

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

CARL F. NORDEN

Interviewed by: Ambassador Horace G. Torbert
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Norden.]

Q: We are very glad to have you here finally Mr. Norden. I hope that we are going to have a pleasant and interesting conversation about your extensive career in the Foreign Service.

NORDEN: Not extensive. Not that many years.

Q: Well, you have had about a year longer than I. I think that it would be very nice if you would start out by telling us how you got interested in the Foreign Service. As an old ordinance officer I am very familiar with the Norden bombsight, but it does not have much to do with diplomacy. [Mr. Norden's father was the inventor of the most famous bombing device in World War II]

NORDEN: I was just a son who was in the way.

Q: Say anything you would like about your education and what got you started. I know you were in international banking.

NORDEN: I was with the City Bank about six years and as often happens in these cases, I was bored. It is not very hard to be bored in banking.

Q: That is particularly true at the lower levels where you used to have to balance the books yourself as part of your training. Was that part of your training?

NORDEN: Yes, I did that, I asked for that. The manager said, "Well, what do you want to do?" I said, "I don't want to just sit there and watch, I want to do actually what they are doing." He said, "That's easy. We'll put you on a desk every time the English professional goes on leave and you can make sure that his books work when he is on leave or vacation." That was a pretty damn good way to get into it because the English guys had never done anything else and never would do anything else. They were pretty professional.

Q: You started first in London and then went to Paris, is that the way it worked?

NORDEN: No, I went to Paris first. Strange things happen, the reason I went to Paris first is that one of our Latin American employees went sour and so the head office got this telegram saying, "Carl Norden to Paris immediately." It was like the State Department, immediately without any delays. When I got there the manager said, "Oh, you're Norden, I did not expect you for another month".

Q: It sounds just like the Foreign Service.

NORDEN: I had a total of four years in Paris. I had no particular interest in the Foreign Service when I was in the bank. I had met a few people in the Foreign Service and that was all I knew about it. After three months home leave they sent me to London and there I became much more interested in the Foreign Service. My first whiff of the Foreign

Service came one summer when I was much younger, I was nineteen and we went to a resort in Switzerland, not too far from Bern and there was a very distinguished looking man and his wife. They would go there every weekend and they looked the part. I was quite impressed with this lady and gentleman.

Q: Was this someone who could be identified now?

NORDEN: Yes, it was Hugh Gibson.

Q: I never knew Hugh Gibson but I certainly knew him by name. I don't recall every having seen him but I have seen pictures. He looked the part.

NORDEN: That was my first exposure to the Foreign Service, so to speak. I also knew fellows in the consulate in Zurich who were very good guys. I did not really get into it or follow it very much. I was not terribly interested in the Foreign Service per se. Then after I left the bank, because one gets bored with banks, thoroughly, I was quite impressed with some of the people whom I had met and who had gone into the Foreign Service instead of staying in the bank.

Q: Of course for a while no examinations were given. When I graduated in 1932 they did not give the exams for two or three years and then they started up again.

NORDEN: I had no idea where I was going to go, but I took the exam, the written exam and I made pretty good grades, but not as well as I thought I was going to. The exam covered a pretty damned broad field.

Q: A pretty comprehensive thing. Then I see that you went back to Harvard and took a masters degree, was that while you were waiting to get into the service?

NORDEN: It was not as simple as that. I took the masters degree because what I was trying to do was the combined degree for political science and economics. It was fairly difficult. The head of my group who administered exams said, "Well, young man, if you want to take any more to get a higher degree you will have to do a lot more reading."

Q: Who were the principal professors?

NORDEN: Harvard was full of them, I can't remember off hand. I had one, called McIlvaine, his course was called 'History of Political Thought'. I took the course twice, it was so good.

Q: I was across the river at the business school a little before that. Harvard is an educational institution that is incomparable.

NORDEN: There is no question about it. You could sit in on any course you wanted to. The professors were so well read.

Q: And expected you to be, as you just said. So you went on and took the oral exams? You got into the service in July of 1938 and you went to Berlin. That was when things were going 'to hell in a hack' as far as relations were going. Would you talk about Berlin.

NORDEN: I had great difficulty whether I would remain in the service afterwards because I said I would never have anything as exciting as this again. You could really see it coming.

Q: Was Hugh Wilson still there or had he already left?

NORDEN: I think he was still there.

Q: This was a training job, was it consular?

NORDEN: The first thing they asked was whether I spoke German, which I did, I had been to boarding school in Switzerland and I was bilingual. I certainly was in a position to use my German. It was the most trying assignment that you could have had at that point. These people were fighting for their lives.

Q: These were the Jews who were still in Germany at that time.

NORDEN: It was trying because they were not the most prepossessing people that could be found.

Q: You had a certain dichotomy between the humanitarian and the interests of the United States I suppose.

NORDEN: That was a very difficult chapter because the immigration rules were not responsive. The people you had to turn down were in many cases very deserving, it was very difficult. Then there were some bad moments, you have heard of the "Kristallnacht"?

Q: That was before you got there?

NORDEN: No, I practically walked into it. On the other hand what made that post extremely interesting was that you could see the war on the horizon, or just over the horizon. I still remember when the Sudeten crisis was still hot. I remember going out and dancing with our military attaché's daughter and we were saying that it might blow by tomorrow morning. That was before Munich.

Q: Did you have any particular contacts at that time that you remember with other diplomats that you remember that were useful to you later?

NORDEN: Yes. You know my next post was Prague and because I had excellent contacts in Germany and the reason I had them was my uncle, my mother's brother, I got from him

a bunch of introductions. There were a bunch of people who had married well in Germany; they were American beer brewers' daughters and they saw to it that their daughters married well. Marrying well means titles.

Q: Your uncle was a German citizen?

NORDEN: No. I got introductions. A lot of these people were well connected in Germany, not always with your favorite people. I did meet, partly by accident, some very nice Germans. There was one German girl who liked to ride and I used to ride with her. German horses are very difficult to ride We would ride before breakfast. She was well-born too. Her father had been in the German Foreign Office and her mother was a titled lady. Her uncle was the head of the German government stud - which was pretty good. I learned a lot about German psychology that way because I remember her saying, "Maybe you can explain to me, what is wrong with the Dutch?" "We don't understand in Germany why the Dutch declared war on us." I asked "Why do you object to that?" "Well, to declare war on Germany is a very serious matter." I said, "And visa versa." She said that "If the Dutch took it into their heads to invade Germany wouldn't you declare war?" She said, "Well, that is quite different because they are so small."

Q: The war with the Netherlands came about after you left Berlin and were in Prague. Had you come back to visit Germany?

NORDEN: Yes. I happened to go riding with her, she was a very good friend of mine. I got the German psychology time after time. I asked her what she was going to do after the war was over? She said, "Oh, I want to travel."

Q: You went to Prague by way of the Foreign Service School, did you get some training? Were you doing the same thing in Prague as in Berlin?

NORDEN: No. I went to Prague because there was a scandal, a visa scandal Our local staff had been selling visas, I was sent to put a stop to it which I did.

Q: I had one of those in Salzburg after the war. Did you leave Prague because Prague was invaded?

NORDEN: It already had been invaded when I went there. The Germans treated the natives quite well, their motto was give the Czechs plenty of beer and feed them well and they will make no trouble for us. Which turned out to be so; the Czechs were not about to make any trouble of any kind.

Q: Now it was quite a change to go from Prague to Paramaribo, that was a totally new experience.

NORDEN: That was an interesting post, I will tell you why. Most people don't think of it that way. Suriname was the source of about 70% of the bauxite that we imported, which

meant bauxite for airplanes and that was rather important. There was considerable concern lest the Germans get their hands on the bauxite. It would have been very easy to have sabotaged the bauxite works. Bauxite has to be dried before it is shipped. Wet bauxite that was shipped to Trinidad was bad news, would have been very bad news. Suriname was defended by twenty-four Dutch marines and two hundred natives with Dutch army officers, so it was a tricky thing.

Q: Were they sort of a Free Holland movement?

NORDEN: No. Eventually of course we made a deal with the Queen, saying if and when it looks as though there is going to be war we would take over the defense. I knew that there was this deal. When the G-2 [Army chief of intelligence] went on a tour of the area and he stopped by this two-bit post where I was the sole officer, the consul, I asked him when were we going to send some marines over here. The Dutch were fiercely independent. So I said to the G-2 when the agreement with the Queen was to be put in force. He said that I could be sure that something much bigger was in the works that would start it. So I had a Thanksgiving dinner with all the top Dutch people -- which meant for the most part mulattos, the Dutch did not have a color line at all -- and I noticed that something was going on in one corner with my newly hired houseboy, who was running into some difficulties. I sent for him and asked him, "What is the matter, what is the difficulty?" "Oh Mr. N, he black man and he want white ice cream."

Q: So they were not as broad minded as one might think.

NORDEN: As a matter of fact right after that my clerk came over and said, "Mr. Norden I have got to see you, I have a telegram, it starts out, 'Eyes only for Norden', so I can't decode the damned thing. I said, "I know what that is, it is when the boys are coming." The telegram said that at eight o'clock the next morning there would be such and such a troopship that would arrive in Paramaribo from Panama. It said "Please inform the governor." So of course I called the governor and said I assume you have already received a message, which he had. He got his directions from the Queen. So the next morning we had one battalion of U.S. infantry.

Q: Was there any opposition to this?

NORDEN: Any Dutchman who knew me well enough to be informal with me would say, "Mr. Norden, it was not necessary, we can defend ourselves, the Dutch can always defend themselves." I said, "I know that, but if the Queen thinks it is necessary don't you think you had better think so too?"

It was an interesting post. Protocol, if you want protocol, take a small Dutch colony, boy, you get protocol! I had to call on the Dutch officials and the first two weeks I was there I called on every official, pay my respects and so forth. And then having done that I had to do a repeat to every official's wife.

Q: You could not just leave your card?

NORDEN: Oh no, you could not just leave cards, not at all.

Q: Well, it gave you something social to do, anyway.

NORDEN: It took me six weeks before my calls were done. That was one of the little tiny duties that you have in the Foreign Service.

Q: We had a good many of those in Eastern Europe in the 1950s and '60s, but there was not much else to do. You had a fairly long tour there.

NORDEN: I stayed there a little over a year and then I went home.

Q: And then you spent some time in the Department?

NORDEN: Emilio Collado, an assistant to Sumner Wells in Latin American affairs, got me and I suddenly found myself working on Latin America. I went to Dartmouth, I went there when Nelson Rockefeller went to Dartmouth and the Department picked this up. We had very poor liaison with Nelson Rockefeller - there was no liaison. He was separate. I was constantly finding connections. Very often I was the only person in the Department who knew what the hell was going on with Nelson Rockefeller. Nelson ran his own show, and he was not about to wait for anybody's "by your leave."

Q: Were you attached to his staff or were you on Collado's staff?

NORDEN: On Collado's staff. What I was doing, it was not my job exactly, I just did it, it needed doing. I was constantly keeping our desk officers informed.

Q: You were talking about Nelson Rockefeller and that you were the only go-between him and the State Department. I notice that you were assigned to SACMED - Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean.

NORDEN: That was Bob Murphy. At that time the British ditched Mikhailovic [of Yugoslavia] and the Department never really got a good explanation of that, not at all. I was there to watch what the hell was going on. The British did not give me much.

Q: Where were you based?

NORDEN: Bari, this was a very hot post, one of the hottest I have ever had. The British man was watching this whole Tito game, to make sure that Tito was top dog - for good reason. My value to the Department, if anything, was that I had lunch with top British Foreign Office types in Italy and really had the story of what was going on - what was supposed to be going on. I was an unclassified officer.

Q: In July of 1945 you were an FSO-8. [a very junior rank]

NORDEN: Philip Broad was my opposite number, an Englishman, a great guy. He sure loved to drink. He would offer me drink every time I would see him. The idea was that I was supposed to down my drink - it was a very relaxed relationship. When I had about the third or fourth pink gin Broad would come on and say "Have some more, don't be stuffy, we are allies". Then he would say "I am not going to be stuffy, here are my telegrams." He reported directly to Churchill. He did not report to Macmillan.

Q: He was the man who was in touch with Tito or Mikhailovic? What was his function as far as the Yugoslavs were concerned?

NORDEN: His function was to make damned sure that Tito was number one, to give Tito everything.

Q: At that time we were really betting on Mikhailovic, or earlier on perhaps.

NORDEN: I don't think there were a hell of a lot of people who liked the idea of the British backing Tito, who was an acknowledged communist. One of my coups, for a small time FSO, was to get the British to put me on a plane and to see Tito. I had a very special day. I had a *tete-a-tete*, one to one with Marshal Tito. This was no small potatoes, he was a big shot.

Q: Where was this, back in the hills somewhere?

NORDEN: On an island. The British wanted to keep Tito theirs, but fortunately my German was fluent.

Q: Tito spoke German?

NORDEN: Tito isn't a German, Tito was an Austrian, he was the product of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian army.

Q: Was your conversation with him productive? I guess it helped us to adjust to the idea of working with him.

NORDEN: I think so. What came up quite clearly in our conversation was that he felt like an Austrian. Once he remarked in one situation that he thought "why be brutal if it is not necessary?" which is typically Austrian. It was an interesting thing.

Q: How long did your tour in Italy last?

NORDEN: I was sent over to join Charlie Thayer's mission which was a military mission, and I did not feel very much at home. I did not really feel very wanted.

Q: At that time was Charlie working for the OSS?

NORDEN: For the OSS.

Q: That led to your coming home at the end of the war in Europe?

NORDEN: No, I was sent to accompany the Yugoslav mission to what was to be the UN. I was not there very long as Charlie Thayer felt that I was not to be helpful to our relations with Tito.

Q: You were telling me that the Chief of Personnel wanted to send you to his old post of Havana and that occurred right after you came back.

NORDEN: What I did was learn about Cubans. I might say that it was a hell of a comedown. I did not have all the support I had in Bari. When there if I wanted a plane to see Tito the British supplied me with one. What was I put to work at in Havana, some commercial and trade work. But it so happened that we had a first rate Commerce man in Cuba.

Q: The ambassador at that time was Norweb who was not one of the most subtle diplomats to come down the pike.

NORDEN: Lighthouse Harry Norweb, we called him.

Q: Who really ran the place?

NORDEN: His wife. It was quite an experience too.

Q: You were there a couple of years, did you get to like it after the glamour of military war?

NORDEN: Oh yes. I liked Cuba - it was a super-fun country. It was the playground of the United States. You never knew what time you were going to go to bed.

Q: Were you married at this time?

NORDEN: No, I will have to give you a little bit of background. I took a lot of criticism because I was always finagling to spend some time in the Department. That was because I was not married and I felt it was about time I was.

Q: There were a lot of officers like that at that time.

NORDEN: I made a resolution quite early in the game that I was not going to marry somebody who was a clerk in the field since you never knew what they were going to be

like; were they running away from something? I decided that I would marry somebody from a real place.

Q: With your kind of background?

NORDEN: I did meet a girl whom I later married when I was in Bari and she was in OSS. She was very good in the Foreign Service.

Q: I found myself that wives were at least as important as you were in getting along in the Foreign Service. You by this time were pretty well committed to Latin America. You went to Santiago in 1947.

NORDEN: What happened was that there was a job in Buenos Aires, it was really a Commerce job. What had happened that was significant to me in Cuba was that my banking background kept coming out. I wrote a little voluntary despatch which touched on some financial things, and Al Neuper said "where did you learn to write stuff like that? That is pretty good in that field." I said, "I spent six or seven years in a bank, what did you expect?" "OKAY, from now on I want you to concentrate on financial matters and see if you can get a commendation. I have been trying to get a decent financial report out of this office for years and I have never succeeded in getting a commendation." An "excellent", we called it. So I worked very hard to get an "excellent". Every time I went up to Washington I would find somebody I had cultivated and work on them.

Q: "Please write a favorable evaluation" and that sort of thing?

NORDEN: I got to know the people in the Federal Reserve and so forth. And then I got to have a reputation for writing the best damned international financial reports in the Foreign Service. The way I did it - they were good too, by God - because they were not just plain financial reports, but sort of touched on things people were putting under the rug. I had wonderful relations in Chile with the Central Bank. In Chile they were forever busting the currency.

Q: Did you ever get into any trouble with those people whose reports were published in the United States.

NORDEN: Deliberately, I used those reports that came out. The Secretary of the Treasury of Venezuela, who was a very powerful man, took note of what I was saying, and liked what I was saying. It was what he was trying to say. I had access to him at any time. I deliberately put stuff out that I knew that would be picked up in the Foreign Commerce Weekly and it was so obvious what the source must have been.

Q: Well, I'm glad to get back here, Mr. Norden, in your beautiful house.

NORDEN: Isn't it a nice house?

Q: Really quite spectacular.

NORDEN: Yes, from my first wife. Not this wife, but her predecessor. She was very talented. Not that this one isn't.

Q: You remember that John Dwyer had a slightly spectacular house just up the street her?

NORDEN: Oh, yes.

Q: This is a perfect street, because...

NORDEN: You do your own thing.

Q: Yes, and it's very nice indeed. Well, when we left last, you had just finished talking a little bit about your financial reporting in Cuba and later in Chile, Argentina, and Venezuela, but I wonder if you'd like to go back maybe on a couple of earlier things you said, just for a minute. Could you tell me a little more about your experiences in... and getting into Yugoslavia, and what your efforts were to see Mikhailovic, and perhaps any other things that you happen to remember about that period, which I think is historically very interesting.

NORDEN: I passed up an opportunity to go and meet Mikhailovic, simply because it was very tricky to get in. You had to be dropped in, more or less. You had to wait for another plane to pick up some stranded pilots and then take you out again, and the chances were that you would be "Mikhailoviced" for longer than you wished to be. And the other, of course, was that I knew he was a lost cause as long as the British would not back him.

Q: And the British were the only people that had the resources at that time.

NORDEN: We had the resources; everything was done with our resources.

Q: But not in situ, so to speak.

NORDEN: They used our planes, they used our munitions and so forth. They were given to Tito. But we did not put our foot down and say no, we won't let you have them, you have to vote for Mikhailovic. This was a tricky regional thing in that country, because Mikhailovic, of course, was a Serb, he was a Royalist, whereas Tito, of course, was probably a Croatian.

Q: I didn't know exactly what he was. I realized that he was the one man who was able to bridge the various...

NORDEN: Well, he was part Slovene and part Croatian; he certainly was not a Serb.

Q: Well, as you said earlier, he was brought up in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, so that...

NORDEN: Oh, very definitely. Well, of course, the Croatians are more Austrian than Hungarian.

Q: Than certainly the Slovenians.

NORDEN: They're Catholics; the Serbs are Orthodox, and strongly. So they're very different people. And as you see now, they don't get along at all.

Anyway, I was tempted, but I also had a poor opinion of Mikhailovic's political savvy. I mean, he was so pro-Serbian, it was perfectly obvious. He remarked publicly, sometime before, "My head says Yugoslavia, but my heart says Serbia." Now that doesn't show the abilities of a politician, particularly, if you're going to have a united nation.

Q: So perhaps in a way the British were right, then? It's hard to tell, but...

NORDEN: I don't know why the British flopped way over. I still don't know. But the present pudding shows what the real situation is. I mean, the Serbs are not about to go to bed with the Croatians. But the British line was there was no way of having a Yugoslavia if you put all your cards on the Serbs, that it would mean a split country, and they were pro-Yugoslav, they felt that was necessary to have a Yugoslavia, because if the country split up right at the end of the war, it might mean trouble, and it might mean trouble with the Russians and so forth. I don't know why they took this line, but they took it. And when the British carry through a line, any line, everybody in the whole British establishment has to go down the line with it.

Q: And they have an establishment which we don't, of course.

NORDEN: They have no room whatsoever for dissent in the British foreign policy organization. We do. We have some.

Q: Well, it's interesting, and I don't suppose we'll ever know. But you never can get very far by debating what would have happened if a different action had been taken at that time. But there we are. Well, one other thing I'd like to clean up before we go on, and that is, I wonder if you have any additional thoughts about your very interesting association with the office of Nelson Rockefeller. Is there anything you'd like to say about Nelson personally, about what kinds of decisions were made at that time, which is a very interesting period?

NORDEN: Well, Nelson was a go-go guy. When he went into something, he went into it with both fists. He staffed his Office of Inter-American Affairs, or whatever he called it, he staffed it very largely with fellows he had known at Dartmouth, a lot of his pals. And these guys meant well, but they sure were amateurs. And as to the true nature of Latin

America, they knew nothing. Because the true nature of Latin America is something different, you know. He was very independent. He was not particularly well-disposed to the State Department, because he felt we were too conservative, you see. And we were conservative. So whenever they went into a situation in Latin America, they were gung ho on it, you know, there was no subtlety about it. And they did not ordinarily clear what they were doing with the embassies, they just moved in. I happened to have a lot of friends on the country desks; I was not officially liaison with Nelson at all. I mean, I just happened to know his people and knew what they were doing, just because I happened to know them.

Q: And used to have lunch with them and things like that.

NORDEN: Yes, it was quite informal. So I wasn't trying to tell tales in any way, but I found that when I dropped in on country desks in the department, as a rule these guys didn't know what in the hell was going on in their countries as far as the Rockefeller organization went. And so they were very happy to be told what was going on. What was going on, as a rule, was perfectly harmless. But as a general rule...

Q: ...the State Department know about it, whether it was harmless or not.

NORDEN: Well, let's say, the nature of a desk officer is that he wants to know what the hell is going on in his country, naturally. Also they were very activist, you know, then.

Q: Do you recall any particular issues that gave you trouble or were particularly interesting at that time?

NORDEN: Well, they couldn't give me trouble.

Q: Well, I mean, organizationally.

NORDEN: Well, the question is whether it was something that Pete Collado was going to take a dim view of. And there were such things, particularly in the realm of agriculture. Agriculture, as a rule, of course, is a delicate topic wherever you go.

Q: Did Collado come out of the Agriculture Department?

NORDEN: No, Collado had no...

Q: I don't remember what his... I never knew him.

NORDEN: I know, he had a very close association with Esso, Standard Oil, and later he became a vice president of Standard Oil. He was a very clever fellow.

Q: Well, let's go on then to your Latin American post. We had touched considerably on Cuba, and very slightly on Chile and Buenos Aires. You wanted to explain Argentina.

NORDEN: I was sent to Argentina from Chile. When I went to Chile, I knew that I was not going to remain there, but was going to Argentina, that Chile was a stopgap and I was to use my strong points, which were finance, in Chile, because Chile was having inflation problems. I was working on that. And I had a hell of a good time. The reason I was to go to Argentina was that Perón had accumulated a very large, for those days, couple-hundred-million-dollar commercial debt, which he couldn't pay. He wasn't paying his debts.

Q: This was to American banks, more or less, or American firms?

NORDEN: Firms. And my job was to watch that and sort of help push it along so that our guys would get it. Eventually the Export-Import Bank decided to give the Argentines a substantial loan toward payment of these debts, and my business was to keep reporting on how it was going, you know.

Q: At that time, was Perón as antagonistic as he somewhat later became?

NORDEN: Well, not quite. We brought that on. We snubbed him. We snubbed him and he was sore about it.

Q: Now when you first went there, the ambassador was Bruce, at that time, was it?

NORDEN: I had three of them.

Q: Stanton Griffis and Bunker, I guess.

NORDEN: Yes, a great assortment. Bunker was marvelous, of course.

Q: I knew Bunker slightly later, and he was an absolutely...

NORDEN: A great gentleman. A great, great gentleman. Bruce, of course, was a different case. He was jealous of his elder brother in London, and so he was always trying to make the press. And his way of making the press was to drop by my office at about 10:30 and say, "Carl," (whatever the topic was) "I'd like you to do a paper on such and such. Label it Top Secret." And then about 11:00 o'clock, I'd turn it in, and he'd pass it around to the press. He was quite a character.

Q: I never knew about this until now about James.

NORDEN: The minor Bruce.

Q: Yes. I somehow rather never... Had he been a career officer at one time, too?

NORDEN: No.

Q: His brother had, of course, been one.

NORDEN: He was riding his brother's coattail. The third guy, Stanton Griffis, he was a special guy. He was a Hollywood type, and he had the greatest collection of "nieces" in the United States, which used to have the run of the embassy, around which he would chase them.

Q: He came to Spain a little after I was there, after this happened.

NORDEN: Well, you know whereof I speak.

Q: And I heard a great many stories also... But he was kind of an interesting...

NORDEN: He was a damn smart fellow.

Q: Yes, very smart.

NORDEN: And he had the guts to say the un-sayable, that Perón was probably necessary from the point of view of social reform in Argentina. He had the guts to say it, but since the American press was violently anti-Perón, it was tricky stuff to say it.

Q: Well, he could afford to. This is one of the advantages of a political ambassador, if you get a good one.

NORDEN: Yes, that's right.

Q: Your service there, in trying to control and watch this desk, consisted of reporting and consulting with bankers?

NORDEN: Oh, yes. I went much further than that, of course, beyond my instructions. As the ambassador said, "This is such a rich country, only a genius could ruin it. Unfortunately, Perón is a genius." Well, I wrote a good many despatches about his talent for lousing things up, and I said that it would be years before the country got over the mischief that Perón had started.

You see, Perón was into something that never works. He was a guns and butter man. They army was madly jealous of Brazil and scared to death of them -- Brazil growing by leaps and bounds by comparison with Argentina. Therefore, the policy was to artificially build up industry in Argentina. And the only way they could do that was to overtax the agriculture, which was very expensive. And the fact is that Argentina, to this day, has not gotten over Perón.

He nationalized things. The British had a lot of investments there, and they were selling them out, and they sold them out to Perón. The railways, the streetcars, and the gas company were all British, you see.

Q: We had the phone company, I take it...

NORDEN: Yes, IT&T, yes. The nationalization worked this way: when they nationalized anything, they immediately built a large building and they filled it full of bureaucrats. Whatever he touched, he ruined.

Q: Even Lyndon Johnson, I think, found this out, although he was not quite as extreme at that point. ...he had to prove it could happen in this country...

NORDEN: Oh, God, yes.

Q: That was the guns and butter part of it... Then you stayed in Argentina for...?

NORDEN: Three years.

Q: Three years, so that was really a fairly substantial...

NORDEN: Rather long. Rather long. It was very dull, because when you first got there, you made a diagnosis, in effect. You could see it was a sick country, and you wrote up why it was a sick country. Having made that diagnosis, there was nothing else but to keep repeating it. You had nothing new to say.

Q: Well, at almost the same time, I was a commercial officer in Spain doing the same thing, so I know just what you mean.

NORDEN: I got myself assigned to Spain briefly, but unfortunately I dropped by there on the way from Switzerland, where my father was living, to see about a house, and at that unfortunate time, who should be there but the inspector. Inspectors are goddamned nuisances. He said, "This young man has got himself assigned not as commercial officer but as commercial counselor. This office does not rate a commercial counselor." And he was stupid, because at that point Spain was just coming around.

Q: Just beginning. We were beginning.

NORDEN: Just coming out, and it did rate a commercial counselor, because what was happening was very important. But unfortunately this inspector didn't have that kind of a mind. He was a typical...what one friend of mine always called them -- chicken inspectors.

Q: Was Dick Rubottom there at that time?

NORDEN: No, he wasn't.

Q: I mean, as inspector.

NORDEN: No, I tell you, Angie Duke had just been announced.

Q: Well, I didn't mean... I meant as commercial...

NORDEN: I got that job by walking in to Angie Duke and saying, "Hey, there's a job there, I think I can do something with it." I said nothing about the title. I said, "I do have one proviso: I don't want my efficiency report done by the present economic counselor." Because he was a Wristonee. Enough said. I'm afraid I was always very stuck up on the subject of...

Q: Getting in the right way.

NORDEN: No, of being a legitimate Foreign Service officer. By God, I had passed the exam, I hadn't taken any shortcuts. I never liked the people who took the shortcuts.

Q: Well, you wouldn't like me, because I came in under the Manpower Act... It was a little different, but it did take some kind...

NORDEN: You had some very good people.

Q: We also all wanted to be Foreign Service.

NORDEN: Oh, sure.

Q: And there was a lot of the... Well, this would be in the early '50s, I take it, that you...

NORDEN: Yes, it was in the early '50s.

Q: But before that, you seemed to have been assigned to Tehran for a...

NORDEN: No, Tehran came later.

Q: Oh, I thought that was after Buenos Aires.

NORDEN: Afterwards.

Q: Well, is there some more on Buenos Aires? How did you happen to get to Tehran? That's quite a change in area.

NORDEN: Oh, who was that fellow? One of the old-timers.

Q: Loy Henderson was the ambassador.

NORDEN: Yes, but he had a friend who was looking for staff for him. He traveled around Latin America looking for people he could use. And I happened to be one of the people he liked. Derby.

Q: Derby, oh, yes, I knew Derby well.

NORDEN: And it was just the time when Mossadegh and the Shah were sparring. I had an economic counselor, but I did my own thrust, pretty much. And I wrote my first despatch, I'll never forget it, everyone had said, "Beware of Loy Henderson. If he gets mad at you, God help you." So I had hardly gotten there than the damn phone rings: "This is Loy Henderson. I want you to come up and see me a minute." And I thought, "Oh, Jesus, I've been here about a week and I'm being fired already." I had written a paper, which was based on the obvious.

Q: When you've only been in a place a week, that's about all you can do.

NORDEN: Exactly. All these people in the World Bank, all these experts, were writing stuff about Iran. They were all talking about imminent economic collapse because the oil wasn't being sold. And in my paper I said, in effect, it was all bullshit about imminent economic collapse; ain't gonna be no economic collapse. Ain't gonna be no economic collapse because the Iranians haven't started to print money. And after they print money, they can do things for a long time. I had just been in Latin America where they are so damn good at this.

Henderson looked at me and said, "Did you write this?"

And then a small voice comes up, "Yes, Mr. Ambassador."

And he said, "First financial report I have ever been able to understand."

I felt better.

And on the strength of that, I had it made. Because this hit Washington, where all this stuff had been coming at them about imminent economic collapse, you see; we were worried about that damn thing. And, of course, the Russians had a guy in the midst of that Cabinet and so forth. So I said forget about it, you know, and in Washington, they saw this, "Well, my God, if there's not going to be any economic collapse, we've got to change our policy. We've been banking on this economic collapse, and Carl says there isn't going to be one." So they argued this out, see, because I had a pretty good reputation as a financial mind, probably the best in the Department at that time.

So we changed the policy. We stopped going along with the British on the oil blockade and so forth, and we sent a Point Four mission. Remember old Point Four?

Q: Oh, yes.

NORDEN: And then we larded the mission with CIA types. In other words, we decided to act politically and not economically.

But, anyway, I made my reputation in a week.

Q: I bet you didn't coast from then on, however.

NORDEN: Oh, no, no. I loved Iran. I thought Iran was the most interesting damn place I'd ever been. They were all such liars. I've never met such a bunch of liars.

Q: Loy was a pretty good man, wasn't he?

NORDEN: Oh, Loy was a great man, yes. Looking backwards, I am not sure that he didn't put too much of his influence, too much of his cash, as it were, on the side of getting rid of Mossadegh. Because all we got was the Shah, and he was no... And Loy knew this, that I didn't trust the Shah either, that the man was weak. I was not sure we could build on him. But the other guy, of course, was suspected of having Russian sympathies. I'm not sure he ever did. I think that was a mistake of judgment.

Q: Was Mossadegh a man we could have actually dealt with, do you think, in the long run?

NORDEN: He was so bloody slippery I'm not sure we could, but we probably could have. We probably could have, but it had a Russian label on it. And in those days we were awfully blind when we saw a Russian label, you know.

Q: And particularly Loy, of course.

NORDEN: And Loy particularly, yes. That was his weak spot.

Q: Now after a year or so, you...

NORDEN: I didn't go back. I caught some kind of a liver disease in that country. It was not hepatitis, but it was something else, and it really laid me low. And I kept getting it back. I finally arranged to see a hospital in Boston to be examined and so forth. And by that time, the people in the political division got fed up with me; they thought I was, you know, trying to wiggle out. It was not true at all, but I couldn't really tackle it with this thing. Then the Leahy Clinic finally said, "Look, you're okay. You do have some mysterious liver disease, we don't know what the hell it is. Your liver's very defective. It's not hepatitis. But if you will leave alone the bottle," (just the straight hepatitis sort of cure) "in time, within six weeks or so, you'll be able to function very well." And that's what happened.

But I didn't go back. At that point, personnel, Bob Woodward or somebody, took pity on me and said, "Listen, this guy is just getting married, don't send him someplace like that." So instead of that, I was sent to NATO in Paris.

Q: And this was again a financial job?

NORDEN: Yes, pretty much. An economic job. A difficult job. My boss was an Englishman; his boss was a Frenchman. The Englishman, I remember, was very brilliant, but he had some peculiarities. He once broke up a staff meeting, walked to the window, and said, "Oh, what a beautiful boy!" But I did some special jobs there. I got into a quasi-financial job, an economic job. I did a study in spare time. We had a lot of spare time there, you see. The annual review took a lot of time and it was hard work, but when you weren't on the annual review, you had time for projects. And I got into a project comparing the growth rates in Russia and the NATO area. Other people did the same thing later, but I did the first one. And I came to the conclusion that the Russian growth rate was going to slow markedly. And it did. But it wasn't a very popular paper, because the British, for some reason, didn't like it. If the British didn't like something, you might as well forget it.

Q: Well,... I suppose. Well, you were there about two and a half years, weren't you?

NORDEN: NATO?

Q: In Paris, yes.

NORDEN: Two years. I had three children born there, twins.

Q: I have twin grandchildren,...

NORDEN: It was very interesting. It was very tricky. You had to be very careful about taking a position on anything, because you stepped on the Greeks' toes or the Turks' toes or, you know, that kind of thing. But they were very nice, nice people, very nice people.

Q: Well, after that, you got brought back for a shot at the Department for quite a while.

NORDEN: Back was Wristonized.

Q: Well, we all did. We all did that...

NORDEN: I went into trade agreements, GATT. I didn't know my ass from a hole in the ground when it came to GATT.

Q: Well, this was a specialized work if there ever was one.

NORDEN: Oh, Jeez, you couldn't write a sheet of paper without running up to one of the GATT lawyers. There were precedents for everything, you know. Very tricky.

Do you know Armstrong who used to be in Canada?

Q: Bill Armstrong, yes. I don't know him terribly well, but I see him quite often.

NORDEN: Do you know his wife, Louise?

Q: Well, again, not well. No, I really don't.

NORDEN: Well, Louise and I shared an office, and Louise had a delightful sense of humor, and I spent a lot of my time seeing how many laughs I could get out of her.

Q: This was before she was married?

NORDEN: Yes, before she was married.

Q: A cousin of mine was a naval attaché in Canada when Bill was there, so they were very good friends.

NORDEN: Bill's a lovely person. He's a lovely person.

Q: Did you attend some of the GATT negotiating sessions?

NORDEN: I spent three months in Geneva negotiating with the Brazilians. Negotiating with the Brazilians is something. They'd come to an agreement on something, and then two days later they'd all walk in together, long faces, "Well, we're very sorry, but Rio says no." You know, that sort of thing. Oh, God. But they were nice. And also the Brazilians...you know Brazilians?

Q: I've known Brazilian colleagues. I've never served in Latin America at all, so...

NORDEN: Brazilian colleagues, they're damn able people, the Brazilians.

Q: I think they have the best service in Latin America.

NORDEN: No question about it.

Q: Partly because they were paid by...

NORDEN: Sure. And also it was hereditary; it ran in families. They were very nice. Anyway, I had a nice time with them.

Q: What were your impressions of the GATT operations, aside from whether you liked to do it or not, as an effective way of controlling world trade? It strikes me that it has been a fairly successful thing.

NORDEN: I think it has. Oh, no question about it. Excellent. Excellent.

Q: But it has taken a lot of work by people like you. ...

NORDEN: Very sad, this was a very dear friend of ours, who had a spot on the lung, lung cancer.

Q: Is this a Foreign Service friend?

NORDEN: No, she was a New Zealander. They were using chemotherapy and everything else on her, and then she suddenly came down with pneumonia, and she lasted about three days.

Very sad.

Q: Very sad, and it seems to me what we do most of the time nowadays is attend funerals of our friends, or go hold the hand of somebody who's in trouble.

NORDEN: Well, she was a lovely person, a very gutsy person. New Zealanders tend to be rather nice people, you know.

Q: Oh, yes... Well, after slaving in the trenches of GATT, you eventually went to Caracas.

NORDEN: I got a promotion out of that Brazilian job. But I had really only one serious instruction, and that was: Keep them in GATT. And I did. And I got a promotion. It was a political promotion, not because of what I did. Because the trade agreement I negotiated, from that point of view, was a disaster, terrible. Well, the Brazilians had the protectionist bee in their bonnet and they wanted five hundred percent duty on everything. You can't negotiate a decent agreement that way. But I kept them in GATT.

Q: Well, that's an interesting thing. Well, now, is that what led you to Caracas? You were economic counselor in Caracas, what, in about '61?

NORDEN: I was three years in trade agreements, the commercial policy and all that shit. The inspectors came round. Two sets of inspectors came round and had a look at me. They said, "Carl, what in the hell are you doing here? You can do much more for the service somewhere else. I mean, we can get dozens of people who can do this stuff, and do it better than you can, and we shouldn't be wasting your time and other people's time around here."

It's the same way. I mean, it's written in the Wriston business. I know the reverse side of that. God, the time I've had with guys who have worked in my department for three months and couldn't write one piece of paper that was worth mailing, you know?

Q: Yes, and, furthermore, hated going abroad. Some of their wives did their...

NORDEN: Yes, oh, God, yes. So I saw the reverse of it.

Well, anyway, so I was sent to Caracas. It was a very interesting time, because Castro had decided that was target number one in the Americas. And we had a hell of a lot of shooting in the night and stuff like that going on, you know. It was quite nasty. I used to have to... [tape ended]

Q: You were just saying what a nice country Venezuela was when you got there, in spite of the fact that it had been targeted by Castro. Do you want to go on?

NORDEN: Well, it's a lovely country. It's a beautiful country, you know.

Q: Especially if you're in Caracas, not... Not down on the coast.

NORDEN: Sure, sure. Anyway, no, but Venezuelans are rather nice people. The private sector there, which I dealt with, is a pretty superior bunch of people, because they have the example of the American oil people, you know?

Q: Yes.

NORDEN: But my job, with the ambassador's particular blessing...

Q: The ambassador soon after you got there was Allen Stewart.

NORDEN: Yes, whom I knew anyway. Allen Stewart, incidentally, was probably one of the finest political officers that ever lived. He had a genius for that kind of thing, he had a flair. And, of course, he was a personal friend of the president's. In fact, the president put him in there. Every time they tried to put somebody in, he would just not pass on him. The thing would die there in the Foreign Office. Very interesting.

Q: Well, I knew him socially, and also he hired the cook we had in Rome, so I knew him...

NORDEN: Allen was a great guy. He had a couple of weaknesses. His main weakness, he had a prejudice against anybody who had been to an Ivy League college, and he gave several people a bad time. And he had another weakness, he had a wife who was a problem. No deputy chief of mission could survive around that woman, because she'd go for his wife. Not easy.

Q: What had he been before? He came in the service rather late.

NORDEN: Oh, he was with UP.

Q: UP. I couldn't remember whether...

NORDEN: That's right.

Q: Well, economic counselor would be a terrific and important job there.

NORDEN: Oh, it was a very key job. My job, as I developed it, was... I had to argue with the ambassador about this, and I said, "Look, there's only one thing for me to do. I have to try and reverse the flight of Venezuelan capital. Because there ain't enough aid money in the whole damn United States..."

Q: To... for all that...

NORDEN: "...to put that country on its feet if it doesn't want to." And so I worked on the American board rooms, essentially. I developed a very simple little technique, but it was very effective. You know, I'd write the little monthly reports that you have to write. You know?

Q: Yes.

NORDEN: But my reports had a special characteristic. They would have little sections that were highly classified, and spread in amongst them the sections that were not classified, which the Commerce Department used to lift and print. That would probably be copied in the Venezuelan press: "It says in the United States Commerce Department that the outlook for Venezuela is brilliant."

Q: Well, this is the way you...

NORDEN: I operated.

Q: Well, I used to be a little worried sometimes about the stuff of mine that was put in the Foreign Commerce Weekly, because I never knew what the Spanish reaction was going to be to it, when we were still not on good terms with Franco. But I can see that it could be used very...

NORDEN: I used it, and very, very effectively. And the minister of finance got to be my best friend.

Q: And he would feed you stuff that he...

NORDEN: Listen, if I wanted to talk to him alone and privately, all I'd do is pick up the telephone and he'd say, "Come over, Carl." Just like that.

Q: Well, that's a relationship that is the essence of business, I think.

NORDEN: He paid me the highest compliment I ever had in my whole career.

Q: Which was?

NORDEN: "We haven't liked anybody as well since Norman Armour."

Q: Well, that is a...

NORDEN: Yes, that was a very successful assignment.

Q: Let's see, you stayed there, oh, about four years, wasn't it?

NORDEN: No, no, three. I had amoebic dysentery three times.

Q: That's endemic in Caracas, is it? Or do you get it by going out to the...

NORDEN: Well, it's endemic pretty much, you know. You've got to be careful. You've got to be awfully careful.

Q: I had it a couple of times out in East Africa. ... there, but...

NORDEN: It's a nasty disease, a nasty disease.

Q: So eventually, after three years, you got back into the department.

NORDEN: They cooked up a very tricky job for me, and it was so damned tricky, I didn't get it. The secretary of commerce, who was Roosevelt, had made the people of Basel, on a trip to Switzerland, a promise that he would get them a counselor. Well, of course, we didn't have the money for a counselor. They had the idea of sending me in there as sort of a commercial officer, low grade and so forth. I had no status whatever -- impossible. And they were going to have a non-career counselor -- an impossible job; you'd be sure to sit below the salt. I just couldn't work up any enthusiasm.

Q: What organization were you to be attached to?

NORDEN: They never decided that. It was an awful thing.

Q: But this was because of the Bank of International Settlements?

NORDEN: No.

Q: That wasn't why you...

NORDEN: No, it could have been, but it wasn't. And it didn't work out. And then this one guy who did liaison between Commerce and ourselves, he said, "I know what's bothering you, it's the title. You don't have any title, you don't have any status." And he, on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, suggested that I should be made counselor or some other goddamned title he'd worked up, you know. This hit certain areas in the State Department, who said Commerce was *ultra vires*, and sent the goddamned thing back to Commerce. That's a terrible thing to have happen to you.

Q: I must say that the handling by the Department of the relations with Commerce over the years has been about as bad as... I'm sure we could well still have the entire Commercial Service in the department if anybody had been willing to compromise with them and recognize the legitimate requirements of the Commerce Department. But we never did.

NORDEN: They were reasonable. I always had very good relations with Commerce. This Venezuelan trick, they loved that. They ate that up. I mean, I treated Commerce as worthwhile. And so many officers don't do it. And particularly if they are economic counselors, they have that bug.

Q: They came up on the economic policy side, and not through the...

NORDEN: Well, there you are.

Q: Well, this is one reason, it seems to me, that we have such a time beating the balance of payment, balance of trade, situation, because not only our private companies, but our Foreign Service posts are not organized to promote trade.

NORDEN: No, they're not, and they should be.

Q: Which the British have been doing madly for years and years. They don't consider it beneath them, but we somehow do.

NORDEN: They have awfully good people. And I have found that if I wanted good contacts, play up to the British. They always had the contacts, and they didn't particularly mind my using them.

Q: Now, have you got five minutes left that you could talk about your last assignment in the Department? Because I know you were in some interesting things relating to the northern tier of South America.

NORDEN: Oh, well, yes, they simply put me in there because I knew... I had the Colombian desk and I had the Colombian loans and things like that. That was a very frustrating thing. I mean, I happened to like the people I worked with, and I knew the area, and I could be useful. But I certainly didn't get any kudos; there was no opportunity to get any. But I had a house here, and the kids had a school here, and, you know, at a certain point you're either going to get something worthwhile, or you say shit with it.

Q: That's right, and you've got family, too... Well, now I know you have to go.

NORDEN: I don't have to go, but my wife will have to go and is going to get the itch in about ten minutes. And I have to change this jacket because I can't wear this to the funeral.

Q: Do you have any sort of final blessings for the foreign affairs community, or do you think we could usefully have another session on this?

NORDEN: Oh, if you think of something, I'm available. I had other interesting assignments, but they were not as critical. I mean, there was nothing else like this Tehran thing. Jesus, I earned my salary for the next ten years. No kidding. In one despatch, you know, and that's what...

My comment is that if you're lucky... Sometimes you're not lucky. Often you're bored. You're writing, say, financial reports, you've got to write the same goddamned report over and over, because there ain't nothing new happens, you know. And then you get the reputation, as I had: "The trouble with Carl is, he's always dissatisfied." As you know.

I think because I married late was one difficulty, very late, at 45. I'd have had a lot better time if I'd married earlier. I could have married earlier, you know, in the service.

Q: Yes, I know.

NORDEN: Assuming you have the right wife.

My only comment is, I really don't know anything else where you get so many opportunities to do something worthwhile, if you have the imagination to see them, and if you have the flair.

Now, you see, I had one great asset in the Foreign Service. After high school, my father said, "Listen, sonny, you're not ready to go to college, you're sixteen. I can't send you to college, waste of money, I won't do it. I'm going to send you to Switzerland for a year, to a boarding school where they beat the hell out of you." Forty classes a week, and we had fourteen nationalities. That was a special asset. I got so used to people, fourteen nationalities, being foreign, that I was never aware that people were foreigners and I treated them like anybody else. And that was an asset to me in the Foreign Service.

Q: Now what language did you operate in, in the school? Two or three languages, or how did it work?

NORDEN: It was in Switzerland--French and German.

Q: So you got those two languages pretty cold, did you?

NORDEN: Yes, and we also had English, you know. But I had to pass an exam, a three-day exam, that was as bad as the Foreign Service exam.

Q: What school was this?

NORDEN: Not a well-known school.

Q: Not Rosé.

NORDEN: No, nothing like that. That's social. This wasn't social.

Q: Well, they're all good schools, I know...

NORDEN: When they teach you something, by God, they teach it to you. But, anyway, I think I had a sort of funny little asset: I was never at a loss for how to handle a foreigner, because I didn't consider him a foreigner, just another guy, you know.

Q: Well, this is a great thing. I think it's an asset that some people can develop late, but it's much better to develop it at that age.

NORDEN: Yes.

Q: Well, thank you very much, indeed.

NORDEN: For what it's worth.

Q: It will be very useful, and eventually we'll get you a transcript of this that you can look over. Don't wait around for it.

NORDEN: Yes, if you have anything else you want to know, wherever I can contribute something.

Q: Good. Well, you may think of things. When you get the transcript back, it's perfectly legitimate to write some more or... Well, thank you, and I'll get out of your...

NORDEN: Adaptability.

Q: Adaptability in the Foreign Service, yes.

NORDEN: Jesus, I mean, you've been in Cuba three years, you've heard of the easy-going life of the Cuban. And they're crooked as hell, you know, I can't begin to tell you how crooked they are. I could tell you some stories that are really lovely. I remember, I dropped in on the prime minister's brother in the Treasury one day, and he said, "Oh, Mr. Norden, what I have to tell you, you won't believe it. This is going to be the most awful scandal in the history of Cuba."

I said, "How come?"

"Why, the minister of education has put his brother into the Treasury. I don't know what's going to happen, but it's going to be awful. Jesus, I'm just a poor bugger, I'm just a poor sucker, my take..., my take is only a couple hundred thousand a year."

And I knew him so well, you know, I said, "Come on, Don Antonio, don't give me that crap. A couple hundred thousand a year, you know, I mean, you're talking peanuts, and you're not a peanuts guy."

"Well, maybe, all right, a couple hundred thousand more than that."

I mean, that degree of informality with foreign officials. Couldn't happen anywhere but Cuba.

You know what happened? He called in all the dollar bills that were dirty and had them washed. And then they were all hauled out to his private yacht, the minister of education's private yacht. He went to Miami and traded them in for dollar bills in Miami, and he bought himself a baseball team.

That's Cuba. That's Cuba.

And from Cuba's informality, I had to do a transformation, instantaneous, so to speak, into Chile, which is stiff-necked as hell, very European. I mean, anything like that is incredible, it couldn't possibly happen there. They have other ways of cheating, you know.

Q: Well, everybody has ways of cheating.

NORDEN: Yes, but I'm just trying to tell you, you have to be very adaptable. Very adaptable, you know.

Q: And then you found a different way in Tehran...

NORDEN: Oh, well, listen, when it came to crookedness, I mean, that's millennial, their cheating.

End of interview