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EDMUND MURPHY

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INTERVIEW

Early Government Employment, Education, and Teaching Experience

Q: Today is January 30, 1990. Being interviewed is Edmund R. Murphy, retired Foreign Service Officer of the United States Information Agency. Ed Murphy began his government career in the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in 1942, but left after 9 months for a three-year stint in the U.S. Navy during World War II. In 1946 he returned to the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs to resume his career. By the time of his retirement from USIA in 1973, he had held a number of senior positions in the Foreign Service, including Policy Officer for Latin American on two

occasions, Cultural Attaché in Argentina, and Director of USIS Operations in Haiti, Colombia and Finland, after which he was a Senior Inspector for the Agency.

Entrance Into Office of Coordinator,
Inter-American Affairs--1942

Q: Let's begin by telling us how you happened to join the office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, which at the time was headed by Nelson Rockefeller.

MURPHY: It was as a result of one of my fellow students in the Graduate School at U.C. Berkeley being employed by the State Department. He joined the Cultural Relations Division and he recommended me to Kenneth Holland, who was the head of the Education Division of the Coordinator's Office. It was as a result of that recommendation that Kenneth Holland asked me to come to Washington to join that organization.

Q: I see. What were your qualifications for a job in that office?

Educational and Teaching Background

MURPHY: In college I was a history and education major with Latin America as a special interest. After graduation I had been a secondary school teacher for two years in Northern California, teaching social studies. Then I returned to the University of California where I was a teaching assistant of Hemisphere history in the Graduate School for two and a half years. I completed my master's thesis on a subject of colonial American history. This study was subsequently published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Work for the Master's degree was under the guidance of Dr. Herbert Eugene Bolton, who was legendary as a specialist in Colonial history of the western Hemisphere. I was also a student of Dr. Lawrence Kinnaird (one of Dr. Bolton's students) who left academe temporarily in the 40's to serve as Cultural Attaché in Santiago, Chile.

Q: With the outbreak of World War II, I understand you joined the Navy and in 1945 when the war ended you were mustered out as a full lieutenant. Then early in 1946 you returned to your former position with Nelson Rockefeller's office. Would you tell us what happened then?

1946: Return to Coordinator, IIA's Office
And Then Transfer to Division of Libraries
and Institutes (ILI) in DepState

MURPHY: By that time many of the functions of the Education Division of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs had been transferred to the Department of State and this brought the opportunity for me to transfer to the Division of Libraries and Institutes (ILI) in the Department of State and I did so in '46.

Q: What libraries did that include?

MURPHY: Those were the overseas American libraries designed to give foreigners access to basic American printed and other materials. At that time, most of the American libraries in Latin America were a part of the operations of the cultural institutes (which were later called "Cultural Centers", or "Binational Centers"). But there were at least two libraries which became highly successful as independent, U.S. operated libraries. These were the Benjamin Franklin Library in Mexico City and the Lincoln Library in Buenos Aires. There were of course, American libraries in other parts of the world, but I was not involved in working with them. The basic legislation restricted our activities to Latin America at that time.

Q: In 1948 you became a section head in ILI of the Department of State and you were dealing directly with the Cultural Institutes or Binational Centers. Can you tell us something about the early history of that program?

Early History of the Cultural Centers--Later
Designated Binational Centers

MURPHY: The earliest institution of this kind was organized in Buenos Aires in 1927 and it opened in 1928. It featured English classes for Argentines, a library collection about the United States, and programs of cultural and other activities designed to promote better understanding with the United States. Before the United States Government became involved, such institutions had been founded--largely on the initiatives of foreign nationals--in Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Haiti, Peru and Venezuela. These centers were administered by local Boards of Directors, both foreign nationals and Americans resident in the various countries. They operated on limited resources, usually could afford only rented premises inadequate for their purpose, and they seldom could afford to employ Americans as teachers because of economic differences. It was evident that the centers were pursuing a laudable goal, and that they could, with a little outside help, greatly improve the quality of their offerings to the public. By 1940 it was evident that the United States would likely get involved in World War II, and that, in such an event, the support of the nations of Latin America could be crucial to our pursuit of victory. The climate thus being favorable, a limited program of support to binational centers was begun in that year. It was administered by the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, in cooperation with other governmental and private agencies. Once limited aid was available, the program grew rapidly. Eight new centers were organized in 1942 and in 1943-44 six more were added. By 1945 there were such centers in every Latin American republic except Panama. In 1946, U.S. Government assistance became a responsibility of the Department of State, where it remained until 1953, when the United States Information Agency was separated from State and became an independent Agency.

In 1952 the same pattern of aid had been extended to the Near and Far East, and centers flourished in Tehran, Ankara, Rangoon, and considerably later in Saigon. By 1955, 34 centers were participating in the program and 12 others received limited assistance. The annual support level was by then approximately \$1,000,000 dollars annually, with the

greater part of this sum being devoted to paying the salaries and travel expenses of the American citizens assigned to work in the centers. Anyone interested in further details of this program should consult the index of the Department of State Bulletin, as several of the participants in this program have published articles in that magazine. Also, in February and March of 1949 I visited twelve binational centers in seven countries of Latin America, and wrote a report which may still be found in the archives. It dealt mostly with how to improve the effectiveness of the centers and the U.S. relationship with them.

1949: Assistant Cultural Affairs Officer (CAAO)
Mexico City

Q: In July of 1949 you received your first overseas assignment as assistant cultural affairs officer in Mexico City. Would you tell us about that?

MURPHY: That was an interesting time to be in Mexico. Miguel Aleman was the President of Mexico at that time, and Lazaro Cardenas, who had formerly been President, was still around as the "grand old man" of Mexican politics. The U.S. cultural staff, under Phillip Raine, had excellent contacts with the universities and the principal cultural institutions, such as the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, as well as with the writers, philosophers, painters, scientists and other intellectuals. The painters Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros were internationally known and they were in demand in the United States.

Our Ambassador at that time was Walter Thurston, who was a career officer, and he was succeeded after a little, by William O'Dwyer who--

Q: You mean the former Mayor of New York City?

MURPHY: Yes, he had been the Mayor of New York City. His political appointment came as something of a surprise to Mr. Thurston who had not been informed that he was being replaced. Mr. O'Dwyer still had some obligations to return to New York from time to time in connection with certain allegations pending against his administration. But he was a very colorful ambassador, splendid at public relations, as are most people who reach such important elective offices. His wife, a New York fashion model, made a lovely hostess who graced all Embassy functions with her charm and wit.

Q: What were your principal duties as assistant cultural attaché?

MURPHY: I acted as liaison with the binational center (Instituto Mexicano-Norteamericano de Relaciones Culturales) and I served on its board of directors as Embassy representative. There was a very large exchange of persons programs, and I did some interviewing of candidates for both private and government exchange programs. That was not my principal responsibility however, because Dorothy Jester, another assistant CAO was primarily responsible for that aspect of our program. I worked with

student groups, teacher groups, some music, art and literary groups, and with assistance to American sponsored schools in Mexico. For an interim period, I was the Acting Cultural Attaché, and during that period my duties were greatly expanded and encompassed the book translation program, programming of lecturers, concert artists and other "cultural presentations" sent from the U.S. by our State Department. I also had some supervisory duties with respect to the Benjamin Franklin Library in Mexico City.

Q: Are that Center and Library still going strong today?

MURPHY: Yes, they are. Both are still highly respected institutions in Mexico. As I've mentioned, this was one of the few overseas libraries in Latin America operated by our government because most American libraries in that area were administered by the binational centers. The Biblioteca Benjamin Franklin is still the showpiece it was in 1949 when it was headed by Miss Bertha Harris, one of the library's most distinguished employees.

Q: And at that time (1949-53) you were a Foreign Service reserve officer. What did that mean? When did you become a career Foreign Service officer?

MURPHY: Well, there wasn't really any opportunity to be a full-fledged foreign service officer early in our careers. That prospect didn't open to us. But it was possible to get temporary appointments as reserve officers and it was only after many years that finally we were able to take examinations to enter the regular foreign service. I took the exams in 1960 when I was serving as the cultural attaché in Argentina. So I became a career officer after that.

1953: Assignment Washington--DepState--Policy
Officer for Latin America, Then to USIA
When Agency Separated from State, August 1953

Q: When you finished your Mexican tour of duty, you were assigned back to Washington as a Policy Officer for Latin America in the Office of Policy which in those days was known as IOP. Is that right?

MURPHY: That's right.

Q: That was in March of 1953. Were you still in the State Department, and how did you move into USIA?

MURPHY: When I returned to Washington, the separation between the Department and USIA was already underway. The work was pretty much the same in either place, so I hardly noticed any differences that may have existed. I think my title was Policy and Planning Officer and I was working directly under Allen Haden at that time. It was not long before Andrew Berding came in to head the Policy Office, and then I worked with Ralph Hilton, who was head of the Latin American Section of the Policy Office. All of

this was not long after the inauguration of President Dwight Eisenhower. And in that change-over I more or less automatically became a USIA officer instead of a State Department officer.

1956: Branch Public Affairs Officer, Lyon, France

Q: This was still fairly early in your career. In January of '56 you went overseas again, this time to be the Branch Public Affairs Officer in Lyon, France?

MURPHY: That's right.

Q: What can you tell us about that assignment? That must have been a very nice place to be.

MURPHY: Well, Lyon itself is a rather cold and foggy place. It doesn't have a very attractive climate, but it was an interesting place to be. I still have contacts with people there. It was the second largest city in France, and it had in early times been famous as a center of silk cloth manufacture. It was the silk center of Europe, but that industry had declined a lot in favor of more heavy industry and it had become a rather smog-ridden town as the industry blackened the buildings and took some of the sheen off of the beauty of the place.

Q: It was really an industrial city.

MURPHY: Yes, it was an industrial city, but it was a challenging assignment because we had such a large part of France to cover. We worked north to Dijon, east to Switzerland, south to St. Etienne and west to Clermont- Ferrand. I was on the road a great deal of the time when I was in Lyon because we developed and sponsored programs in most of the major cities of that whole area of France.

America Days Programs in University Cities
of North France

Q: What kind of programs did you have at that time?

MURPHY: Well, one of the programs that we ran in all these places where there was a university was an America days program once a year. So we organized a program of several days consisting of musical or other performing events and lectures and seminars and social events involving all the faculty and administration of the universities in Dijon and Grenoble, Clermont-Ferrand and Lyon.

Q: How much staff did you have for all this activity?

MURPHY: I had an American secretary part of the time and one American assistant. Then later USIA added a trainee. During my stay there I had two different American trainees who had not previously been on an assignment.

Q: So breaking those trainees in, and then covering that vast area really kept you going.

MURPHY: Oh, that was a busy time, and it was not easy in those years. For one thing, France still had a critical housing shortage as a result of the war and we couldn't find a place to live. We ended renting a crumbling, drafty, chateau 14 kilometers out of town.

Communists--Frequently City Officials in 1960s-- Were Difficult to Work With

But another thing was that the communist party was fairly strong in that part of France, and frequently we had to deal with municipal officials who were communists and who, needless to say, were not very friendly. When we made protocol calls, they used to try to show us where Americans had bombed hospitals, schools, nurseries, churches and the like, never mentioning which of them might have been bombed by Germans or referring to the fact that American intervention had helped to save France.

Q: Yeah.

International Events Impacted on USIS Programs in France

MURPHY: But anyway, we put up with quite a lot of stuff to work some of those cities. And France wasn't having too easy a time.

Revolt in and Loss of Algeria

One of her major problems was that North Africa was falling apart--specifically Algeria. There was a strong nationalistic movement through most of that country. It was very closely tied to France economically, and France had a lot of internal problems with that. There were a lot of incidents of terrorism by Arabs, who eventually, of course, succeeded in throwing off the yoke of France, partly because the United States supported the nationalist movements in Africa.

Hungarian Revolt of 1956 Resulted in Immense Refugee Flow to France

I think one of the things I remember was the Hungarian attempted revolt against Russia which was crushed ruthlessly. Refugees streamed out of Hungary and a lot of them landed in France. The agency sent us a Hungarian- speaking assistant at that time to try to take care of some of that overflow out of Hungary.

The Suez Crisis: U.S. Halting of British/French/
Israeli Attack on Egypt. French Hostility to America

And the other event was the Suez crisis. I don't know whether you remember that, but because Nasser was very threatening about the Canal, England and France got together and decided they would try to provoke an incident that would justify intervention on their part, and they arranged with Israel to create an incident. Israel bombed the Egyptian Army in the Gaza strip and as a result Pres. Abdel Gamal Nasser nationalized and closed down the Canal. This was terribly serious because France was dependent on oil from the Middle East which was shipped through the Suez Canal. But that incident was what England and France wanted and it justified their intervention. They were moving towards intervention when President Eisenhower stepped in and stopped the whole thing.

Q: So they had another reason for loving the Americans?

MURPHY: The French were absolutely irate and I will never forget that I gave a party sometime during that event and I got rude notes from Frenchman who said they didn't come to the party because American policy prevented them from getting gasoline. I still hear from one of those Frenchmen, who was at the Sorbonne for several years afterwards and a prominent literary professor in France, specialist in American literature. Now he's quite friendly.

Q: Was that period also when the French insisted that the NATO troops leave France? Or was that before or after?

MURPHY: I think that was after. To return to the subject of my experiences in France, like any USIS post, we have "cultural presentations" to program in our area, e.g., military orchestras, American performing artists (Andre Watt, an American concert pianist, was one), and distinguished visitors like then Senator William Fulbright, who came to receive an honorary degree from the University of Dijon. One of our "out of routine" programs was participation in the annual gastronomic fair in Dijon. Each country had to present some typical dish at the various receptions given when the French Foreign Minister (Maurice Couve de Murville) visited the fair. Bertha Potts, who was my assistant at that time, and I decided we would do an American Thanksgiving feast, preceded by old-fashioned (American bourbon being considered typical despite the French name) and popcorn. We were able to get American turkeys from the commissary. Bert supervised the roasting of turkeys and dressing and she made the popcorn, while I prepared the old-fashioned and some cocktail snacks and helped to serve. It looked as if the French appreciated our efforts and even our food, thanks perhaps to the generous supply of bourbon.

While I was in Lyon, the city celebrated its 2,000th anniversary, and the 200th anniversary of the birth of Lafayette. We participated in these events, as we did in the funeral of Mayor Edouard Herriot (a former President of France) in a mass ceremony in

Place Bellecour in the center of Lyon, a magnificent public spectacle of unforgettable mourning for one of France's heroes.

After Short Temporary Assignment in
Washington (1958), Cultural Affairs Officer,
Buenos Aires (February 1959)

Q: In October of 1958 you were given a temporary assignment as desk officer in the Office of the Assistant Director for Latin America. Do you recall what countries were included in that assignment?

MURPHY: Yes, that was a temporary assignment with Lewis Schmidt and Albert Harkness. I did some work on the USIA Argentine program, but took on whatever overflow needed attention. That was while awaiting my transfer orders from France to Argentina.

Q: Oh, yeah.

MURPHY: Originally, I was supposed to transfer from Lyon to Bordeaux but while I was on home leave, I think Al Harkness intervened and negotiated with Bill Cody to let me go because Al wanted me to go to Argentina.

Q: I see.

MURPHY: Because the Argentine vacancy wasn't available yet, I had a temporary assignment until they could send me to Argentina.

Q: Right, I can see it was only about three months, October of '58 that you came back and in February of '59 you went to Buenos Aires as Cultural Attaché.

MURPHY: That's right.

Q: Where did you live that three months when you came back? It's a problem we all face when we come back from overseas.

MURPHY: Well, I found a French diplomat who was going on home leave to Paris and I rented his house on Macomb Street, just off Connecticut Avenue. We were very comfortable there and our kids could walk to school from there and it worked out very nicely.

Q: How big was your family at that time?

MURPHY: Well, we had five children at that time.

Q: I see.

MURPHY: The house we rented was a big house.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about your assignment as Cultural Attaché to Buenos Aires?

Peronist Influence Still Strong in 1969:
Economy in Shambles

MURPHY: Yes. It was a time that's somewhat like now because one thing that one noticed right away in Argentina was the terrible inflation. Another thing you noticed was that there was still a very strong Peronist element in Argentina among the working class in spite of the fact that Peron had been gone since the end of September, 1955. And, it was also evident that because all of the money he had spent on social gains for the working people, the infrastructure in Argentina had fallen apart. Their once famous British railroads, a model of efficiency, were in shambles. The streets were full of potholes. Public transportation was undependable. Telephones didn't work. Electricity was sporadic. Garbage frequently piled up in the streets. In short, the after effects of the Peron regime were all too conspicuously visible.

Q: We're talking 30 years ago?

MURPHY: Yes, we're talking 1959-1961.

Q: You could almost be talking about Buenos Aires today!

MURPHY: Of course, of course. It's very much the same. That was a rough time for us and more particularly for the Argentines because they could scarcely survive with the inflation.

Book Translation Program Troubles

Q: I believe at that time USIA was having some difficulties with the book translation program, as it was being operated in BA prior to your arrival. Traditionally this program operated somewhat independently from USIS, if I'm not mistaken. At least it does today. Would you care to comment on the situation that apparently developed with respect to this regional book program in BA during your tenure there?

MURPHY: Yes, the book program in Argentina was and had been an almost independent operation and it was not really in the local chain of command under the cultural operation. It was a regional service center for all of Latin America, so it was not considered by USIA to be a USIS Argentine operation. But I did take a close interest in it and I was consulted when titles were discussed and so on. But it developed that the public affairs officer at that time became somewhat suspicious that there was collusion going on. And I think after some months of rather quiet investigation it did turn out that the

Argentine who was publishing the books was shortchanging USIS, i.e., he was not publishing the numbers of books that he said he was publishing. The result of that was that the book officer was transferred and I think he afterwards resigned.

Q: What were your major activities on the cultural side during the years you were there?

MURPHY: Well, I was concerned with the exchange of persons program a good deal in Argentina.

Regaining American Control of Exchange of Persons Program

I found when I arrived there that it was handled largely by Argentines and the Americans had tended to sort of give them the full responsibility. That caused some problems needing to be cleared up because it looked like there was too much favoritism in certain sectors with the exchange program and I think I did help to break down the system and insist that the Americans take more leadership in the nominating process. I was elected chairman of the Fulbright Committee in Argentina. That situation was a little unusual because they had always had an Argentine in that job. The locally employed Executive Secretary was a lawyer who had several jobs. He paid too little attention to the program and was arbitrary in his decisions. Fortunately, we were able to replace him with an Argentine who had studied in the U.S., and who gave full time to this job. Historically, USIS Buenos Aires has been a troubled program for the Agency. For reasons not clearly understandable, that post has always had more than its share of problems.

Q: Had the Lincoln Library been established by then?

MURPHY: Oh, yes. The Lincoln Library had a great location on Avenida Florida and it was a busy and popular place. Isabelle Entrikin was the American librarian, and she was very able and popular in Argentina. Only two blocks away was the Argentine-American cultural center that had been founded by Luis Fiore, a wealthy Buenos Aires businessman.

Argentines Somewhat Touchy About USIS Intervention in Binational Center Programs

Q: And this is the binational center.

MURPHY: Yes, this is the center I spoke of earlier as having been opened in 1928. I understood that the motive in founding this center was to counteract the bad publicity the U.S. was getting in Argentina over the Sacco-Vanzetti case. The Italians represent an important part of the nationalities who make up the Argentine. Rosario, which also has a binational center, is a very Italian city. The Binational Center in BA had been in existence for 12 years before the U.S. embarked on assistance programs. So the local founders did not welcome American suggestions or interference. Nonetheless, it was and is effective.

Q: Was there considerable difference between the BA binational center and the one in Bogota, Colombia, where you later served?

MURPHY: Yes, a very big difference that can be accounted for principally by the fact that American initiative, financing and personnel were involved in the Bogota center from its inception. So the question about the extent of American participation was never moot. On the other hand, the BA center was created by local, Argentine initiative, and had a strong feeling of independence.

Q: In Argentina, were there other binational centers besides the ones already mentioned?

MURPHY: Yes. Besides Rosario, there was one in Cordoba, one in Mendoza, one in Salta and another in the process of getting organized in Santiago del Estero. The latter two did not have American personnel in them; the others did. As part of my job I visited all of these centers from time to time to participate in their programs and to confer with their Boards about their needs, and give the American personnel some contact with headquarters.

Q: Were the centers in the provinces more closely related to USIS because they had Americans as directors?

MURPHY: No, I don't believe that was the case. The Buenos Aires center also had an American "administrator," but the centers were reluctant to surrender authority and the Americans had to work under restraints imposed by the history and attitudes of the local sponsors. The situation also depended on the talents of the Americans involved. If they were competent and diplomatic and came to be trusted, they were given more latitude in carrying out their duties.

Q: Who was the public affairs officer in Argentina in those days.

MURPHY: Seymour Nadler was the Public Affairs Officer. He had been sent there just about the time I was.

Q: Is there anything else you want to mention about Argentina in those days?

Close Relationship Between Buenos Aires
Great Colon Theater and USIS Cultural Activities

MURPHY: Well, one of the benefits of serving in Argentina was that the Colon Theater was one of the most beautiful theaters in the world, and because the seasons in the southern hemisphere are the opposite of those in the northern, Argentina got all the best of theater, opera, ballet, music and individual concert artists. Performers were glad to be busy in what was the off-season up north. The U.S. Cultural Officer got a big welcome from the management of the Colon Theater. There were close ties between this theater and the Met in New York, and many Argentines had transferred and made enviable

careers in New York, e.g., Tito Capobianco as a stage-manager for opera. Argentine musicians like Alberto Ginastera were also well known in the United States. A box was available to us at the Colon Theater for most performances, and this was quite a help when American visitors of importance wanted to go to the theater on short notice.

We had some important American visitors like Howard Mitchell and National Symphony Orchestra from Washington (under the "cultural presentations" program of the Department of State), visits by U.S. Navy ships, for which we handled some aspects of public relations. There was also a visit by President Eisenhower who was accompanied by his son, John. The American ambassadors who served in Argentina while I was there were Willard Beaulac and Richard Rubottom, both of whom were staunch supporters of the cultural and information activities of our Agency.

Q: Were the relationships of Argentina with little Uruguay and big Brazil, both near neighbors, about the same as they are today?

MURPHY: Argentina and Uruguay always got along fine and the two moved across borders almost as if they didn't exist. The favorite beach playground of the Argentines was near Montevideo. They had a common language and a common cultural background. Brazil, on the other hand, had traditionally been considered a threat but now, as in 1959-61, both countries are primarily concerned with their troublesome economic problems, so that historic rivalries have faded into the background.

1961: Haiti as Country Public Affairs Officer

Q: Well, your next assignment was as Public Affairs Officer in Port-au-Prince Haiti from March 1961 until September 1963. That, again, must have been a dramatic change from rather sophisticated Buenos Aires to Port-au-Prince.

MURPHY: It was a very drastic change, but it turned out to be a really interesting assignment, not all pleasant because Papa Doc was the President for Life at that time and it was a very regressive administration as everybody knows. It also was a very, very frustrating experience for the American government because they tried to provide aid to one of the poorest countries in the world, but no matter how they did it, Duvalier always managed to use a fair portion of the aid for his own political purposes and it could be argued that the Americans were helping to keep him in power. Of course, there were those who charged that Americans had created him because he had been trained in the United States with American scholarships for medical training--he was a doctor. He was groomed and educated in the United States. No one suspected he was going to turn out to be such a catastrophe and while I was there toward the end there was a strong movement against him. The revolt was crushed, but during the revolt there was an attempt to kidnap his son, Baby Doc, who succeeded his father afterwards.

Q: But obviously, they were not successful.

MURPHY: No, they didn't get him. I'm not sure they ever knew exactly who did it, but in retaliation for that act several houses were burned down in the hope that by burning several they would get the one that they wanted to get.

Q: And as you noted about Argentina being similar 30 years ago to the situation today, the same can be said for Haiti, unfortunately.

MURPHY: It certainly can. The only difference is you had a man long entrenched when I was there. Now you have one who's trying to get entrenched but who hasn't been very successful. There has been a succession of aspirants, but it looks as if nobody can survive very long in Haiti. One of those, who lasted only a few months, was a very good friend of mine: Leslie Manigat. He was a presidential candidate in recent times, but had to flee before elections could be held.

Q: And I think the U.S. had some high hopes for him.

MURPHY: Oh, yes. Because he was an intellectual and a Democrat in his beliefs. I don't think he would have made any attempt to be a dictator. But he didn't last very long. He's in exile now. One my Haitian friends, who knows Manigat well, lives a few blocks away in Chevy Chase.

1963: Back to Washington, and Shortly,
Policy Officer for Latin American Area

Q: Well, after the assignment in Haiti, you again returned to Washington and again were in the office of the Assistant Director of Latin America, first as Desk Officer and then as Policy Officer for Latin America. Let's discuss the desk officer job first. Which country or countries were you in charge of at that time? Do you recall? Or was that a short period before you then moved up to Policy Officer?

MURPHY: There was a short period before I moved up to Policy Officer. I was assigned Argentina during that particular time because I had recently been working there.

Q: Well, this was now in '63. What were some of the issues in Latin America at that time?

MURPHY: Let's see, Al. Can I put that aside just a minute?

Q: Sure.

MURPHY: To say that one of the things that I cherish about Haiti was the fact that Edward R. Murrow came there while I was PAO. And he and his wife spent a few days in Haiti and I had the pleasure of organizing their programs and showing them around. It was one of the high points in my career. As you know, Ed Murrow was Director of USIA at that time and he was already ill.

Q: Sure, sure. You really get to know people when they come to visit in a USIS post, even if only for a few days.

MURPHY: Yes.

Q: Well, as policy officer at that time in '63, I guess Kennedy was in the White House. Wasn't the Alliance for Progress a major thrust in our Latin American policy?

MURPHY: That's correct. President Kennedy was in for only a short time because that's the year he was shot.

Q: Yeah, that's right.

MURPHY: But the Alliance for Progress was an important development in our work at that time.

The Dominican Republic Crisis of 1965

Q: And then more than a year after you returned to Washington as Policy Officer, the Dominican Crisis of 1965 developed. Would you tell us about that, what your role was, what USIA's role was with the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic?

MURPHY: Well, you remember that was the time when Trujillo was assassinated, was it not?

Q: Yes, just prior to Kennedy.

MURPHY: And the political situation looked like it was going very left. We had a big military presence at that time in the Dominican and the main thrust of American policy at that time was to try to assure that out of this came some kind of a Democratic pro-U.S. group in the Dominican instead of a Cuba type government. So we beefed up a big extra staff who served in the Dominican temporarily and we were very busy providing special materials to keep this post supplied with policy materials to influence Dominicans to support moderate, democratic elements.

Q: Do you recall that I was a Caribbean Desk Officer at the time and you and I became involved with a publication of a book called Caribbean Crisis: Subversion Failed in the Dominican Republic by J. Mallin?

MURPHY: Yes.

Q: Would you like to comment on that?

MURPHY: I remember that I spent many hours pouring over the manuscript of that book. We were glad that we were able to endorse a book that could be published promptly and maybe have some influence on public opinion on the crisis in the Dominican.

Q: One thing on the Dominican crisis, as you recall many in the American press were saying this was going to put U.S. foreign policy back 40 years. But less than two years later LBJ was meeting down in Punta del Este with all of the Presidents of the South American countries. Does that say something about predicting the future?

MURPHY: Yes. Well, in retrospect I don't think we seriously damaged our Latin American relations with that adventure.

1966: Country Public Affairs Officer, Colombia

Q: Now, in July of '66 you were then assigned as country public affairs officer in Bogota, Colombia. Was there any inkling in those days that narcotic trafficking would some day become a major problem for both Colombia and the U.S.?

MURPHY: None whatever. Nobody ever mentioned the subject of drugs during the time I stayed in Colombia.

Q: What were the major issues and concerns with regard to Colombian-U.S. relations at that time? I suppose the Alliance for Progress was one of them.

MURPHY: A lot of our work was on the Alliance for Progress in Colombia. We had a big publications program specifically on that subject and we also did a lot with AID and with student groups in Colombia, because coincident with emphasis on the Alliance for Progress there was a push for more programs aimed at students. I don't know whether you remember, but that began in the Kennedy Administration particularly with Bobby Kennedy, and it carried over to my work in Colombia. So I used to go into the countryside to work with students who worked on building projects such as building rural schools on a volunteer basis. And there was one Conference on Student Affairs in Lima that I attended because we were putting a big emphasis on new student programs in Colombia.

Q: Was the Peace Corps in there too at that time?

MURPHY: Yes, the Peace Corps was in Colombia.

Q: And you had a number of branch posts?

MURPHY: We had one USIS branch, consisting of a local USIS employee who had an office in the American Consulate in Cali. This employee worked mostly on information activities with emphasis on press. Otherwise, in a sense, we had assistance with cultural

programs from the American officers assigned to binational centers. These were located in Medellin, Cartagena, Cali, Manizales, Popayan and Bucaramanga.

I was traveling a lot because I visited the binational centers frequently. They were considered to be an integral part of USIS programming and close liaison was necessary. We had meetings in Bogota of BNC Directors once a year, or sometimes twice a year. A windfall came to this program while I was in Colombia. It developed that Foreign Service Officers were no longer permitted, under State Department regulations, to sell their automobiles unless they gave all proceeds over cost of the vehicle to some recognized charity. A ruling was secured which included BNC's as eligible recipients, and this proved to be a boon to the centers enabling some of them to acquire building funds for eventual purchase of suitable real estate for center purposes, so some of them, like Cartagena, were able to get into building projects.

Q: The binational center in Bogota had a tremendous building project. Was that part of the program you describe?

MURPHY: No, that project had developed earlier. That building was financed principally by appropriated funds set aside by the U.S. congress for overseas construction. That had already permitted the BNC in Bogota to have one of the few buildings which were designed from the outset to further the purposes of a cultural center operation, including classrooms, library, an auditorium and administrative offices. So when I arrived in Bogota, the BNC had one of the most adequate and best designed buildings in the whole Latin American network.

Q: Who was serving in the binational center when you were in Bogota?

MURPHY: Roger Hinkley was the Director of the Center when I got there; Raymond Burson was an assistant director; and Francis (Paco) Gomez was a Student Affairs Officer.

Q: Paco Gomez later became Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, and Sally Grooms, who was Director of the BNC in Bogota sometime after Roger Hinkley, is now the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs.

MURPHY: Well that's certainly news to me. It ought to encourage people who think that working in a BNC might be a blind alley to career advancement.

Q: Yes, it looks like good experience. Anything else on Colombia you want to tell us about?

MURPHY: One of the exciting things while I was there was the visit of Neil Armstrong and Richard Gordon to Colombia. Armstrong was later to become famous as the first human to land on the moon. This astronaut visit was a very exciting affair. I had the opportunity to organize the all-over program in consultation with Colombian officials,

including President Carlos Lleras Camargo himself, and Virgilio Barco Vargas, the Mayor of Bogota (who is now President of Colombia). They took a personal interest and we were given unstinted support. So the public appearances, ceremonies and parades drew huge, enthusiastic crowds making the visit a truly memorable event. I got to follow the astronauts through every detail of their program and got to know them pretty well. I did not realize at that time I would see Richard Gordon again later in Finland.

Q: Did you have any presidential visits while you were in Bogota?

MURPHY: No, the closest I came to it was when President Lyndon Johnson's daughter Lynda (later Chuck Robb's wife) came to Cartagena and Bogota. She was visiting the Hospital ship HOPE, and she was afterwards guest of Ambassador Raymond Carlson and his wife Patricia at the Embassy residence. I was assigned as Lynda Johnson's escort officer, so I played official spear bearer for a few days.

1968: Country PAO in Finland

Q: In October 1968 you went to Helsinki, again, as Country Public Affairs Officer. Again, a real change from your prior assignment. Did you have to learn Finnish?

MURPHY: Well, I didn't have to. But from the day I arrived there until the day I left I took Finnish lessons and I did learn enough to be a little bit sociable in Finnish. It isn't a language that you could acquire on short notice it's just too complicated.

Q: It has some Central European Association.

MURPHY: It's related to Hungarian, but distantly, but Estonian is understandable to Finns. Finnish is not related to any Scandinavian language, except that Finland belonged to Sweden for 600 years, and Swedish is an official language in Finland. The Lithuanians listen to the Finnish broadcast which is where they got many of their democratic ideas.

Q: What was USIS doing in those days in Finland?

MURPHY: Well, we were doing a traditional USIS program. We had big services to the radio stations of which there were many and which still represented a very important medium in Finland. With the emerging television, there were two companies. There was the government owned and operated television and then there was a private firm which accepted advertising and did its own financing. We serviced the press and we had a good book translation program in Finland. The Finns are great readers. So those programs were very effective with the Finns.

Q: And I imagine it was a favorable climate, I mean, just speaking of the relationships between the Finns and the Americans which was a pleasant relationship.

MURPHY: It was a most pleasant relationship. I think the countries where I found the people most outgoing and friendly were Mexico and Finland. In other countries, I don't mean to say they were unfriendly, but there was a reserve that you didn't find in Mexico or Finland. Of course, we had the library in Helsinki, too, which we used as a kind of cultural center because we did a lot of programming there in addition to library work. It had what could be converted into an assembly hall and we had lectures and movies, cultural program in general.

In Finland we had astronauts too. We had Buzz Aldren and Collins and Richard Gordon again whom I had already known in Colombia. That again was a very exciting time. Then we had America days with the Finnish American society every year in a different city of Finland. They moved around because there were societies in almost every town of importance. And later on we had William Anders, another astronaut, come to be the principal speaker for American days because after the moon landing there was so much interest in Finland in those astronauts. And as you may know, President Reagan later appointed William Anders Ambassador to Denmark. I think he has another ambassadorial assignment now.

Q: Oh, I didn't know that. Well, upon your return to Washington in February, 1973, you were then assigned as a Senior Inspector, right?

MURPHY: That's right.

The Salt III Talks in Helsinki

Q: Do you want to tell us anything about that assignment?

MURPHY: Well, the last thing I'd like to say about Finland is that I was there through the Salt III talks on strategic arms limitations, and that was a real adventure too. Because for the first time I got inside of the Russian Embassy. That Embassy was a big luxurious enclosed block within a classic building across the street from my apartment. I could look over at it from where I lived. It was something that the Russians had made the Finns build and give them as part of war reparations and foreigners seldom got in there. But during the SALT talks, part of the talks were at the American Embassy and part at the Russian Embassy. Not only did we get into the Embassy, but the Soviet diplomats became very chummy with us at that time. The Russian Cultural Attaché took me to lunch, and the normal chill thawed a little. I went to the final social occasion celebrating the closing of these talks at the Russian Embassy. They didn't allow in any photographers, but I always carried a camera and nobody bothered me. And I got the only picture there was of the two heads of delegations, plus the Russian Ambassador and the American Ambassador.

Q: Who was heading the American delegation?

MURPHY: Gerard Smith. I've got two whole albums of pictures that Ned Norris gave me of those talks and activities.

1973: Assigned to Washington as Senior Inspector

Q: Interesting. Then back to Washington again where you had this assignment, a senior inspector, which took you out of Washington a number of times I guess?

MURPHY: Yes, it did take me out a number of times. I did an inspection in Pakistan with Hewson Ryan.

Q: Where was the capital at that time?

MURPHY: The capital was Islamabad.

Q: Oh, yes.

MURPHY: It was the new capital which was largely unpopulated. It was stone city, sort of like Brasilia at the beginning, with almost nobody there. But it was built. It was beginning to develop. Most of the embassy operations were still going on in Rawalpindi and that's where we worked.

Q: Pakistan was my last assignment, Islamabad.

MURPHY: Was it?

Q: Overseas that is.

MURPHY: I'll be darned. I didn't know that.

Q: What other countries did you go to?

MURPHY: Well, one of the more beautiful trips was the trip to Greece when we looked mostly at the USIA program in Athens. But then we looked at the VOA programs in Kavala and Rhodes, and a branch USIA activity in Salonika.

Q: The VOA activities are still going on in Kavala.

MURPHY: Are they?

Q: Yeah, I have a friend who's stationed there, and I guess in Rhodes also.

MURPHY: But you can imagine that was kind of an idyllic trip which included a side trip to Crete.

Q: Now, in those days the inspections were only on overseas operations. I think it was later that they then decided that offices in headquarters ought to be inspected too occasionally.

MURPHY: Right, right. No, they weren't inspecting home office at all when I was working there. Well, then another trip I had out as Inspector to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Rangoon, Burma which was extremely interesting.

Q: Were there any major actions that you recall came out of these inspections? I think the philosophy is to help increase efficiency and so forth.

MURPHY: Well, and just offhand without referring back, I would find it hard to isolate what recommendations were made because there were so many trips. I made a lot of inspection trips even before I was assigned to the Inspection Corps. I went to Mali and Ivory Coast. I had a lot of trips with the Agency that were very special. I was sent from Bogota to Vietnam during the elections there.

I took a lot of pictures and I did a magazine piece for one of the good magazines in Bogota and they published it with pictures.

Q: Right. Well, on the inspection, you know now that there's now an Inspector General assigned by the Congress, I believe.

MURPHY: I didn't realize that.

Q: Yes, to oversee. This was a law passed, oh, five or eight years ago I think. Not all organizations have inspector generals, but a lot of them do, and USIA got its inspector general under that system three or four years ago.

MURPHY: Somebody totally independent of the agency?

Q: Yes.

Public Members on USIA Inspection Teams

MURPHY: When I was inspector they had the system that required you to take along someone who was not affiliated with government.

Q: Right, a public member.

MURPHY: Yes, a public member. So on more than one trip I had public members. One of them was the head of some radio stations in the State of Washington whose name was Thomas Bostick. He was a very interesting and helpful member of the delegation. Among the places that we inspected on that trip was Romania. I never suspected at that time that the lid would blow off there, because when I was there I didn't find any evidence at all

that foreigners were welcome, or that freedom was possible. The people in general were afraid that if they even talked to you the secret police would be after them.

Q: Right. Well, that was around in the early '70s.

MURPHY: Yeah, that's right. It was in the early '70s.

Q: I never expected it to blow up. Did any of the public members, did they--can you say anything about the reaction of the public members on inspection? Did they contribute something to increasing the efficiency of USIS operation, do you think? Did they find USIS a great amount of activity that USIS is involved in is surprising? Do you recall anything about that?

MURPHY: Yes, I do. I don't believe that they really dug into it enough to feel confident that they could make recommendations that were worth making. However, it was perfectly clear that they got an education that was an enormous surprise to them. They had no idea of the complexity or the really fine experience and ability of the people in USIA and they were impressed. That was what I got out of accompanying public members. It was a complication to your task, I can assure you, because you were charged with seeing that that public member never had a dull moment. And if you weren't careful he could keep you pretty busy, all of the inspection job you had to do notwithstanding.

Comments on Promotion Panel Service and Work

Q: Did you incidentally ever serve on any promotion panels?

MURPHY: Yes, I did.

Q: Do you have any comments about that experience?

MURPHY: Well, yes. I think I learned to appreciate the process more after having served on it. I was impressed that it was very, very serious and in general an extremely objective kind of procedure.

Retrospective: Observations on Career as a USIA Foreign Service Officer

Q: Right. Well, is there anything we haven't covered or any additional comments you would like to make?

MURPHY: Well Al, the only other comment I would have to make is that it would be very hard to find any career more rewarding or more interesting than being a USIA foreign service officer. I always felt that we had wonderful advantages over the regular foreign service because of the latitude it gave us to work with foreign nationals. Not only that but the nature of our work gave us a whole lot more room for improvisation and for

authorship of things and a sense of accomplishment. So we were not so tied to regularly reporting and functions that were routine as is a regular foreign service. I think it's an extremely exciting life for someone who likes foreign places moving around and a lot of adventure.

Q: Well, thanks for sharing your observations with us. This has been an interview with Edmund R. Murphy, Retired Foreign Service Officer of USIA conducted, January 30, 1990 in his home in Chevy Chase, Maryland. The interviewer was Allen Hansen.

End of interview