.S. ambassador to GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), which was an ambassadorial rank that USTR was responsible for staffing. Mike subsequently ended up being a deputy USTR. But all of this time, he remained as a State Department Foreign Service Officer. He was quite proud of being a Foreign Service Officer, despite the fact that he would battle State about getting all of these negotiating issues transferred to USTR.

Q: Actually I interviewed Mike some years ago.

McCONVILLE: Well, Mike and I ended up having an extremely close relationship, adversarial in some ways, but I had a long, long relationship with Mike. Mike was pretty exceptional too. I learned an awful lot from him about the way he dealt with these advisors and how he handled these advisors in such a way that he convinced them that he was getting as much as they could possibly get, and at the same time it was something that he was confident that could be negotiated, and he was a master at that. But in any event, it was a pretty extraordinary experience, and I came away, again, truly impressed by what the right kind of economic policies could do in the developing world, and at the same time the political situation created under Park Chung Hee wasn't quite as draconian as some people try to suggest. It was still pretty authoritarian, although Koreans tend to like it that way up to a point, but that was becoming more and more of an issue as I left Korea. Then when I left Korea and went back to Washington, I had been hoping to then get into the financial side of things in EB but ended up taking an assignment in the East Asia Bureau. This was in 1977, under the Carter administration.

The Carter administration had brought into the State Department a number of relatively young people who had been sort of outsiders in the Democratic party foreign affairs community who had backed Carter, and when he won the nomination and then subsequently was elected President, many of these people were rewarded by significant positions in the State Department. One of them was Richard Holbrooke, who was 35 years old, as an Assistant Secretary for East Asia. Now, Holbrooke had actually been a junior Foreign Service Officer in Vietnam before he left the Foreign Service, but now he reappeared as the Assistant Secretary. One of the things Holbrooke believed in was the importance of the economic side of things. Holbrooke attached a lot of importance to the economic dimension of our foreign relations in East Asia, and as far as his approach to this, he had backed the idea of significantly strengthening the Regional Economic Office in the East Asia Bureau. They had picked a guy named Erland Higginbotham as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, and then this Regional Economic

Office was expanded from four officers to seven officers, and I was one of the people that joined at that time. The model was supposed to be sort of the Regional Economic Office in the European Bureau, which had considerable stature within the Department. Now, there, of course, you had the European Economic Community so there had been a body for the regional office to work with. There wasn't such an entity in East Asia, but, in any event, you still had economic officers on the bilateral desk, but more of the economic policy was centralized in the regional economic, although there was a little tension on this, but we had pretty strong backing from Holbrook. In the role that I played there, there were two dimensions. I was responsible for the trade issues, and of course there I now brought my background from Korea, and textiles among other things were very important all throughout that region. The other dimension was ASEAN, or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, which had been in existence since the mid-'60s but had been until about 1975 sort of a moribund body. But the Southeast Asian nations, in about 1975, had amongst themselves had decided to make the ASEAN organization a much more significant organization, primarily putting emphasis on their economic relations, and they were going to develop tariff preferences amongst themselves and various other economic schemes not to go so far as the European Community had but to begin to move in that direction, building some sort of a unified economic entity in Southeast Asia. Well, from the U.S. perspective this was interesting because it was a way that we could relate now to post-Vietnam Southeast Asia. There was both a political and an economic dimension, but the economic dimension was the most important at the time because the ASEAN nations themselves wanted to portray this largely as an economic organization rather than a political union of some sort. Even though the presidents would meet annually and so forth, the emphasis was still on their economic ties to each other. So the second part, the other part, of my role in the Regional Economic Office was this economic relationship with ASEAN, which was concentrated particularly in two major meetings, the first of which was the first U.S.-ASEAN meeting. It was a ministerial-level meeting, and that first one was held in the Philippines. Our office, and myself in particular, had a very major role in preparing the U.S. for this, but it was something that Holbrooke was going to represent the U.S. in. We didn't get ministerial level. They had some ministers involved; we didn't going to ASEAN. But they were generally very well disposed towards getting this kind of recognition from the United States. It was beginning a process in which ASEAN was beginning to meet with foreign countries collectively, and they wanted to expand this and were particularly pleased to get this sort of role with the United States. Then the following year we had the first U.S.-ASEAN economic ministerial in the United States, and for that we were able to get five U.S. cabinet officers involved, and the ASEAN people all brought a significant number of ministers from their side. That went off exceedingly well. Again, I was one of the key staff people involved in organizing all of this, and it was, again, a very educational experience in getting involved and seeing it firsthand. As I say, there were five U.S. cabinet officers; in addition to the Secretary of State, it was Commerce, Treasury, maybe Labor, and Defense, I think, was involved - no, where was James Schlesinger at that time? Energy, I believe it was; he wouldn't have been Defense at that time; it was Energy. It was hailed by both sides as being a very, very successful meeting, more for its atmosphere and its sort of significance than any really dramatic accomplishments, although we did then under this sort of impetus, develop a modest, very modest, regional AID program with ASEAN where they

came up with some ASEAN projects that were funded by AID. This was another role that I also played in that Regional Economic Office. I did a great deal of liaison with AID for the AID programs throughout East Asia, particularly where they involved more than one country. It was, again, a good experience, and I grew a lot in it. I did my two-year assignment, and then I was on a four-year assignment to Washington, so I was to be reassigned again for the second two years.

Q: The first one was '77 to '79 approximately.

McCONVILLE: Right. It was in '79, I got promoted to what was then the FS-03, now the FS-01, but that was a significant promotion and promotions were extraordinarily slow for that period. In fact, the number in the first part of that year, the first promotion list, had been so small - it was the smallest at least in modern history - and finally the State Department had reconsidered and decided to have a second promotion list that same year, and I was on that second promotion list. But being what's now an FS-01, then an FS-03, was significant in that it opened up a lot of different positions to you. So the regional officer in the East Asia Bureau wanted me to stay and become the Deputy Director of the Regional Office for my second two years, but I ended up taking instead Chief of the Textiles Division in EB in the Office of International Trade, and the Textiles Division was one of the four divisions in the Office of International Trade. This was the role Mike Smith had earlier. Mike was now the chief negotiator at USTR. In any event, this gave me my first significant supervisory role. I think we had about six officers in that division plus a couple of secretaries. Again, because of the unique role in the way that textile negotiations were conducted, you were really largely an operation of your own. The office chief at that time, the office director for the Office of International Trade, Harry Kopp - and not long after that he became the DAS, Deputy Assistant Secretary. In any event, I still remember when Harry and I met the first time shortly after I got on board. Harry told me, "Look, I will always be here to support you. If you need my help, come to me, but as far as I'm concerned, the fewer times that you bring issues to me, the better I'm going to like it as long as it's going well, as long as it's functioning the way it should function." That's the way we dealt with it from that point on. So I had a great deal of autonomy; I was running my own office, the division; we were in a separate location by ourselves; and then conducting all of these negotiations and handling the State Department role. I could take these things to Harry or take them higher, but I did that very, very sparingly because it simply couldn't get those things worked out at that kind of level. They had to be done at a different sort of level. At that time in particular there was a pattern that Mike Smith particularly had fostered. There was extensive travel in these negotiations with this constantly expanding role of developing countries, and we still had them with Japan, as well as international meetings in Geneva where the various matters of the international textile agreement were thrashed out and so forth. Smith had established a pattern - actually Jurik had done it before him - of traveling extensively and having about half the negotiations in the host country and the other half in Washington, so you traveled a great deal. Right at that time when I first joined the office, this was in 1979, and I just walked into the office and found out that we were going to be leaving in seven days for about a 14-day trip in East Asia, a two-week trip. What was going on at the time was that there had been a slump in the textile sector at the time and there was a

recession going on - this was the latter part of the Carter administration, and that was the era of the "stagflation" and so forth - and the textile industry had screamed that the existing textile agreements were too generous under the circumstances, and they had brought enormous political power to bear, and out of this had come something called a White Paper in which the administration had in effect agreed to go back and renegotiate the agreements with Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Japan was no longer a significant player in exports, so it was those three. We were, in effect, going back to them and insisting they were going to have to renegotiate agreements with us and accept lower levels than we had already negotiated. You don't do this very easily. You had to, again, bring a great deal of political pressure to bear on them, and this, of course, was a very significant foreign relations issue and I was in the thick of it. That two-week trip that we went on was the kickoff of this effort to renegotiate these agreements, which went on for a full year of intense, intense negotiation. Again, it was a great learning experience, and to find a way to seek to represent and advance the foreign policy interests of the United States, and from our point of view also, I was deeply personally convinced that the fact that things like textile agreements are extraordinarily bad economic policy for the United States. They're politically something that you can understand, but from an economic point of view they were extraordinarily bad policy, inefficient, and created all sorts of problems. At the same time, I did a great deal of research myself during this period of time and had come to the realization that up to this long period of these agreement what was truly happening was that you were still getting adjustment in the United States. Those particular textile products which we were particularly inefficient at producing, they were still losing ground, and the adjustment was dragging out more slowly, but it was about as much as the political process could tolerate. So the market share for almost all these vulnerable textile areas, the market share of imports was continuing to grow, but it was growing at a more tolerable level. Ultimately you would outgrow this thing. So in negotiating I had this in mind: both the fact that these things had significant foreign policy consequences, that there was economic rationale trying to see that this adjustment proceeded at least at a level that the political process in the United States could tolerate and not let it get bogged down any more than necessary, and to strike a balance and at the same time negotiate an honest and effective deal so that the advisors had confidence that you weren't double-dealing with them. They knew what you represented in the particular government team, but they still respected the fact that, unless they struck a somewhat reasonable deal, they'd never get an agreement with these developing countries, or one that could be sustained. Ultimately they were not opposed to the idea of you pressing for something that could be negotiated. At the same time, they didn't want to publicly admit or concede that. But anyway it was quite an experience, and because of this unusual role that textiles has in the way it was handled within the government, it gave me a great deal of autonomy. It also meant that it gave you the potential to screw things up pretty significantly, but at the same time it gave you a lot of room to be able to grow and show your strength. I found it absolutely fascinating. Smith had gone on to be at that point ambassador to GATT. The chief negotiator who had replaced Smith had not worked out too well. The Reagan administration was coming in, but the textile industry had made it clear to the powers that be that they didn't want to keep this guy. He believed in being very open about it. He told these people, these advisors, "I will never put forward a position that you haven't approved in advance." Well, their first reaction to all of this

was, “Hey, that’s great. We’re going to love this guy.” He would come back from each of the meetings, and he would go over in agonizing detail everything that had taken place in the negotiation. Even the guy from Commerce was pulling him aside and telling him, “Look, we really need to keep some of these things to ourselves. We’re negotiating with those advisors as well as with the government, and you’re going to put us in an untenable position.” The last thing these guys wanted in the end was actual approval of our negotiating positions. You would have a meeting where they were all together, and they would insist on absolutely impossible positions, and then they would call up afterwards and they’d say, “You know what I said in there. To be frank, I could accept a little less than that, but I didn’t want to say it.” He would get upset about this. He thought they were being less than honorable. In any event, what happened, he was pressed to step down, and the Reagan administration was coming on, so it was a perfect opportunity to have a new man named. Well, they were having trouble finding anyone who was going to be acceptable, so there were a significant number of these advisors who actually started to promote the idea of my taking on the role as chief negotiator, which said a great deal about the degree of confidence that I had managed to develop with these people. In fact, during that time, because we were still in this transition where USTR had the role as chief negotiator but State was the backup to this, and then any circumstance where the chief negotiator was not there, State Department became the chief negotiator. In fact, we had two teams, called the first team and the second team. The major negotiations the first team handled, and the negotiations with some of the smaller countries we handled with what we called our second team or B team, and that was chaired by my deputy, a State Department officer. So there had been a number of occasions where I had actually chaired some of the negotiations when Smith or one of the chief negotiators were not there, so they had experience with me as being the negotiator for the US. So Harry Kopp came to me - he was DAS at that time - and he told me about this, that several of these people had approached him about the idea of my taking on that role. I thought about it and I told Harry, “I can handle this very well as the State Department member of this team. Deep in my bones I believe this is bad economic policy, but I accept that it’s what the political process can tolerate in the US and I can work with it that way. But to be the chief negotiator, I would be wrestling with myself all the time about pursuing a policy and championing a policy that I believe was fundamentally bad policy for the United States, and I would find myself having to be particularly dishonest with the people I was dealing with on the U.S. side. I would find it very difficult to handle those kinds of contradictions as the chief negotiator.” Harry said he understood. Whether or not they would have all accepted me, I don’t know, but in any event it certainly was quite an experience for me. So I had a very, very good tour there as the chief of the Textile Division. At that time EB still had a particularly high status within State Department, so when I finished my tour, I had a number of opportunities at being economic counselor, particularly in East Asia. I was an FS-03 at the time (the old 3, the new 1) and so for some of the positions at some of the more significant embassies, we had to be a senior officer or at least they were senior officer positions, but there was still a number of attractive economic counselor positions. Having been very successful at the textile job was a big boost to me in being able to get onward assignment, and I ended up being assigned as economic counselor to Malaysia, which I was very happy to accept at that time.

Q: That was in '79.

McCONVILLE: That was '81. That was my second supervisory role, and they had just expanded the section out there by one officer because of the fact that they had just recently reached a tin agreement which established an international tin administration or authority - I can't remember what the name of it was. It was a body to administer a tin agreement, and it was headquartered in Malaysia, so that was just going to come off the ground and the economic section there would have a great deal to do with helping get this organization off the ground, and that was what the extra person was assigned to us for. It was also at that time though that the commercial function was split off and it was established under the commercial service at Commerce, so we no longer had the commercial function under the State Department economic counselor, which was something that I was not happy to see go because I had always taken a pretty strong interest in commercial work and liked working with American business. But that was what the arrangement was, so when I got out there I immediately set about to develop a very good working relationship with the new commercial counselor, who was actually a State Department officer who had taken the opportunity to convert to Commerce.

Q: You were in Malaysia from when to when?

McCONVILLE: From '81 to '84.

Q: What was the situation, both politically and economically, when you went out there?

McCONVILLE: Politically, a new prime minister had just been elected, and he's still in position. His name is Mahathir. Earlier he had been involved with the riots in 1959 or something like that in Malaysia when there had been these race riots and so forth. He had a reputation at least as being a radical and a rabble-rouser and so forth, and he had been exiled from the major political party there in Malaysia and only recently had been restored, and having been restored to the party, he succeeded in being able to take it over and be elected the prime minister when the previous prime minister either died or was in ill health. I think he had died, or maybe was in ill health and had to step down. So there was a certain degree of apprehension about just how this would work out with this man who had at least been a militant in his younger days. He also had adopted a policy, which he called "Look East." He had professed to be very unhappy that Asians were looking too much to the west, to England and the United States, for their models and that they should look instead to Asians, and he had identified particularly the Japanese as being very successful Asians. So he had something called a "Look East" policy, and there was apprehension about that. The fact is it turned out that he did hold some of these beliefs but he was also very pragmatic. A number of the people close to him were very conscious of the importance to Malaysia of having good relations with the United States and with the UK, so there was much less to this than appearances. But it was sort of a delicate situation to handle.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

McCONVILLE: When I first got there, it was a guy named Ron Palmer. He was there for two years, and then the final year - I'm trying to remember the guy's name; it was Tom. He was an old Japanese hand. He had actually been the consul general in Hong Kong. It was his last tour and he became ambassador to Malaysia. Both of them were career officers. In any event, it was an unusual relationship. Economically Malaysia was doing very well. They're very blessed with natural resources, particularly rubber and tin, although rubber and tin were becoming more of a problem area at that time than they had been, but also with petroleum, and petroleum might have been particularly significant. It wasn't produced on the scale of Indonesia or any of the Arab countries, but it was generating a lot of resources. One of the legacies of the British colonial rule in Malaysia had been to leave in place a very capable civil administration. The civil servants and so forth were of pretty high quality. Now, they were almost all Malays under this sort of arrangement that Malaysia had this understanding between the races that the Malays would dominate the political situation as long as the Chinese were left to pursue their economic interests without too much interference. The Indians, being a much smaller minority, also had to carve out their own role. But it was, in appearance at least, a democracy, but it was a democracy in which the Malays ran the government and the elections were open and fair, but the Malay political party was pretty authoritarian in its own right and could pretty much dictate what happened within the country. The press was free up to a point, but if they overstepped their bounds at all, they could quickly be controlled. At this particular time, tin was still important in Malaysia, and Malaysia was the world's largest tin producer, but Mahathir, in his early days as prime minister, shortly before I had gotten there, he and some of the people around him had been enticed by one Mark Rich into a scheme to corner the tin market. They had done this all covertly, of course, and the attempt ultimately had failed. They hadn't succeeded in cornering enough of the market, and what really had thrown the real wrench into it was that the U.S. had significant stocks of tin in its GSA (General Services Administration) stockpile and the U.S. began making releases of tin from that stockpile, and this had undercut this effort to corner the tin market. Mahathir never admitted that the government of Malaysia was in fact involved in this effort, but he was personally intensely angry at the U.S. for what he considered had been this effort that had scuttled his plans. So literally during the first year or so I was there, Mahathir never failed to mention, whenever he spoke to anybody, whether it be a group of little old ladies that came by or the visiting prime minister of the UK (United Kingdom)or whoever it was that had any kind of meeting, that he would denounce the USA GSA tin sales. Some of the people who were very pragmatic and also very pro-American within his inner circle saw this as being harmful to Malaysia's interest but they still had to deal with this quirky sort of personality of Mahateer. So they had been approaching us, and we had done a little ferreting on our own, we in the embassy, Ambassador Palmer and myself and some others, and they indicated to us that they would like to find a way to develop a better relationship between Malaysia and the United States but we had to find some way of finessing this tin issue and to come up with some sort of agreement on U.S. tin sales. The most important tin producers, other than Bolivia, which was sort of a wild card, were Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, so this was to be a U.S.-ASEAN agreement on tin. Also, GSA at the time that was like a black box. They would absolutely refuse to discuss their policy about releases and so forth. What the ASEAN

countries -- primarily Malaysia; Indonesia and Thailand were willing to settle for almost anything that Malaysia would be -- wanted was to just get some kind of agreement with us that GSA would just consult with them, just give them an opportunity to have their say. They weren't expecting any promises or any commitments but simply just to be able to have annual consultations. Fortunately, about this time there was a new man named to head GSA in the United States, and when he came to understand this, this made eminent sense to him because he saw the importance to the U.S. of having good relations with these ASEAN countries and there was practically no cost to this. We simply had to go through the motions of having a consultation, letting them have their say. So we ultimately were able to work out an agreement, and we in the embassy were largely the instigators of this. We were dealing with some inner circle of Mahathir's that was outside of the regular foreign policy establishment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and so forth, in Malaysia, and we ruffled a few feathers there.

Q: I would imagine you would have.

McCONVILLE: But these people were truly close to Mahathir and included the Deputy Prime Minister, a guy who subsequently came...

Q: Anwar?

McCONVILLE: No, it was before Anwar. Mahathir subsequently turned on him later on and severely punished him. Anwar was a young militant at the time and was a favorite of Mahathir. In any event, that again was a pretty interesting period to be in Malaysia, and Malaysia was doing very well economically. Politically, as I say, Mahathir was a wild card, but essentially they were a fair and open government if you accepted the fact they had this unusual relationship with the races there. There was a massive affirmative action program for the Malays, but the Chinese, on the other hand, were doing very, very well in Malaysia, and while they resented a great deal this sort of favoritism of the Malays, they still felt that they were doing very, very well and didn't really want to go anywhere else.

One thing that was happening at this particular period of time, there was tremendous expansion in the number of Malaysian students going to the United States and studying at U.S. universities. Malaysia, again, because they had all funds from petroleum, were able to fund Malaysian students studying abroad, undergraduate studies as well as graduate studies, but all the people who were funded by the government were Malay. Now, the Chinese, those who were making enough money, would send people off at their own expense. Earlier in Malaysia's history, most of these people had gone off the UK or maybe to Australia or Canada or something like that, part of the Commonwealth nations, because of Malaysia's orientation, but at this point in time they were becoming more and more oriented to the United States so by this time at least half or more of these people were going to the United States. Again, this was going to have a very positive impact ultimately on U.S.-Malaysian relations because of all these people who were coming back and were basically bringing back a lot of American ideas and basically good feelings toward the United States. So that was also something that was very much in the interest of U.S.-Malaysia relations and something that we were able to help foster. On the

whole it was, again, a very healthy relationship but there were traps out there you had to be careful of. I think one of our major accomplishments was bringing off this U.S.-ASEAN tin agreement during this period of time, which we did manage to pull off despite great odds.

Q: While you were dealing with ASEAN both times, were there any sort of problem states from your perspective in dealing with ASEAN?

McCONVILLE: Mahathir himself was one of them because of his particularly quirky personality. Indonesia was always difficult to deal with, but it would depend upon the issue. They all had their reasons for wanting to have a good relationship with the United States, but you had to recognize that ASEAN itself and the relationships between those countries, it was not going to become a European Economic Community, certainly not anytime soon. They were going to move at their own pace, and you simply had to accept that. It was becoming more and more in our interest to have them functioning at least as an economic cooperative arrangement in that in the international economic arena generally the ASEAN group was a very moderate, pragmatic third-country group. You could work with them very effectively in international economic organizations. They represented a third-country group and had stature within that world, but at the same time they were pragmatic, they were generally Western-oriented, they followed reasonably market-oriented economic models themselves, so it was a very positive force, and for them to be able to come up with a collective position, it generally was easier to work with them as a group rather than trying to deal with each of them individually, although you still did this on a number of issues as well. But it was a group that was getting more and more stature internationally. Again, by this time I had spent a good deal of my career in Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, and many of these people were people that I had come to build up some pretty good relationships with, and I had an awful lot of experience in dealing with the Southeast Asians as well as Northeast Asians. I was very comfortable with that and felt I was pretty effective. Then when I finished my tour there, I went back....

Q: This was in '84?

McCONVILLE: '84. I then went from Malaysia back to Korea again, this time as economic counselor, which is a step up from Malaysia, being a more significant relationship. Now, getting back to Korea in 1984, Korea by this time was...

Q: This would be '84 to...?

McCONVILLE: '87 - was a much more significant developing nation. It was clearly one of the tigers. Many of the people in the significant economic positions within the government at that time were people whom I had known 10 years earlier when I'd been out there in '74 to '77. Many of them I had extremely close relationships with, and this was of enormous benefit. Again, it was a period of extremely intense activity in '84 to '87, particularly on the trade side. Now, at this time textiles were still important in Korea, but there was a much, much broader range of trade relations in which Korea was a

significant player by this time - steel and ships and all sorts of emerging electronic products. This was also a period in which trade issues were becoming more and more prominent in the United States as the international trade relationships and the deficits that the US had with some of these East Asian countries and so forth, so trade issues with Korea were a very prominent part of the agenda with Korea during that '84 to '87 period, not just in the economic dimension but in terms of our total relationships. My first ambassador in Korea when I first arrived there had been Habib, Philip Habib, and then he was followed by Dick Schneider. Both Habib and Schneider were career officers and both were ambassadors who attached a great deal of important to the economic dimension of relationships in Korea and had gone out of their way to develop very good relationships with the American business community in Korea and to give a great deal of attention to economic issues.

The ambassador now was a politically appointed ambassador, Richard "Dixie" Walker. Walker also strongly believed in the importance of economic issues, and this time they were clearly a very significant part of our relationship with Korea. The DCM at that time was Paul Cleveland. Paul had actually been in the political section during the time I was in the economic section, so Paul and I had known each other, and that was one of the reasons I ended up getting Korea, that Paul was very happy to have me come to Korea at that point. But Paul, again, attached a great deal of importance to the political dimension of the relationship. Now, we had an economic section, a commercial section under the Foreign Commercial Service, a commercial counselor, and we also had an agriculture counselor. I had proposed to Paul - and Paul was very much in favor of this; I can't say just who was the author of all these ideas because it was so much a collaborative effort - to develop a very close relationship amongst the economic, commercial, and agricultural sections, chaired by the DCM, but within that the economic office was supposed to have the lead role of promoting this sort of coordination, and not just in the embassy itself but also in promoting this kind of close working relationship with our parent organizations back in Washington. We developed a very extensive and pretty aggressive economic agenda and particularly a trade agenda, and setting out what we advocated was to identify priorities amongst American trade issues and to set out targets and goals for ourselves and prioritize those things that we felt were most important, rather than try to run off in all directions at once, concentrate on those thing that we could agree. So we set up priorities for ourselves in a cable at some length, setting out all our reasoning behind it and so forth. It went back to Washington, and the trade community back there within the government was exceedingly pleased with this effort, because they found if we can get the embassy agreement with all three of these agencies represented there, that made it much easier for them back in Washington to support a collective policy, and we sort of became known as the troika out there. But it was a model actually that could be used elsewhere. The people back in the trade community in the Washington agencies were extremely pleased with this arrangement. Now, we had just an endless series of trade negotiations with the Koreans during that period of time and had to use a number of threats to get them to do some things. All of this was worked with an extremely close collaboration. People coming out from Washington used to comment from time to time about what a blessing it was for them to work with this kind of relationship. The USTR officer, the woman who was responsible for the Korea portfolio was gushing about it and

she said, “You know, in the reporting from Korea, it’s golden, because it always comes back with the agencies believing that everybody in the embassy is on board on this, so the people back in Washington, within the different agencies back in Washington, are willing to accept that these are the facts to deal with.” So many times in the State Department in Washington, the reporting would be discredited as being too much influenced by foreign policy interests and so forth, and she said that we had completely overcome this sort of prejudice by projecting this image of unified reporting coming from the embassy. We put an awful lot of effort into it and were very, very successful. The Koreans attach a great deal of importance to economic issues, and we were pressing them for a lot of things that they were finding difficult to accede to, but they knew that it was pragmatically necessary for them to do so and the economists among them recognized that this was in Korea’s interest in most cases to do these things, to open up their market as fast as they could possibly politically accomplish this. So this kind of pressure, as long as it was used adroitly enough, they saw as in being in their interest as well. So it was a pretty extraordinary experience. And we also worked very, very closely with the American business community there, with the Chamber of Commerce and so forth.

Q: How did they find doing business in Korea? This is a period of time, which continues certainly in Japan, where American business finds itself opening up offices, trading there, great difficulty because the laws....

McCONVILLE: It was difficult in Korea. They had a lot of complaints, but at the same time they were doing very well, and it wasn’t quite as difficult as Japan. So they felt a very strong need in having the U.S. government behind them to bring pressure to bear on certain issues, but at the same time they very strongly believed that US business interests were doing well in Korea and could do even better. So they had a lot of interest in working with us, and what we again pressed them to do was prioritize the things they needed to get done, so we used our leverage most effectively. We had just a constant parade of visitors from Washington. I know that we had a least a quarter of the Senate out there during the time I was there and probably almost as much of the House, and we had endless governors bringing trade missions and so forth. We had encouraged the Chamber of Commerce - and we worked on their committee to help them do this - to develop effective presentations for all these visiting groups. We didn’t tell them what to say, but we helped them organize what they said and, rather than having just a litany of complaints, to have a positive and constructive story to tell these visiting Congressmen and Senators and so forth, but then to identify the issues where they really felt that it was particularly important to get some support from the Congress and do it in a way in which these things were well argued and well presented and focused. So again the visiting delegations were increasingly impressed by their meetings with this Chamber of Commerce group. They would frequently comment to us how impressed they were by the presentations they had there as compared to other countries they had visited. So this was an extremely interesting, exciting period of time. We got an awful lot of backing at the highest levels within the embassy. We had an excellent relationship with the business community. We had excellent relations with the trade agencies back in Washington. And we got an awful lot accomplished. There was a series of trade negotiations, and in most cases in the trade negotiations of that era, two of the biggest countries they would be

involved in negotiating with would be Japan and, secondary, Korea. So you'd get a great many negotiating teams that would come out and visit Japan and then they would come to Korea. For instance, they would come back from the steel negotiations with both countries at the same time, these visiting U.S. negotiating teams were always very complimentary of our embassy effort there, and they were also pretty positive about their negotiations with the Koreans. Again, it was the same sort of experience that I had described earlier. They were tough, tough negotiators, but in the end you could strike a deal with them, and they respected that. They said, you know, with the Japanese where they were treated with this infinite courtesy but in the end they would walk away with nothing, it would be so amorphous; whereas, with Korea you could be much blunter and more direct and you could expect you'd have to get down on the mat and wrestle around, but in the end you could strike a deal. That was, again, a very exceptional experience, and I also came away further reinforced by the role that sound, informed economic policy can play in transforming countries and bringing them into modernity.

Q: As economic counselor, you were a member of the country team. During this period, '84 to '87, what was the political situation in Korea?

McCONVILLE: They still had a military-dominated government. All these people had been elected, but Chun Doo-hwan was the President at this time. Of course, Park Chung-hee had been assassinated. Chung Doo-hwan was getting increasing disfavor amongst the militants in Korea, and his term was coming up and he was maneuvering to have Roh Tae-woo, another general, to succeed him. Roh Tae-woo actually during the time I was there was elected President, but there was very strong protest from increasingly broad circles of the Korean populace about the method of the selection. During the final months that I was there, there were increasing clashes. They had been led by students and some of the activists, but more and more the middle class and the passers-by, the people on the streets, the business community even were siding with these activists. You were having clashes on the street with tear gas being thrown and cars being overturned and so forth. It never got directed at foreigners, Americans or other foreigners; it was all directed at the Roh Tae-woo government. I remember being out at times and, having passed pretty close to where some of these events took place, never really feeling personally threatened. But it was clear that the political situation was coming to a boil. Roh Tae-woo, I think, was still in power when I left, but it was not too long after that when he subsequently had to give in to elections and the elections then elected the first real civilian government.

Q: What did Choi Kyu...?

McCONVILLE: That happened in between. That happened in early '80. Park Chung-hee was assassinated in about '79.

Q: November of '79.

McCONVILLE: The military coup took place not long after that, with Choi Kyu-hah asserting himself. Then when they reared up against this military coup and then were put down by the generals, that was Chun Doo-hwan, and that kept coming back up all of the

time and ultimately after the fall of Park Chung-hee, Choi Kyu-hah was arrested and subsequently spent that time in a monastery and so forth, lost a great deal of whatever personal wealth he may have amassed, and Chun Doo-hwan ultimately came to somewhat similar fate. But that was all coming to a boil during particularly the latter part of that period, so politically it was a pretty extraordinary period as well. Economically Korea was an enormous success story. At the same time, they were having these political tensions. Again, it tends to lend a lot of support to the argument that ultimately if you have open economic arrangements and begin to succeed economically in at least a modern market-oriented international economic arena, these will increasingly bring pressures to open up politically. First of all, you begin to develop more and more diverse centers of power within your political body as your economy continues to expand and economic power becomes more and more significant and becomes more dispersed. As people begin to succeed more economically, they become more and more concerned with political liberty and feeling more disposed to press for political openness. It certainly happened in Korea; it happened in Taiwan. Whether it will always happen everywhere, I suppose, is an open question. Again, you can argue - certainly Park Chung-hee, in taking over Korea in '62 -- the Koreans whom I talked to who remember that period, maybe because I talked to so many who were in economic backgrounds - most of them thought back on that short period between Syngman Rhee and the military coup by Park Chung-hee as sort of total chaos in Korea. They looked on that as totally an abhorrent period of time.

Q: Korea was really considered the bottom of the...

McCONVILLE: Yes, they were economically, but during the period after Syngman Rhee had been overthrown and before Park did the military coup, it was just total chaos. The politicians who tried to run Korea during that period of time had been totally incompetent. In fact, there was no sort of culture that supported a democratic sort of organized society in Korea at that time. Park Chung-hee, for all of his harshness and so forth, never amassed any great amount of personal wealth. He seemed to be a man who was really driven by a mission to modernize Korea. He lived pretty modestly. He could be very harsh with political foes, but he seemed truly to be driven primarily by what he considered to be his role to modernize Korea. He had always spoken that at some point then time would come to turn over political power, but like so many autocrats who do this, they find it more and more difficult to give up that political power, and he was never able to do it until it was crumbling beneath him and he was assassinated by some of his own.

There were all of these mounting demonstrations at the time. There was no question of whether he was losing control. Certainly given the Korean culture and so forth and their long history of a very, very Confucian-oriented, hierarchical society, they were still having trouble in working out functioning ways to work as a democracy. They're doing it much better now, and Kim Dae-jung, I think, is certainly doing well as President. At one time he was the arch foe. But whether that can justify having an authoritarian government during a period of modernization may still be open to question, but I find it difficult to believe that, had Park Chung-hee not come along, Korea would have ever succeeded

certainly as quickly as they. They paid a price for that in some of the political oppression that they had. I still remember looking out my window on that first tour, looking down - there used to be a school right behind the embassy; this was around '74 or '75 - and see these little school children, elementary school children. I looked down at them and I would think to myself that by the time those little people down there are young adults, these people are going to have a standard of living that's not going to be that dissimilar from the United States that I knew of in 1970. At that time, they were still a very poor country.

Q: It wasn't until around 1978 or '79 when the average income had reached $1,000.

McCONVILLE: Yes. I knew what life was like for an awful lot of very ordinary Koreans. It was still a pretty harsh affair. I had become persuaded that by the time these people were young adults they were going to have this kind of transformation economically. That kind of thing hadn't happened that often in the world before and certainly within that period of time. I was convinced it was happening in Korea. Certainly coming back in '84, '84 to '87, I was seeing a great deal of it. These economic technocrats that I worked with and had such a great deal of respect for, they were all very decent people themselves. They had a great sense of taking part in a very historic episode in Korea and having a great deal of personal satisfaction in being involved in this kind of role. They're people I still have tremendous admiration and respect for. There were an awful lot of very, very capable and very well intentioned people in those roles. There were a few dogs and a few people that weren't of the highest motivation, but they were blessed with an awful lot of very, very competent people. Again, that's the other dimension of a Confucian society. Civil service and government roles still had a great deal of stature, so they attracted a great deal of very, very capable people into those roles. Anyhow, that was another very, very good experience in Korea. By the time I then finished up.

Q: I think this is probably a good time to stop. But let's put at the end of this tape: Where'd you go in '87?

McCONVILLE: I went back to be the Director of the Office of Trade in EB. Trade was again to play a significant role.

Q: All right. We'll pick this up then in 1987 when you were back in Washington.

McCONVILLE: On a personal note, it was in Korea on that tour that I got married in 1985. After all these years as a bachelor, I met and married my wife. She was a Korean woman whom I'd met through mutual friends.

Q: What was her family background?

McCONVILLE: Her father had been a career army officer in the Korean military going back to the Korean War and before. He'd actually been in an academy in Japan. He was in the same class, I think, as Park Chung-hee. But he had by this time retired as a bird

colonel in the Korean army and had worked for a while in some kind of defense organization, defense industry organization. She was the oldest of six children, and all her brothers and sisters - she had two brothers and three sisters - were all in professional roles.

Q: Was she able to go to one of the universities?

McCONVILLE: I can't remember the name of it. She actually had gone to college right about the time that her father had retired from the army, and this had been sort of a difficult period for them financially, so she did go to a university but not one of the top schools. Of course, her brothers went to Seoul University. She had worked for Koker, I think. She had majored in English and foreign languages and had worked for Koker and then she'd become an international stewardess for KAL (Korean Airlines) - that was a very, very prized job at that time - until her first marriage, which was a Korean medical doctor. That had gone bad and they had gotten divorced - it had been a very bitter sort of thing - and she had a small child. He was at that time five years old, a young boy. The father had totally disappeared from the scene. I met her through some mutual friends and, much to my surprise at this particular time in my life, we ended up getting married, and I acquired not only a wife but a stepson. We got married actually on the lawn of Ambassador Walker's residence. In Korea no one officiates at a marriage. Getting married in Korea means you turn in some papers to change the status of the records. They get married in churches and in Buddhist ceremonies and so forth, but a priest or a preacher or a Buddhist monk is not empowered to marry them. He just oversees the ceremony. We got married on the lawn of the ambassador's residence, and we had Ambassador Dixie Walker as our featured speaker. They also always had in Korea some prominent person who would give a speech of some sort. So in effect we just married ourselves, exchanged our vows. We had already turned in our papers to be legally married. There was a very nice group of people there. It was a wonderful wedding ceremony. Ambassador Walker in effect officiated at the marriage.

The particularly amusing thing: A week or two before that former President Nixon had visited Korea. Dixie Walker, of course, had been a Republican; he was actually from the academy community, the head of the International Institute of the University of South Carolina, but he had been active in Republican politics. When Nixon came out there for a visit, he had some functions for him at the residence. One of the functions he had for him was just to meet with the embassy people. He was going to have another big reception for a huge number of guests, but for this function for the embassy people, they had a little receiving line with people being brought up to be introduced to Nixon, and when my fiancé - to be my wife about a week or so later - and I get up to be introduced, Ambassador Walker introduced us and said, "You know, a week from now I'm going to marry these people." Nixon's eyebrows went up: "Is that legal?" I'll remember that remark to the last of my days. It was a pretty extraordinary experience. I had a tux on and my wife had a traditional western wedding dress on. We had a reception on the lower part of the residence lawn there, and while we were down there - my wife had set this up - the two of us slipped away for a bit - there was a second little house down there - and we changed into traditional Korean garb, both my wife and I, and we reappeared out there

with our guests dressed in traditional Korean garb. Unbeknownst to me, apparently one of the traditions in a Korean wedding is that the husband carries the wife around on his back in a couple of circles. It symbolizes something or other. So pretty soon people were calling for this, so my wife gets up on my back, and I go around this circle, and this broke the audience up. All this was being recorded by a video camera, so we still have a record of all this. I was pretty pleased at the number of Korean friends I had there as well. Some of them go back to that '74-'77 period. In fact, one of the more surprising guests - he hadn't really been invited - was Kim Woo-jung, who's the founder and head of Daewoo, which has now collapsed but, of course, at that time was very, very big, a multibillionaire. The top Daewoo officials, presidents of their different units, they were all very bright and able technocrats. Kim Woo-jung did not have any sons, so, unlike some of the Korean conglomerates where their sons were being groomed and were being headed to take over the operation, he had developed this pattern of identifying very bright young people whom he would groom as his senior executives and surround himself with these people. Well, I had come to know a number of these people, who were often U.S.-educated, bright technocrats. There had been a function where, I think, Time Magazine was doing something big on Korea that involved the business community in a big way too, and the Korean business community was very much behind it. I don't remember just what it was now. But they had sent some people out to set this up, and Kim Woo-jung was having a big dinner for them. The ambassador couldn't go that evening, so he had asked me to go in place to represent him there. Kim Woo-jung came in a bit late for this dinner. One of these presidents was sitting right next to him, right across from me, and it was somebody I had a very good relationship with, so when Kim Woo-jung came in, he started telling him about how I was going to be marrying a Korean woman in the next few weeks. Kim Woo-jung seemed to get fascinated by this and he just started to ask a number of questions about how did we meet and so forth. It was really pretty amazing that he seemed to be so intrigued by this. So this president, this good acquaintance of mine, was one of my invited guests for the wedding and he didn't come, but who else comes? Kim Woo-jung. I hadn't invited him. He came to the wedding, not for the wedding but came down for the reception for a good part of the afternoon. I was absolutely flabbergasted.

Q: Okay, we're going to pick this up next time in 1987 when you're going back to Washington to be...?

McCONVILLE: Director of the Office of International Trade in EB.

***

Q: Today is the 12th of April 2001. We're in 1987. So you were back in EB...?

McCONVILLE: It was still EB, I guess - I can't recall when it changed. It's EB, Economic and Business Bureau.

Q: And you were there from '87 to when?

McCONVILLE: ‘87 to ‘90, three years.

Q: Your job was what?

McCONVILLE: Director of Office of International Trade, which comprised four divisions. I think we had something like a total of 45 people spread over these four divisions including the staff and the officers. It was, I think, without question the largest substantive office in the State Department at that time. There may have been some administrative offices that might have been larger, but we had four divisions with about 45 people. It comprised both bilateral and multilateral trade, and it was an extremely larger portfolio. In fact, I was the last director of the office of that magnitude. On my departure it was broken up into the Office of Bilateral Trade and the Office of Multilateral Trade. It was a very exciting period for international trade. I got there during the final year of the negotiations on the U.S.-Canada free trade agreement. There was just a constant parade of major bilateral trade issues with developing countries, with European countries, and all of these came under my overall purview. It was a pretty fascinating assignment.

Q: Moving up from your position, who were some of the major players dealing with the trade issues at this time?

McCONVILLE: Directly above me was our Deputy Assistant Secretary, Ralph Johnson. The Assistant Secretary of State was Gene McAllister, who had been over in the White House or somewhere then and had come over to be Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs. In fact, something like 80 percent of his time at least was occupied with the trade issue, because of the intensity of these issues at the time. Mike Smith, my old comrade was the Deputy at USTR at that point, one of two. I’m trying to recall who the trade representative was. Carla Hills, I don’t think, was in the job. Right offhand, I don’t remember. There were major issues with Japan that were dealt with at very senior levels within the administration. James Baker, at that time, was Secretary of the Treasury, and he had been particularly committed to this idea of a U.S.-Canada free trade agreement. Those agreements had dragged on for about 18 months and seemingly were not going to get concluded. There was a deadline that the fast track authority established in Congress that set a specific deadline for concluding the negotiations, and it looked like they were not going to conclude. In the final week or two, Baker himself stepped in as Secretary of the Treasury, and his counterpart in the Canadian government, and the two of them with just a handful of the top negotiating people on the US and Canadian sides closeted themselves for a weekend, and it still didn’t come to a resolution. Then there was in effect sort of a week’s extension by some interpretation of the legislative language that allowed them just a little more time. I went home that weekend and the expectation was that this thing was over. On Sunday night that was the expectation, and suddenly on Monday morning, some deal had been struck and the agreement was concluded in principle. The actual writing of much of the details in the text of the agreement was to be concluded over the next three months or so, following this agreement in principle, which had met the letter of the law with respect to concluding the agreement within the time specified in the legislation. So for the next three months, there were intense rounds of

negotiation to actually get the actual agreement itself written. Our people were involved in this - as I say, I had a very large staff - and I was involved in some of that, although because Ralph Johnson, the Deputy Assistant Secretary, was so deeply involved in it, I concentrated more in other areas to free him up to concentrate closely on that. But I was involved in some trips to Ottawa.

Q: Do you recall any, where you concerned, any of the particular sticking points with the Canadians?

McCONVILLE: The fundamental issues were in the financial services area, and it was very difficult for the Canadians to come to agreement on that because of their concerns about being overwhelmed by the American financial services area. One of the other extremely sticky issues with respect to the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement was the Canadians had wanted to, and did succeed ultimately in maintaining up to a degree, a sort of cultural protectionism. This is a deeply rooted concern in Canada, the fear of being overwhelmed by American culture and that their cultural institutions and entities, including things like magazines and books and so forth, needed to be protected to a degree or otherwise being treated favorably, or otherwise they simply would be drowned out by the American counterpart. That was a difficult issues to get resolved. You had a long history in Canada, particularly in the agriculture sector, of agriculture being extensively subsidized. There again getting an agreement on agriculture proved to be very, very difficult, because the Canadians wanted to maintain their subsidies and that's difficult to do if you're going to have free trade. Those areas, to some extent, were sort of finessed in agreement up to a point. Clearly the thing that really drove the conclusion of the agreement was the fact that Secretary Baker was so deeply committed to doing this and attached great importance to that. Just the sheer force of Baker's participation and the pressure he brought upon his counterpart in Canada succeeded in striking at least a compromise. It was less than full agreement across the board, but it still was a dramatic step forward. As I say, agriculture was largely set aside. It was, again, a major step forward in the whole process of stimulating further free trade negotiations and agreements on a broader scale.

One of the striking elements of that sort of negotiation, too, was brought home to me in one of my trips to Canada during this period for some of the negotiations. I recall we were in a car, which, I think was hired by the US government but had a Canadian driver, and during the ride out to the airport this driver, who made a living as a driver, started to inquire what we were doing here, and we talked about the free trade agreement, and he suddenly showed a great deal of interest. He was a man probably in his upper 50s or maybe even a little older, and he described how he and his sons, over a series of Sunday afternoon dinners, had discussed the impending free trade agreement amongst themselves and they had collected a lot of literature about it and articles and so forth, had spent a series of Sunday afternoon dinners discussing it. You probably could have questioned 100 Americans and been lucky if even one of the hundred would have been aware that the negotiations were going on. There was an asymmetry in interest in this sort of thing in Canada versus the United States that was astonishing. In Canada, it was the overriding issue. In fact, ultimately what happened, it had to get approved in Congress and that took

a good while longer, and it had to get ratified. In Canada, as I recall, the Prime Minister decided to make it an issue of reelection and called for elections and ran for election, and it became *the* issue in the election, and he got reelected by virtue that the free trade agreement was ratified in Canada. In fact, it's because of the relative size of the economies, the consequences for Canada were far, far greater than for the United States. There had always been a great deal of trade between the United States and Canada, but this was going to integrate our economies to an even greater degree, but it was going to be of far more consequence in those terms for Canada than it would be for the United States. So it was an issue of very major magnitude, and it was fascinating to be a part of it.

At the same time, the Uruguay round of the GATT was being launched and we were being organized for that. There were 15, 16 or more different negotiating groups to conduct the negotiations for the Uruguay round, like agriculture and natural resources and for energy, 15 different groups like this for separate negotiating groups Of those 15, only one was chaired by the State Department; the rest were chaired either by USTR or Commerce and one or two by Agriculture. They were all multi-agency groups. The State Department participated in all the groups, but the only one that was chaired by State was the natural resources negotiation, and I was designated the US negotiator for that. So I was one of the 15 U.S. negotiators. Julius Katz had once been a rather famed Assistant Secretary of State, had a long-time career in the State Department, had come back out of private life as a senior negotiator for these negotiations. In any event, on virtually all of the groups, our office, with a few exceptions, I think, was the State Department representative in the 15 negotiating groups, someone on my staff. Then, as I say, myself, I was actually the chief U.S. negotiator for one of the groups. The Uruguayan Round negotiations, I believe, began about 1991, I think it was, and they were to have a midterm negotiating session where all of the countries would get together again at a ministerial level. The whole thing was supposed to be concluded in four years, two years for the midterm and then two years beyond that. So in the negotiations through the first two years there wasn't an awful lot of progress made. There was a whole series of meeting in Geneva for the natural resources group. I used to have to go over about every two or three months to chair a negotiating round session over there. That's where most of the negotiations were held, in Geneva. But when we did get to the midterm and there was going to be a ministerial, there was a great deal of stress put on having some kind of concrete results achieved by that time, to be able to create the momentum for continuing the negotiations and to signal that they indeed were going to be concluded. The midterm ministerial was scheduled to be held in Montreal, and I was on the US delegation, as were a number of other people in my office. Of course, McAllister was there, and - Ralph Johnson was still around - he was there at that time. Al Larson was the Senior Deputy in EB at that time. He was later on going to be an Assistant Secretary, but he was also involved. I don't think he was in Montreal, because somebody had to stay behind. Those were some of the names that were in it. In any event, I remember that it was about a week up in Montreal while these midterm ministerials were being held, and they were being headed by ministers for all of the participating 130 or 140 governments, whatever, that were involved. And like so many negotiations, they were darkest before the dawn. Some of the simpler issues had gotten resolved. And, I must say, with natural resources, we had

concluded our ministerial. In fact, there had been pre-ministerials in Geneva where I had to attend a number of those, both for my own negotiating group but then as a participant in many of the others. It had dragged on and on almost 24 hours a day trying to work out acceptable language. There were about four or five areas that were the major stumbling blocks, agriculture being the biggest of all. These were carried on to Montreal, where they tried to get the ministers to resolve them. It was just sort of halfway, stepping stones, midpoints for the negotiations. The negotiations almost collapsed. In fact, they didn't come to agreement in Montreal, but were hung up on agriculture. There were a couple of other groups that weren't completed, but they were really sort of contingent upon agriculture.

Q: We're particularly sensitive about agriculture, because that's one of our big exports, isn't it, or biggest?

McCONVILLE: Well, that's true, but we are less sensitive than some of the others, most especially the Europeans. This was, of course, at this point the Bush Administration following on the Reagan Administration. The U.S. had been the major instigator behind the idea of having another multilateral trade round, negotiating round, and had gradually built up support through the 1980s and had brought this about. The US set out as one of its own targets for the Uruguay round to get a commitment to have a date certain for concluding or ending all subsidies in agriculture internationally and to have literally then open and free trade in agriculture and to phase out all subsidies, and commit to do this. We were prepared to make those commitments if we could get those commitments from others. There was resistance to it within the U.S. agriculture community. They had been able to find enough support that, if we could get the commitment out of everyone, the U.S. was committed to do that - a dramatic ultimate transformation in agricultural policies internationally. The U.S. was deeply committed to this. It was very fundamental to what we were trying to achieve with the Uruguay Round, and that was one of the reasons why it was so difficult to get agreement. The Europeans were deeply dug in. Now, we had a lot of allies around the world, people like the Australians. The Canadians were wishy-washy because they didn't really want to make this commitment themselves, but the Australians and the Argentines and many of the other countries that were very dependent on exports of agriculture products and were deeply frustrated by the protectionism in the developed world against their kinds of exports, were very strongly allied to the U.S. on this, with the major opposition being the Europeans. But for the Europeans it was an extraordinarily difficult issues. Agriculture still even to this day occupies a bigger role in Europe, significantly bigger, than it does in the United States or in countries like Australia or Argentina, in terms of the number of people who are still involved in the agriculture sector. It's still much more labor intensive. The whole European Community right from its start was involved in very, very extensive subsidy to agriculture commodities. They had long held that these maintained this sort of life, and the agriculture sector in Europe is fundamental to the European way of life. We had gone through this sort of process in the United States. We were much further along. Agriculture by this time had become a smaller and smaller part of the total economy, thinking in terms of the number of people and the economy involved in it and so forth. There was a time in the U.S. when all the arguments about family farms and so forth had

carried enormous weight in U.S. politics, but we were outgrowing this to a much greater degree than the Europeans have succeeded in doing. So it was extraordinarily difficult for the European governments to be able to make these kind of commitments and survive politically, and trying to find some sort of compromise to deal with that practically broke up the negotiations. In the end they succeeded only by agreeing to extend this ministerial, to seek some resolution three or four months hence in a special continuing session in Geneva. That was done, and they did patch together some language. The other country that was very much allied with the Europeans was Japan, most especially with respect to rice, and they had some of the same problems that the Europeans did. Politically the rice farmers, who were intensely subsidized, heavily subsidized in Japan, are still a significant political force in Japan, and the Japanese government found it very, very difficult to be prepared to consider ultimately phasing out these kind of subsidies in Japan with respect to rice. The issues did get resolved to the point where the negotiations were continued. They didn't get done on schedule. I was already, of course, on further assignments by that time, but it took about another three or four years before negotiations were finally concluded and some ultimate compromise. Agriculture was still one of the toughest issues right up to the very end and finally did get resolved, and there was commitment to at least significantly reduce subsidies over a period of time. Those were the kind of issues, and then, with respect to certain kinds of tariff, tariffs are not really that significant an issue anymore. They have been lowered to the extent that they are not major impediments. It has more to do with the non-tariff issues, agriculture being very prominent amongst them.

We were also particularly committed to establishing a regime for trade in intellectual property rights and copyrights, having protection for intellectual property rights and so forth, which we felt was fundamental to trade in the new world economy. We were being battled there particularly by India and some of the other developing countries who were very reluctant to commit themselves to protection of intellectual property rights, having the feeling that they were better advantaged by being able to steal property rights that would be produced in developed nations. We, of course, were allied with the Europeans in that area and, again, we did finally broker a compromises that made important advances, but intellectual property rights and copyright protection and this sort of thing was another big part of the trade agenda during this period of time. There were such a series of issues, I had very, very long hours during the period of time. It was exciting. These issues were front page constantly, so I was very deeply involved in issues that were not always all that well understood by the public at large but at least the public at large recognized them to be important, and they got a great deal of press attention and otherwise were identified as very significant issues. It was a very, very important time for the international economy. This was the 1990s. The whole idea of globalization was gathering more and more force, and globalization, globalizing of the world economy, meant that trade would be growing even more rapidly, to the extent that we couldn't get barriers lowered. This would further advance the efficiency of the global economy. It was something that, again, I had deep roots in, and having seen what international trade and market forces and so forth can contribute to modernize developing Third World economies, like places like Vietnam and Korea and so forth, I had very strong personal convictions about how these kinds of policies could ultimately contribute to a great deal

of betterment of the world as a whole, if we could succeed in getting these. At the same time, I'd had enough exposure and experiences that I was acutely aware of the domestic pressures and the constituencies involved and the threat to one's livelihood that these sorts of things can entail, and the importance of having the political support to be able to do this and to be able to make these cases intelligible for the body politic and so forth. Again, I enjoyed it immensely and got enormous personal satisfaction.

Q: What was the role, when you were dealing on the European side, of France, because France always seems to be at the spear point of trying to go for exceptions, particularly in agriculture and that sort of thing?

McCONVILLE: Certainly in agriculture they were one of the countries that were the most difficult to deal with. On the other hand, there were other areas where they were closer to us than some of the others in the Community, like copyright, along with the British, but the French felt fairly strongly about the importance of international intellectual property protection. Again, it's like most, and especially true of the French, that they defend their national interests, and there are some things in which they saw their interests being closely allied with us and others not, and they could be very difficult to deal with on those things in which they saw their interest diverging from ours. It would depend upon the issue. They weren't that much more difficult to work with, or within the Community and so forth. The Community itself is difficult to deal with. I don't know at that time whether it was 12 or 15; I lose count at how many members they have at this point. They wanted to be treated in some way as a collective entity, but on others they want to be viewed as 15 separate nations. In fact, the European Commission negotiates for them. Yet, all of the individual nations would have people attending the negotiations sort of on the periphery. They would not always be permitted in the negotiation itself, but they would be there in town and were being consulted with, and in Geneva they were very much a part of the scene. For the European Commission to strike any kind of a deal they could get all of their parties to acquiesce to was always a very, very difficult thing to do. And, of course, they tended to try to use this in their negotiating strategy as well, always pleading that they needed to get your position but they couldn't quite give you theirs yet. It was difficult always to negotiate with the European Commission.

Q: Did we use the "Gee, it's a great idea, but Congress will never buy it."

McCONVILLE: Oh, yes, of course. During this period of time and before the Uruguay Round, we had the fast track authority. That was something that had emerged after some of this earlier series of world trade negotiations in which the U.S. in fact had, after striking a deal globally, gone back and the Congress had insisted on some changes before they would ratify it. So the theory had emerged that the only way you could really get countries to negotiate seriously with us was to come up with this idea to get Congress to approve fast track, which had allowed the executive branch, working in close consultation with the Congress all throughout the negotiation, actually to strike a negotiation and bring in back to the Congress, in this case not just the Senate. Both the House and the Senate by simple by majority would have to approve it *in toto*, either up or down, yes or no. They couldn't change anything. That was considered to be essential to

getting any kind of serious negotiations concluded. We did have it for the Uruguay Round and, as I say, they had it for the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. It has lapsed subsequently, and that is one of the issues that the Clinton Administration was unable to get renewed, and the Bush Administration has put that as pretty high priority, to get fast track authority renewed again. That's always part of negotiations, the argument that there's only so much that you can agree to and still get accepted. There's a great deal of legitimacy to that. Trade negotiations do affect the lives of a lot of people. Ultimately, if markets are liberalized and so forth, there is going to be adjustment, there are going to be some industries that benefit significantly and some that will be disadvantaged. That's always difficult for governments to strike agreement on, but the argument - and it's been proved time after time to be valid - that you then get investment in more efficient industries on all sides and all sides come out winners, in both countries or all the participating countries, of what global trade increases, and all benefit and all come up winners. It's not a zero-sum game, 'If I get more trade, you have to have less trade.' But within that there are adjustments.

There are some sectors that are going to do less well than other sectors, and within an industry, for instance like textiles. That was a classic example. Because of the much cheaper labor rates in Third World countries, unless you had protection, they would wipe out these kinds of jobs in the developed world. Well, there's a good deal of validity to that, but at the same time certain kinds of textile production are much more capital intensive and can be done much more efficiently by more capital-intensive methods that still involve labor but they involve more sophisticated labor and so forth. If indeed these adjustments are allowed to occur, the more advanced industrial countries will do much better in those areas and be able to market those products in the Third World. This is what's happened with globalization, but it does involve some adjustments. There may be some people who lose jobs, some people who gain jobs. In the end there ought to be more jobs everywhere, certainly better paying jobs. But it's a difficult argument to make to the person who might end up seeing their job disappear. So trade issues touch some pretty raw nerves. They create a lot of fears, some justified, many not justified. If you're involved in trade negotiation at all, you have to very aware of that and you have to be keenly conscious that the political processes in any country that purports to be open at least will reflect those kinds of pressures, and legitimately so. Congress will be reflecting pressure from their constituencies who are worried about the effects this trade and others who see advantage to getting these kind of trade agreements. This is one way that you are able to identify and understand these pressures and where they're coming from. At the same time, it's also one way that you can communicate to these constituencies and their spokespersons and so forth as to how they might ultimately end of benefiting, and that you can't go too far too fast or you simply will not have the political support for it and the efforts will collapse. That's why it's such a fascinating area to work in. By this time I had spent a good deal of time in trade issues, seeing them from the point of view of Washington and being involved in negotiations, and seeing them in some of the foreign countries, being directly involved, to see how far we had come and how much global trade had truly grown during this period of time, how many of the agreements over time had worked, sometimes not completely as intended but had consequences. The one thing that had come through to me was that freer trade, more liberal trade doesn't, in every

instance in which I'd seen it, ultimately bring benefits for virtually everyone involved.

Q: Were we looking, on the Uruguay Round and the Canadian one, at a free trade agreement with Mexico, at least sort of digging the preparatory trenches and that sort of thing?

McCONVILLE: Well, not right at that moment. At the very tail-end of my tour as Director of the Office of International Trade, which would have been late 1989 and early '90, in late '89, the Mexicans had been making some noises about the possibility of a free trade agreement with the United States, and we'd had some bilateral trade meetings with them to just sort of talk about this topic. I had participated in some of those in late '89, and at that time our conclusion was that they simply weren't prepared, they didn't understand what this was really about, that the quality of people that they had involved in some of these economic and trade ministries that were talking with us was not very impressive, and that they weren't seriously talking about a real free trade agreement and this was not something that seemed its time had come. But then something happened during this period of time. Carlos Salinas was elected President in of Mexico. I think Mexican presidents are inaugurated in December, so he probably came in in December of '89. In Mexico, even though they were of the same party, when the new President comes in, he brings in new Cabinet members who bring in their people, and there was a wholesale turnover again in not just the top levels but reaching down quite a way into the ministry. Carlos Salinas himself, with a doctorate in economics, I think it was, from Harvard, had in his Cabinet with him a number of other people that had PhD's from Yale and Harvard and Chicago. Some of these people had been in the previous administration but not quite to this depth or breadth. With Salinas' ascension to the Presidency, this whole effort was greatly intensified in Mexico. So we again had another round of talks about the possibility of some kind of a new trade relationship with Mexico, and in these new talks it was like night and day. The people that were heading them on the Mexican side were extraordinarily impressive. They had PhD's from top U.S. universities, and they clearly had very strong backing from Salinas and from his top Cabinet ministers in the economic area, and they were very deeply and genuinely committed to serious talks about free trade. So that had a dramatic impact then on the U.S. side. Coming back from those talks, we were bringing the message that these people are very serious about it. Reagan in fact had mentioned the idea of some day having free trade from Alaska to the tip of South America. It had been thought of at the time as some kind of rhetorical flourish, nothing that was very realistic. Salinas then publicly stated that Mexico was interested in a free trade agreement with the United States, and when he went public with this, it suddenly woke up some people within the Bush Administration. Bush had responded to it in a fairly positive way, and over the course of that year this became a very serious matter. Both governments ultimately agreed, yes indeed, they would very, very seriously explore a free trade agreement between the two nations. This was such a dramatic advance in the whole area of relationship with Mexico, which had for so long looked on the U.S. as something to be feared.

Q: The menace to the north.

McCONVILLE: The menace to the north, and suddenly for the Mexicans to be proposing free trade, it was simply reflective of the fact that Carlos Salinas and the people who were around him were U.S. educated in economics and had come by this time to be persuaded that, for Mexico to modernize itself, trade must be much more open, across the board, there must be economic liberalization domestically but also in their trade relations. Supposedly, Salinas had participated in the economic forum in Davos, Switzerland, that they have annually where a number of very prominent leaders go and talk about international economic issues. Supposedly, also he called on Mitterrand, who was the President of France. Supposedly he had learned later on that Salinas had discussed the possibility of a trade agreement with the United States and his concerns and fears about this, and the Mexican concerns and fears about getting too close to the United States, and then Mitterrand's advice to them had been that, "You really have no choice given your physical location." He said, "Look at France and Germany. We have fought these wars for all of these centuries, and we came to the conclusion that we and Germany had to get along and had to work together. The same is going to have to be true of you and the United States." Mitterrand had given him this advice. But whatever, he had come back from this trip to Europe, and that's when he announced he did wish to seek a free trade agreement with the United States. This was in early 1990.

Q: You left there about that time?

McCONVILLE: I left in mid-year. In fact, this was going to have a lot of consequences, because that ended up being my next assignment, Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs at our embassy in Mexico. The biggest reason that people were interested in me for that job and I was interested in the job was because by this time it was pretty clear we were going to have free trade negotiations that would include Mexico and Canada, the so-called North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) negotiations. So I went off to Mexico then as what was called Economic Minister Counselor, and that was to occupy a good part of my three years in Mexico.

Q: You were there '90 to '93.

McCONVILLE: '90 to '93, right. There had already been a commitment to explore the whole idea of negotiation, and then within the following year there was the actual launch of the negotiations. We in the embassy were very intensely involved with that. As the Minister Counselor for Economic Affairs, we also has a Minister Counselor for Commerce and for Agriculture, and we had a Treasury attaché and so forth, but I was essentially the person who was the key coordinator. In fact, when the negotiations went on, the Treasury attaché was the embassy participant for the financial services negotiation and for agriculture. Commerce got involved, but they were much more interested in promoting American goods as opposed to the trade policy *per se*. While Commerce itself was an important player in the trade negotiations, Commerce in the embassy didn't play that much of a role. Again, we had something like 15 or 18 negotiating groups, and for all but about three of those, the economic section of the embassy was the embassy representative. It was either myself or someone on my staff that was representing it. Of course, then during that period NAFTA became a big front-page issue in the United

States. Again, we just got endless streams of Congressional delegations, Senatorial and Representatives. There were Cabinet officer visits and so forth, just a never-ending stream of them, and almost all of them had at least as part of their agenda to talk about NAFTA while they were there. I think eventually it extended to about 18 groups. Most groups would have one meeting in the U.S., one in Canada and one in Mexico, and each one of them would be meeting about once a month or once every six weeks or so. In any one week we would probably have at least two or three of these negotiating groups in town. Then for some of the overall meetings where they got all the groups together, they were held some in Iowa, in Dallas and Houston, and then some in Mexico. I attended a number of those, as did some of my other people, but there were always negotiating sessions that were going on in Mexico itself. In a typical week, there'd be two or three of these groups in town at any time. Then you'd have all of these visiting business groups and Senators and Congressmen. I remember twice during my stay there Gephardt was the Senator Majority...

Q: Richard Gephardt.

McCONVILLE: He was Speaker of the House. Twice he came down, and each time when he came down he came down with just a few of his staffers; he didn't come down with any other delegation. First Congress had to approve the fast track, which was going to be key, an extension of the fast track, and then the following year there was a crucial vote on NAFTA itself. Each time Gephardt came down, he came down on very, very short notice. He wanted to see President Salinas, he wanted to see the ministers. Ambassador Negroponte, John Negroponte was ambassador at that time, was deeply involved in this whole negotiating process and committed his own personal time extensively to it. He was a superb ambassador. Negroponte arranged the last-minute meeting with the President, but Salinas knew how important Gephardt was.

Q: Gephardt was basically concerned about the union.

McCONVILLE: Gephardt was always very much on the fence. He was undeclared as to where he was. What President Clinton had to deal with here was the fact that he had majority support on the Republican side, although there were Republican opposed too for their own reasons to free trade, but the majority of Republicans were supportive of free trade. Within the Democratic Party, primarily because of pressure from the unions and environmentalists, they had only a minority in favor of free trade, but it was crucial to Clinton, and it wasn't just a handful of Democrats. They had to have a fairly significant number, and there were some significant Democrats who were openly and strongly in favor of NAFTA. But Gephardt was on the fence, and it would clearly be very important if Gephardt as Speaker of the House would have come out openly in support of free trade and the NAFTA. He in the end both times ended up voting against it. I was his personal - what did you call it when a big-name dignitary comes? - control officer for Gephardt on both his visits. But that was just an example of the sorts of exposure that I had down there.

Q: We've already gone through an agonizing time with the Canadians. Well, the

Canadians and the Americans went through an agonizing time coming up with this Canadian-American agreement, if the Mexicans want to come into it, I would think that it would be very hard to sort of disassemble some of the provisions of the American-Canadian agreement in order to meet Mexico.

McCONVILLE: It was really more the other way around. First of all, with the case in Mexico, we were prepared and were insistent that we were going to have this agreement and it was going to go further than the Canadian agreement, most especially in the area of agriculture. Essentially that had been finessed in the Canada agreement. So NAFTA was a broader and more far-reaching agreement than the U.S.-Canadian agreement, and the Canadians were going to have to be prepared. We were going to have a separate bilateral free trade agreement with the Mexicans. Neither we nor the Mexicans had anticipated having the Canadians involved, and then suddenly the Canadian Prime Minister spoke up and said that Canada wanted to be a part of this. Both the U.S. and Mexico were caught off guard by this and weren't really all the keen about the idea, but it was hard to back away. Canada had come in though but with some sense from both the Mexicans and the U.S. that, "Fine, you can be a part of this, but you're going to have to do it on the kind of terms that we are prepared to negotiate. If you can't agree to that, we've already got our agreement with you; we'll have a separate agreement with Mexico." For the Canadians, there again in agriculture, they largely exempted themselves from agriculture in the NAFTA and we ultimately, we and the Mexicans, acquiesced on that. They certainly didn't come as far as we and the Mexicans did. Another issue was the cultural thing again with Canada. It was Jaime Serra Puche, I think, the trade minister of Mexico, who, when asked about this issue, said that, "Mexico isn't afraid of cultural imports; we export culture." It simply was fundamentally different. With their sense of themselves and their security about their culture, they really didn't feel threatened by American culture in the way that the Canadians did and had much less difficulty in dealing with those issues. In any event, you know, Canada did become an important part of it, but they had to come in on sort of the basis that, "We in Mexico are going to negotiate an agreement and we're happy to have you as a part of it, but if you aren't prepared to make some of these commitments, then we will do that bilaterally."

Q: How did you find your colleagues on the Canadian side in Mexico? Was it difficult, or were people on both sides pretty open, do you think, on this thing?

McCONVILLE: Negotiations are negotiations. First of all, the people that were involved from all three countries were pretty capable people, and where the US and Canada, our trade negotiators on both sides, had had more experience than the Mexicans, the Mexicans had a significant number of U.S., internationally but basically U.S. trained people not only in specific trade areas but in a whole broad range of economic areas, and these people, some of them, had been brought into this administration. There were some of them that were coming back with fresh PhD's out of the U.S.. But they were very bright competent, capable people who had had a good deal of sophistication because of their international education. They were a totally different breed than, say, the typical Mexican diplomat, who tended to be somewhat leftish in his outlook and always had a strong undercurrent of anti-Americanism. In the economic ministries down there, this

was not totally but largely absent. This was, of course, actually gaining great acceptance in Latin American in that era, this whole idea of looking much more positively towards market economics and the U.S. model in particular as something that could be very, very useful in Latin America; and it wasn't just in Mexico, it was throughout a good deal of Latin America at that time. So it had become much more acceptable to be openly supportive of liberal economic policies, and the leftists were on sort of the defensive. Now, the leftists still controlled the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and you still heard some of that over there, but these people were nationalistic and they were good negotiators for Mexico, but they also understood and did believe that liberal economic trade policies were in Mexico's interest. So clearly it was somebody that you could negotiate seriously with. There were areas in the U.S. where we were clearly protectionist, things like textiles and transportation sectors and so forth. Agriculture was difficult on both sides. But they were pressing for much more openness than we could politically probably deliver on the U.S. side in some of those areas. These negotiations are never easy, but the caliber of people negotiating for all three parties was of very high quality. It was hard-headed negotiations. During the period of time I was there, in addition to all this trade agenda that was moving forward. There was a tremendous economic opening of Mexico itself. It had begun earlier but was accelerated dramatically during the Salinas years. So this also was an area of a great deal of interest, and it also involved a great deal of reporting. It was, again, something that was of significant consequence to the whole relationship with Mexico. It was absolutely critical as well to the whole idea that you could now seriously negotiate a free trade agreement with Mexico. You couldn't do that with a country that was the Mexico of the '70s or '80s or even earlier than that; it was only if Mexico was truly a fairly open economy that this was going to make sense for us. All of these things were interrelated, but it was a period again of great excitement. I was deeply sorry that Salinas came crashing down like he did a couple years hence. I think that he was truly committed to modernizing Mexico, liberalizing the economy of Mexico, feeling that was absolutely critical to being able to modernize Mexico, and yet he came from a family that had been involved in politics in Mexico for a long time, and he had gotten into the position to be President because he and his family also had ties in that world and his family at least had allowed some of those people to benefit significantly from what was happening in Mexico at the time, he and his family as well. I think that he himself was probably more driven by the idea of modernizing Mexico but this was a compromise that he had made, and that compromise ultimately brought him down.

Q: You're talking about insider corruption, as families?

McCONVILLE: Yes. There was a mixture in the Salinas administration between the people who were clearly these technocrats who were highly motivated people, very well educated, and were driven largely by a sense of mission, of wanting to modernize Mexico. Then you had also some of the old dinosaurs, as they were referred to, the people who had the political connections and that's what they owed their position to, and these people tended to be corrupt because that's the sort of people that had advanced in that system. They were more and more, though, being pushed aside by the technocrats. The technocrats, by and large, were people who were themselves not corrupt. The more and more that they were able to liberalize. Mexico had historically been a place that had

been controlled out of Mexico City. In the old Spanish economic society you had a large number of fiefdoms with the license and control of it being parceled out by Mexico City, and those benefiting from it then would pay off the authorities to have this position, this favored position, and they would benefit at the expense of the masses. This became true when you got sort of a much more state-dominated economy in the '30s and '40s and beyond with the huge petroleum industry that was state controlled and the telephone industry and so forth. In all of these, too, you had certain favored groups. If you worked for the petroleum sector, fine, you got paid pretty well and you had a sinecure, but this came at the expense of a great many other people not having much of anything. There were very inefficient industries and industries that were arrogant and dismissive of the populace as a whole. A big part of what Salinas was doing to was privatizing all of this. In privatizing it, you broke up these power structures, and in a much more liberal economic climate, those who benefited from simply have the license or the privileged position in a particular sector would no longer do so, and that minimized the amount of corruption. But it had been an enormously corrupt society and was still corrupt, less so perhaps than it had been before, but you were moving in the right direction. I recall something like, for instance, customs. Customs in Mexico had been historically so corrupt that there was not an awful lot of customs revenue generated, but there were an awful lot of bribes being paid to customs officials and so forth. The Secretary of the Treasury, for example, the customs king, along the border, in particular, with the U.S. - and this was again partly preparing for what was likely to be a huge expansion in trade over the border as a consequence of NAFTA - tried to modernize the customs facilities up there, not just in people but in the way that they were administered. They secretly trained a whole new crew of customs workers, and then suddenly over one weekend they either fired or dismissed with provocation or transferred virtually all the personnel they had up there and put these new people in, and they were people who were supposed to be bachelors or single women so as not to have close ties. They were moved every three months. We talked to a great many of the American businessmen and the Mexican businessmen who had to go through customs up there, and the effect was dramatic, and the increase in customs revenues was soaring because suddenly there was money going to government. Probably right now you still have a lot of corruption on Mexican borders out of customs. You can't do it once and then it's over with. But these were the kind of things, across a whole broad swath of policy areas, we were doing and attempting to do, and it was very fascinating to see it and to be involved with the Mexicans, to have intimate contact with so many of these people who seemed so committed to this mission.

Q: It was an exciting time.

McCONVILLE: It was a very exciting time. Of course, their economy really began to improve significantly, and you could see the possibility that, given decades into the future, I could see a Mexico resembling a Korea, a country that was truly modernized and would be a totally sort of neighbor to the United States, and NAFTA was going to be a part of all of this. Of course, on the U.S. side, it was the unions and the environmentalists, but with the Clinton Administration, they did deal with this by coming up with separate agreements on labor and environment that were supposed to address some of these issues, and to some extent did, and those were also part of the negotiations. In any event, it was,

again, an extraordinarily exciting period to be in Mexico. I think I mentioned before I got married in Korea and acquired a stepson who was five at that time. It was actually before I left Korea our daughter was born as well in 1987 just before coming back to the United States at that time. So I had my wife and two children at this point, and we enjoyed Mexico too. We did a good deal of traveling when we could get away for a long weekend and so forth when we were down there and had an enormously enriching experience in Mexico and with a Mexico that was changing very dramatically right before our eyes. In any event, NAFTA was concluded before I left but it still had to be ratified by the Senate, which was to be a big battle yet, and this was after I left. After my three years in Mexico, then I went off to be economic counselor in the Philippines. Lo and behold, this happened after I had actually been assigned to the Philippines. It was shortly before I left Mexico. I remember there was a picnic at the ambassador's residence, and Mrs. Negroponte, Diana Negroponte, had kept me aside at one point and was asking about our going to the Philippines and what I had found out about the schools there and so forth. I was sort of puzzled by why would she be interested in the schools. About a week later it was announced that John Negroponte was going to be our new U.S. ambassador to the Philippines. As it happened, I had already been assigned there, but I ended up being the economic counselor for John Negroponte for another three years.

Q: So you were there in Mexico till '96?

McCONVILLE: No, '90 to '93, and then....

Q: I mean in the Philippines.

McCONVILLE: '93 to '96.

Q: In a way, you were in a country that was on its way up before in Mexico, and I would think that the Philippines would be a country that from the outside looks like it's a country kind of on its way down.

McCONVILLE: That was the way it looked when we arrived, but as it happened, there was also a new President in the Philippines, Fidel Ramos. As you said, the Philippines, at one time they had been sort of, after you got past Japan and Hong Kong, one of the more advanced of the countries of East Asia. By this time they had fallen behind most of them because of the Marcos dictatorship. My second assignment was in the Philippines. As a young officer I had done that consular assignment there, and I was there when Ferdinand Marcos was first elected. He ultimately had been a disaster of huge proportions for the Philippines. Then, when he'd been toppled and Aquino's wife had become President.

Q: Cory Aquino.

McCONVILLE: ...Cory Aquino, the flower-power revolution, there had been a lot of goodwill then towards the Philippines. A lot of countries were willing to give a lot of aid. We increased ours even though we were in an era of declining aid, but the Europeans and others came in with a lot of aid because they all wanted to help Cory Aquino and people

around her to restore democracy in the Philippines. It had been a well-intentioned but a poorly disciplined and chaotic administration. Their economic policies had floundered to a significant degree. In addition, they were getting into more and more trouble again financially, and in addition to that, the biggest and most acute problem was on the energy side where, because of leftist political pressures, they had not built a single power plant in the Philippines during the Aquino administration, and those that had been built or did exist were very, very poorly maintained. With Ramos coming on, there had been almost a collapse of the electrical system in Luzon, where Manila is located, and they had these rolling blackouts. Sometimes they'd be six or eight hours a day without electricity. Of course, this had devastating effects on what was already a weak economy. But Fidel Ramos, somewhat like Salinas in Mexico, had brought in more technocrats in key positions in government and was deeply committed himself in trying to open up the Philippine economy, which was what his technocrats were telling him he needed to do, and to get the political support for this sort of thing and to turn towards liberal and open economic international trade, get on this bandwagon of internationalization of global economy to spur growth in the Philippine economy and invite foreign investment and so forth, the sort of thing that worked to a very considerable degree in most of the rest of East Asia. That in fact did begin to emerge during our three years in the Philippines. When we first arrive, as I say, with these blackouts, in fact, they had responded by getting a lot of private investment in electrical power, some of it short term but some of it on a much longer term basis. By the time we got there - we got there in July of that year, I think - by December the blackouts were over and they never did return except during a typhoon or something. In the meantime, they were enacting an increasing series of liberal economic policies opening up the economy and doing a lot of things that Mexico had done, for example. When I first arrived from Mexico and word got out that I had participated very much in NAFTA - there was tremendous interest in NAFTA in the Philippines - I was asked by some people in the American Chamber of Commerce - but it wasn't just the American Chamber, it was the economic community there, the international economic community - to speak on NAFTA and what it was about. I appeared for this thing and there were 150 people in that room, including the brother of the foreign minister. I was somewhat astounded at the audience that had accumulated for this, and it went on for a couple hours. They had all sorts of questions, and it was pretty fascinating. There was tremendous interest among many of these technocrats about the experience in Mexico and what Salinas had done in Mexico and what applicability that might have for the Philippines. Again, I found myself having excellent relations with a lot of technocrats who were very interested in opening up the Philippine economy and were pretty candid in telling us what they were doing and what they were trying to achieve. In so many other countries, where the executive branch is totally dominant and relationships with whatever sort of legislative body they have are not that significant, whether it was in Korea or in Mexico, just examples, it was hardly worth your time to spend much time cultivating those legislators because they had such minimal consequence, so you dealt almost exclusively with the executive branch and the private sector. But in the Philippines, the congress has very significant power, and they welcomed contacts from us, so we in the embassy and the economic section would put a great deal of effort into it. We spent a great deal of time in cultivating relationships with key figures in both the house and senate in congress, and they were, by and large, pretty open about that. We'd

meet with them often, and they would listen to us. We would have a chance to advance some of the issues we were concerned with, whether it be rice again or some of the trade issues. The Uruguay Round had been concluded by that time, as I recall, but getting it ratified in the Philippines was important. So in addition to the relationships with the technocrats, which were on the whole very good, we worked very hard at relationships with the congress because they were very important in getting good legislation passed there, and they found it entirely acceptable for diplomats to come and see them and give them some perspective and to discuss with them the kinds of things that we thought were important and why. I found that very interesting and satisfying as well. Again, the agencies from the U.S., such as Treasury, came over on quite a few visits. They were very interested in getting the banking sector and financial services open. But then USTR, as well as partly getting the Uruguay Round ratified, also sought intellectual property rights and a series of issues in which there was very strong interest in the U.S. We arranged for these visitors from the U.S. to meet with these key figures in congress as well, and both sides were very impressed by this. It was something that hadn't been done before. We succeeded during that three years in getting an awful lot of things done that would advance US trade and economic agenda there and that were in the Philippine interests as well. But the US economic agencies, like they had been in Korea when I was there, were very, very pleased with that sort of effort. Another example, we also tried to involve as well the commercial and agricultural elements, and we always had very strong backing from Ambassador Negroponte and could wheel him in whenever we needed him. So it was, again, a very significant part of the U.S. embassy's agenda, and to work with the American business community, the American Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines, and so forth. So it was, again, a very good model to work with. This ended up being a much more rewarding experience than I had really anticipated. During that period of time, the Philippine economy made some very major strides forward and was suddenly getting attention internationally. Ramos was getting a great deal of attention as bringing about some very fundamental reform and greatly raising the prestige of the Philippines internationally as a consequence of the policies. Of course - this was after I left, when he was succeeded by this movie star, Josef Estrada, who has managed to mess an awful lot of that up again.

Q: He was kicked out by the people.

McCONVILLE: The woman who has replaced him, his Vice President, she was in the Congress at that time as a Senator, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. We met with Gloria, I remember, on quite a few occasions. Her father had been President. He'd actually been the President that Marcos had defeated, Diosdado Macapagal. But she actually graduated from Georgetown and was an economist. She has, I think, a PhD from the University of the Philippines, so she may ultimately get them back on track again. It was another experience of seeing good economic policy pay off very well when it's being devised and implemented by competent people in some other government, and to see what kind of positive consequences this can have for a country.

Q: Did you see any of the problem that's brought up a number of the Southeast Asian countries and Japan and all, and that is sort of sweetheart loans from banks?

McCONVILLE: Not in the Philippines. This had been true in Korea. The Korean system is very comparable to Japan in that degree, but not in the Philippines for the reason that there had been very significant reform in the banking sector. The American banks were a part of this, but there were some very competent Philippine banks. You know, the Filipinos have a higher level of literacy and a higher level of education overall than many of the other peoples in East Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, and because of both their abilities but also their English language capability and so forth, they are highly sought after throughout East Asia as international employees. Many of them, including the banking sector, had worked abroad for a good while elsewhere in East Asia, and it was only with the Philippine economy now beginning to finally expand and grow very dramatically and opportunities were opening up that many of them were now coming back to the Philippines. In any event, the banking system there, because it was a much more American-oriented, open banking system than those elsewhere in East Asia, had been run a good deal better and, particularly under the Ramos administration, they were being operated on much sounder banking principles. So the degree of sweetheart loans and banks being dramatically overcommitted in those areas was not nearly as much of a problem in the Philippines. And now that they were opening up their economy, their economy was in many ways become more open than many of their neighbors who had been more open previously, because they were going further than some of the others had been willing to do. There problem tends to be, again, more on the political side, that they get the wrong kind of leadership in there and the old enemies of corruption and mismanagement and frivolousness and so forth overwhelm them, and those who are well intentioned and an extraordinary number of capable Filipinos get disheartened. In the Philippines - again, partly it's this American heritage - they are deeply committed to a democratic society. They're comfortable with it, their mores and so forth, cultural attitudes to democracy; they're much more attuned to this than some of the other more authoritarian societies of East Asia where they have had real little experience with democracy through most of their history and find it difficult to adapt their cultures to this sort of a more open and free-wheeling kind of society. The Philippines can thrive in it, but their problem tends to be that the mass of the Filipinos, who are poor and often haven't had too much education, get enticed by some of these demagogues or some of the populists and so forth and will elect these kind of people instead of some of the much more bright and able people that they do have, and these people can lead them down some pretty silly paths. Maybe having had the experience with Estrada, they will be a little bit more sober about it the next time, but there is a real deep division. There's an increasing middle class in the Philippines, and they respect and recognize the abilities of people like that, but the broad masses of people still are deeply suspicious of these people as to whether they really have their interests in mind and are too easily swayed by the demagogues and the populists. I think that if the Philippines can simply - they've got the abilities, they had the policies in place and they had the institutions in place - succeed in getting sustained growth for a couple of decades and with this bring about the broadening enough of the middle class and of the literate in their society and so forth and with that begin to achieve a more stable political process.

Q: Did you find being in our embassy in Manila it was sort of a relief to people that we

no longer had our bases in the Philippines? Prior to that everything was so predicated on keeping those basis.

McCONVILLE: I think that's very clear, and it wasn't just we in the embassy. Within the Philippine society, first of all, if you talk to Filipinos and talk to them across broad swaths of the body politic in the Philippines, they'll almost all tell you how much they like Americans. There's also some anti-American element, like there always is, and it's particularly on the left. Always the United States, as being the center of capitalism in the world, is going to be a lightning rod for a certain amount of resentment. Even at the time this treaty with Subic Bay (naval base) was defeated in the Senate, public opinion polls had shown a very high level of support for Subic amongst the body politic in general. So Filipinos would consistently be telling you, "I really like the idea of losing the bases," but most of them would recognize that this was absolutely necessary to their finally kind of cutting the umbilical cord with the United States and thinking of the fact that most of the problems that they had were of their own making and that they had to be able to address these problems themselves. I'd been there '65 to '67, now I was there '93 to '96, it's almost 30 years later, and the difference.... During that '65-to-'67 period, there had been just a constant drumbeat of anti-American agitation and certain columns in the newspaper. They did it as sort of a sport. The same guy who would be writing these and would seem vehemently anti-American in columns would pride himself about his American friends and would have his children educated in the U.S. and so forth. Particularly among the intellectuals and the intelligencia and so forth, you simply were in great danger of being dismissed if you weren't anti-American or at least weren't anti-base and so forth. It was just part of the static in the background. But during the period I was there from '93 to '96, this was almost completely absent. It was no longer fashionable to constantly be denouncing the Americans. There was a little bit of it here and there but, by and large, I was astounded how much the climate had changed, and this had changed largely since we had left Subic. Even the U.S. military at this point had come around to the view that it was a much healthier relationship with the Philippines now that the bases weren't there anymore. We were beginning to having some of the first ship visits since the departure of Subic when I was there. I don't think we'd had the first ship come back into Subic yet, but they were visiting Manila, some ship visits and so forth, and they went well, by and large. The U.S. Army Chief of Staff visited the Philippines while I was there, during the last year I was there, for the first time since we had left Subic. And we were beginning to restore relationships, like we had with a number of Southeast Asian countries, with their military, having occasional exercises together and some degree of reasonable cooperation.

The U.S. military itself had realized that it was not as important as they had once thought it to be, and having other arrangements in the Philippines might well serve U.S. military interests as well. So some of the resentment of the military and particularly the U.S. Navy had dissipated by this time. Ramos, of course, was very highly regarded by the military. He had been a West Point graduate and then had been basically a very U.S.-oriented general throughout most of his career. He was quite insistent, for example, the last time he was there in 1966, on the 50th anniversary of Philippine independence from the United States, which was granted July 1st, 1946, Ramos was quite insistent on having

pretty extensive celebrations of that in the Philippines and personally attended them all. He was not at all bashful about the fact that he still had a very deep regard for the United States. So in that way it was a much healthier relationship. It was dramatic in its sort of psychological significance in the Philippines in a very fundamental way. Suddenly it had prompted the Filipinos to look to themselves and to finally accept more responsibility for themselves, for their conditions and the fact that the way out was to make changes in themselves and in the way they dealt with the world and so forth, their international economic policies and so forth, rather than always looking for a scapegoat or blaming the United States in some fashion. Then Ramos made a big hit with Clinton, so Clinton visited twice while I was there. He once was en route to a meeting of the...

Q: ASEAN?

McCONVILLE: No, it's not called ASEAN. They've got this new organization now which encompasses all of East Asia; the name of it slips my mind right now. [Ed. note: APEC, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation] But they have annual presidential summits, and this one was being held in Indonesia, so Clinton stopped in the Philippines en route to Indonesia, in part because also - this was in '45 - it was the 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War. I was there Clinton's visit, and he had a ceremony at Corregidor and then at the American cemetery in the Philippines, which is the largest U.S. cemetery. You know, veterans of the Pacific War are buried there, both Filipino and American, and it's the largest American cemetery outside of the United States proper. The biggest in the Pacific, I think, is in Honolulu, but this is the next biggest. It's a beautiful setting. Partly the reason Clinton stopped there was to have some commemoration of the ending of World War II. He had gone to Normandy and some of the ceremonies for World War II in Europe. But in any event, the relationship between Clinton and Ramos got to be very good. Clinton quite clearly admired Ramos. Under the new constitution, presidents serve one term of four years and they couldn't run for reelection, which is a pity in this case. Ramos was a very good politician despite the fact he'd been a career military officer. One thing that I came away with was the deep impression that Ramos was fundamentally committed to democracy, believed in it very deeply, and that while he had a role for a time in the military during the Marcos years, the man had every opportunity, when it really came to crunch time, the man was deeply committed to the rule of law and to maintaining democracy in the Philippines. There was no evidence during the time he was president that he ever accumulated any significant amount of wealth for himself. He was a man on a mission. His wife had worked in administration at the International School, which is basically the American School in the Philippines. It had a lot of Filipinos attending, and other foreigners, but it was called the International School. It was like an American School in many countries. She'd worked there for years teaching and in administration, and even during the time he was president, she continued to work there part-time in administration. She was just totally unaffected, totally natural, and they were just two very, very decent people, and the Philippines was very blessed to have them. Too bad that they couldn't have stayed on in power a little bit longer, because he was very, very good for the Philippines.

Q: Then you left there in '96? Maybe it's a good time to stop. Where'd you go after that?

McCONVILLE: I came back for my final assignment a Director of Central American Affairs in ARA.

Q: How long?

McCONVILLE: Two years.

Q: Maybe we can cover that now.

McCONVILLE: All right. Well, with the Philippines, again, it had been another experience where I'd been blessed during a very interesting period of time in the Philippines and, again, another period in which liberal and economic policies were being implemented and there was a sense of excitement in the society about what was happening. To see these things first-hand was an extraordinary experience. In the Philippines you had particularly close ties. Even people like the President was someone as an economic counselor I got to see from time to time. Anyway, when I returned to the United States, it was for my final tour as Director of the Office of Central American Affairs in ARA. Central America encompasses the five Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Costa Rica plus Belize, the former British colony.

Q: Panama too?

McCONVILLE: And Panama was the last part of it. Of course, this was during the period when we were turning over the Canal to Panama, which was to be concluded in the year '98. We had begun discussions with the Panamanians about the possibility of continued U.S. military presence in Panama. Under the terms of the agreement, the treaty with Panama for turning over the Canal, it involved the complete turning over of all military bases in Panama to the Panamanians and all of the Canal Zone and so forth, and a lot of this had already taken place. It was being staged over a number of years. But, I believe, January 1st, 1998, this was to be all completed and the Canal turned over in full to Panama, and all U.S. bases would have been eliminated and all US military presence would be out of Panama and what had previously been the Panama Canal Zone. But the two Presidents, Clinton and the President of Panama, had agreed to have some negotiations to explore the possibility of some kind of continued US military presence in Panama, and it was to be set around some kind of an anti-drug effort. They were flying out of Panama at the time these AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) aircraft and others to try to intercept drug trafficking coming out of Colombia and Peru and other countries in South America, and this was to be a continuation of this sort of thing and then some training for regional anti-drug efforts. There were discussions about the possibility of this involving perhaps a few thousand American troops who would remain in Panama. There was a good deal of interest about this in Congress, and the State Department decided to designate a special negotiator for these negotiations. Who was selected for that but John Negroponte. He was physically located in the office. In fact, we gave a part of our office space for him, so it was in the office right directly next to mine. I

remember when we first ran into each other after he got back again and he said, "Let me know where you're going on your next assignment, because I'll probably be going with you." He wasn't under me and I wasn't under him, but we had to obviously collaborate very closely, and we were physically located in the same suite of offices. That was part of our charge too, but he then took over chairing the whole U.S. effort in the direct negotiation. We had this whole portfolio of Central America including Panama, and there were a lot of other issues with Panama at this time. Now, by this time in Central America they were finally winding down this whole period of civil wars in Central America that they'd had during the '80s with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and then El Salvador. The U.S. had been involved to one degree or another in a fair amount of it. In Guatemala, where we hadn't been that directly involved for a number of years, they'd had this civil war that was finally being brought to a close. Negotiations were going on at this time to conclude this thing. So you had within Central America, the five Central American countries there, for the first time in a very long time a period of peace and by now a need to restore these societies. Some of them were a little more advanced on it than others. But they too, like a good deal of the rest of Latin America and a good deal of the rest of the Third World, were also trying to modernize by adopting liberal economic policies and, like Mexico and many others, you had a number of U.S.-educated technocrats who were leading this sort of effort and who were in prominent places in these administrations. The wars now were behind us - and they had been pretty divisive political issues in the United States as well, where there had been deep division in the United States between those had been supportive of some of the rebels in Latin America - it would depend upon which government it was; sometime the rebels were left and sometimes they were on the right - and those who were supportive of the established governments there - and, of course, the Contras and that kind of thing during the '80s, and all of this was behind us. You still had this old baggage of atrocities and human rights abuses and so forth, and some of them still continued to plague some parts of Central America, but you had all this demand for making some of this public. But more and more that was becoming less and less a focus of our office, and responding to the desire for modernization in these countries was becoming more important, and their desire for now a different and closer relationship with the United States now with the new government and with the economic dimension of it being a significant portion of it. In fact, they were talking about wanting to have a free trade agreement with the United States and saying that they were disadvantaged because Mexico had one now and they didn't and they would like to have a free trade agreement. So you had a desire again to expand this relationship with the United States and a proposal for ministerial meetings. Secretary Madeleine Albright was sympathetic to all of this, so as a consequence she was very open to the idea of having annual ministerial meetings with Central American ministers, and in addition to her, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Treasury, Attorney General - there were a lot of justice issues that were involved in Central America - and Attorney General Reno got very interested in this. We had these ministerial meetings. There were four or five minister-level participants on each side. We had one down in Central America and one in the United States during the time I was there. There were two of them, and they were going to be annual thereafter. But they were very successful in setting out an agenda across a broad range of things on which you can get cooperation, and there were people, as I say, in Treasury and Justice and Labor and others who were quite impressed by their counterparts in Central America

and became quite interested in working out agendas with them to broaden the relationship. Then we had a Presidential visit where Clinton, when he took a trip to Latin America, stopped in Costa Rica and met in Costa Rica with all the Central American Presidents. That was also part of that two-year period, so we had a very active agenda and, on the whole, a very positive and forward-looking agenda, because, again, people were awakened to the fact that we had very important reasons to have good relations with these countries, including the fact that there were so many of their citizens now living in the United States and, if things didn't improve down there, they couldn't take advantage of it, now that they had finally gotten the peace and the potential of being able to modernize their society, that the ultimate consequence would be only ever-increasing pressure for migration to the United States. So, again, this was another period of pretty positive experience, and a lot of the experience that I had had elsewhere in my career was helpful to me. This was returning to Latin America and, of course, I'd been in Mexico. My first assignment had been in Panama eons before. But it was a very good experience, and I was very impressed with the group of people that I worked with. The Office of Central American Affairs had had a good reputation, and we succeeded in attracting a lot of bright young people to that office. We had the regular turnover while we were there. We attached a lot of importance to finding good replacements and had a very good selection of people to choose from. We were able to maintain a very high quality of people in that office, so that again was another very good experience for me, both as a manager and as a policy participant in some of this and working with the interagency process in Washington, who got pretty impressed by how their interest could be furthered in working with these Central American countries.

Q: Then you retired in?

McCONVILLE: I retired then in September of 1998. I just did a two-year tour as Director of Central American Affairs.

Q: Okay. I want to thank you very much. This has been great.

McCONVILLE: Well, I've enjoyed it. For a kid from a little town in Minnesota who had no idea what the Foreign Service was about when he first took that test and got started off on this track, it was quite a lifetime.

End of interview