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Information Series

LAWRENCE NORRIE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Larry, I will ask you to start the interview by stating something of your background, a brief bio-sketch, where you came from, what your education was. I know that you had a substantial career before you came into USIA, so if you'll simply recount that, and then indicate what it was that got you into the governmental information program in the first place.

Bio-Sketch and Pre-Government Information Work Experience

NORRIE: Thank you, Lew. To begin with, I was born September 22, 1903, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I went to college at Springfield, Massachusetts, at Springfield College. I got a B.S. degree there. Then years later, I went to Columbia in New York and got a master's degree.

My first job right out of college, I was sent to the Honolulu YMCA to work with street gangs and boys. I stayed there 14 years, wound up as Executive Secretary of the YMCA there.

1945: Enters War Department Program on Education, Cultural and Religious Affairs (ECR)

In 1940, I was transferred to the National Council of the YMCA as Assistant National Secretary and responsible for work in the seven Pacific Southwestern states. In 1945, I was interviewed by the War Department for going to Germany, to take over the reorientation of German youth. I was assigned to Berlin and my job was to give leadership to the programs necessary to point youth in the right direction to live in a new environment called democracy.

In 1955, five years later, the State Department took over in West Germany and the Foreign Service attracted me, and I took the examination in Germany and passed.

Q: Larry, before you go on to your career, which was actually under the State Department and then later USIA, I'd like to get something clarified. It was my understanding that the Army set up some sort of an educational and information program as a special branch under the Army, to which a lot of civilians were recruited. Really, that was the forerunner of what later became the USIE, then the USIS. I imagine that what you were doing was under that particular organization.

NORRIE: That is correct. It was called ECR--Educational, Cultural, and Religious Affairs. I was assigned to that division. My job was the reorientation of German youth. I got into that challenge through General Clay's concern over the gangs that were developing, the destruction of government property, attacks on the government people, including civilians and military, and he wanted something done about it to give youth another incentive. He asked American youth organizations for suggestions, and because of some experience I had had in Hawaii, that's why I was apparently asked to take over that position.

Main Focus Initially was Reorientation of German Youth into Useful and Democratic Activities

Q: Can you give a discussion of a few things you did when you first started out in that program under the Army auspices, before you got into the State Department?

NORRIE: Oh, yes.

Q: Which was really a continuation, I gather.

NORRIE: That's right, except that the branch was expanded to include several other responsibilities, e.g. women's affairs, adult education, etc. First of all, we had to liquidate the remnants of the Hitler Youth Organization. Actually, I think the youth of Germany had become disillusioned with their leaders and were not too happy about accepting new ones from the United States and other countries.

Under the Army, we first dissolved the Hitler-type organizations, liquidated their assets, dispersed their leaders, and gave permission for youth to organize only on a local basis. We forbade organization above the local group. We wanted them to organize around their own hobbies or interests, or just for fellowship, but have no national organization because of the tendency in Germany to look to the top for leadership. We wanted them to have the experience in determining their own fortunes and their own organizational patterns. That was the first thing we did. We forbade uniforms, marching, and military insignia.

We then set up leadership training schools. We had three of them, one near Wiesbaden, one in Stuttgart, one in Berlin. We also approved youth groups asking the Army to help them with their organizational needs and equipment. The Army was very helpful and very cooperative. They provided tents for camping, tables for ping pong, books, all kinds of things, e.g. places to meet, baseballs, etc. This was the beginning of the friendship between the military and the German youth organizations, and it grew like wildfire. In that little pamphlet I showed you yesterday, "Youth Between Yesterday and Tomorrow," you will find how fast they grew from 83,000 to a million and a half in two years, i.e., youth in democratically organized groups.

Q: What different activities? Were they divided by activities?

NORRIE: No, we didn't divide them at all.

Q: They weren't specialized?

NORRIE: If they were a music group, they started a glee club or a band. If they just wanted fellowship, the YMCA or the Boy Scouts came in and developed educational programs. There were all kinds. The YWCA was very active in that period, too. They all sent experienced leaders to Germany at a later date, to help in the rebuilding of German youth organizations.

We also brought in a great many organizations that wanted to do something about Germany. The Friends Service Committee, for instance, came in and set up an exchange program with school youth middle grades, and they brought in work groups to help rebuild towns, set up camp in a little town and rebuild the fire station or rebuild the school. This was very effective. We had a lot of those all over Germany.

Q: Did the Army provide building materials on occasion for those efforts?

NORRIE: They helped a great deal. At one point, a little later, we were given permission to take over unoccupied castles, public buildings that had belonged to the Nazis, such as bomb shelters, safety centers, where people could go. We set up youth organizations in them, and they were very effective. The Army helped a great deal in furnishing them and giving leadership to their efforts. That's the early days.

The leadership training schools developed under the help of the State Department when they started the cultural exchange program they sent leaders to teach. I remember Elmer Ott from Minneapolis YMCA came over and organized a camping organization for Germany, set up camping programs with them along the American camping lines. They were democratic organizations, not military, as they were under the Nazis. Other organizations sent volunteers over to work in other programs.

Q: Did they work under the auspices of the State Department?

NORRIE: Yes. They sent them over, paid their way, in some cases, paid their salaries. They worked under our supervision and we kept close touch with them. They wrote reports and recommendations for the organizations' use and for our use.

1950: Norrie Enters Foreign Service in Department of State's Public Affairs Program

I entered the Foreign Service in the Office of Public Affairs, and the responsibilities covered all of the American zone. But then I was transferred out of Germany after eight years, to the West Indies.

Q: Is there anything more that you want to say about that period under the State Department and what your activities were in Germany during that time?

NORRIE: Well, yes, the youth activities branch became "community activities," and included women's affairs, community organization, adult education, and motion picture sections, as well as youth and sports. I took the first group out of Germany, which was a group of religious leaders, to the World Conference of Churches in Oslo. That was a great experience for them to get out of Germany and go somewhere. Then I took a group of young leaders of German youth to Williamsburg, U.S.A., for a conference with American youth leaders who came from all over the United States to Williamsburg, and sat with this group of German leaders for a week. It was a fabulous experience for them and for us, too. One of those leaders is presently in the Bundesrat, I believe; Willy Birkelbach was the head of the labor youth movement.

1954: Transferred to USIS Program in West Indies with Headquarters in Trinidad

Then I was transferred to the West Indies, which was a great experience for me. I had a pogo-stick job, which ranged from Suriname, which at that time was Dutch Guyana, British Guyana, French Guyana, on up through the Archipelago as far as the Honduras. My job there was to build the local USIS in Trinidad and new USIS services in Barbados and other places. I think all of them are still thriving, from what I've heard. We set up a building in Trinidad and went to work. It was a well-received program in the islands throughout the British West Indies and the other countries.

Q: What kind of an operation did you have there, in addition to organizational? Were you carrying out the traditional media activities of the Agency and exchange programs?

NORRIE: Yes, all of the programs of the State Department and the USIA were carried out in full, with very limited personnel, but particularly the film program was very effective. At one point, we were taking films to all the countries mentioned above.

Q: You said the film program was particularly effective. Would you like to give us an example or two of exactly what you were doing?

NORRIE: All right. I used the Walt Disney health films in backward areas. You remember them?

Q: Yes.

NORRIE: They were very useful. We'd take them on our jeep down into one of the most impoverished villages you've ever seen, poor people who lived down by the water. We took those films in there, which were not only useful in telling them how to preserve their health, but they loved the animated films. This went on for a long time. We showed films there every week.

But the government there objected to us sending films of entertainment to that group. They had a bulb light on a high pole, and my driver used to shinny up that pole and plug in our electric line so we could show our films, and everybody in that village would turn out and see the films. But when we didn't stop sending films there, the government ultimately took the wire out and the people had no lights. That was the only light in the whole village. So USIA came to our help and sent me, by way of Pan American Airlines, who transported it free, a generator. We put the generator in the back of the jeep and we still showed films. It was a big success.

Q: Did the government object further to you directly?

NORRIE: Never had any official government intervention or requests that they be stopped.

Q: Why did they dislike your showing films in the village?

NORRIE: They thought it was another way of making the people feel content with their surroundings there. If they had a film shown, it was a morale factor, and they would not listen to the pressure to get them to move out of that community to other parts of town. That was the excuse given me personally. But it was not an objection completely. They didn't reject the program completely.

Q: I'm surprised. It seems to me that if these people were so poverty stricken, if they didn't have the means of moving out of the center, what were they going to do?

NORRIE: That was never determined. We had many, many discussions of this in private, but never any official complaint.

Although through a labor leader, I got to show our films to the labor unions. It was a large outlet for our films, because there were a lot of union people there. They paid no dues, they had no money. It was an important group, as far as I was concerned. I never found this group active in any way against the United States. They were always very pro-U.S., so I discarded the charges that some were anti-American. I was very grateful for their help.

One local person who helped a great deal was Carlton Comma, who was the head of the Library Association. Libraries were very important to us because it gave us an outlet with another group of people. We showed films there, also exhibits, e.g. art and other exhibits provided by USIA.

The press was always cooperative there. In fact, it was a happy experience throughout the islands. I had no great opposition at all. We developed very rapidly throughout the whole archipelago.

Q: Did USIS have its own library?

NORRIE: Later it had its own library. They sent me 500 books shortly after I got there. We had no place to put them, but through the man you met yesterday, Jay LaBelle, he was the building man from the State Department, arrived there and took measurements and exercised authority given to him by the State Department to build a small building which housed those books and a lot more that came later.

Q: Were you able to also distribute books to the labor libraries?

NORRIE: Yes, the labor unions and libraries and shipped them to other places. The exchange program worked mostly out of London.

Q: They were still a British protectorate.

NORRIE: Still a British protectorate at that time, and later became an independent nation. After three years there, I was sent to Ecuador.

1957: Transfer to be PAO in Ecuador

Q: That was what year that you were sent to Ecuador?

NORRIE: It was about 1957, I guess. That was another great experience for me. Quito, Ecuador, was the headquarters of the embassy. We had our offices in the embassy, we had a branch office in Guayaquil, and we had an Amerika Haus in Quito and another office in Guayaquil. As you know, Quito is 9,500 feet high. Some people have difficulty living there, but we found it very congenial. We loved the people. There was much to be done there. Political education became a major interest of ours, to let people see how America lives, how they work, how they play, and what their facilities are for a good life. But also how they govern themselves.

Q: Did you have formal educational resources to deal with the public there?

NORRIE: The University of Quito and the University of Guayaquil--also other groups, yes. We didn't have too much access to the university at first, but through the help of one of the leaders in Guayaquil, we were able to get some funds to build a residence for non-communist youth at the university and to help them develop their own press, their own paper, and to enjoy some other activities through our auspices, e.g. English classes at the Amerika Haus.

Q: While you were there, did you ever know a man by the name of Dr. Bustamante?

NORRIE: Oh, yes.

Q: Because when I was Acting Director for Latin America, I remember going with him one day. I think that we had provided some of the material, soccer balls and equipment, as well as other sports equipment.

NORRIE: I do remember him. The military attaché at the embassy also supported his work. So did the Marines stationed there.

Q: No, I was speaking of Bustamante in Ecuador.

NORRIE: No, I didn't know him. I'm sorry. I was thinking of the Bustamante in Jamaica.

Q: I went with him way out into one of the small towns up in the Andes. He had all this equipment which USIS had furnished him, and he gave it to the boys' athletic club that was in this small town. I remember them giving three cheers for Dr. Bustamante. I have several pictures of that event.

NORRIE: I remember receiving some soccer balls and other equipment from USIS, requested by our U.S. cultural officer at USIS. The Otavalo Indians were one of our audiences. We showed films for them. We had a strong film program there, with a couple of vehicles to take the films around into the hinterlands, and a very good man to show the films.

Q: You said you built these dormitories for non-communist students. I gather from that, that there was at least some, or perhaps a fairly substantial, communist influence and sympathy in the University itself.

NORRIE: No doubt about that, I guess. Our job was to start with assumptions that our program was needed, and that those interested would come to it, and whether they were communists or not, they would benefit by it. The students at the University in Guayaquil came very generously to the program. They liked what they saw in the films, and speakers provided by the State Department, musicians, talented people, authors, and so forth, would come there, and they would flock as an audience.

Q: Did you have any overt and identifiable opposition from the communist groups to the program?

NORRIE: Not to our program. I don't recall any directly aimed at our programs. The film program was well chosen in Washington. The films were carefully selected. That is, they developed films, took the pictures, and shipped them, of things that actually existed in the U.S.A. The Cultural Exchange Program was also well received.

Q: They could relate the films to the actual life of the people in the USA?

NORRIE: That's right. This would flabbergast people when they saw the sea of automobiles parked around the Lockheed factory, automobiles driven by workers at that factory. They couldn't believe it. But it became part of their impression of American life.

USIS Ecuador Establishes a Newspaper to Assist
Ecuadoran President Galo Plaza Obtain a Media Outlet

Q: In connection with USIS activities at the time of your assignment to Quito, when we were talking last night off the record, you told me about the cooperation of the ambassador in taking you to see the president and asking him how you could most help him to carry out his program in his own country. If you don't mind, I'd like you to put that experience on tape and tell us what came about as a result.

NORRIE: The president at that time was Galo Plaza, who later became the head of the Organization of American States. He was a fabulous person. We also had a fabulous ambassador, I thought. He was always cooperative and willing to help in our program. It was Ambassador Ravndal, who is gone now.

At one point not too long after we got there, it developed that Ambassador Ravndal wanted me to go with him to see the president and talk about how he could get a better press, a better public. Because, as Ravndal said, "My job is to make sure that the public knows who you are and what you are as president of this country, in order that you will stay in office and do the good work that you've cut out for your country."

The president said, "I don't need money. I don't need manpower. The thing I lack is a public audience. I have no newspapers; they're all controlled by the opposition. I have no radio, I have no other outlets. If you can help me in that regard, you'll be of great assistance and I will appreciate it, but I can't think of anything else."

We went back to the embassy and brought together the staff, and discussed with them what could we do. It developed that everyone thought that a newspaper outlet was the main thing needed. We discussed that, or the ambassador did, with the State Department, and in due time, a printing press, tons of newsprint, which was unavailable to the president of the country down there, arrived in Guayaquil. We went down to receive it. There came the problem of where to put it and who's going to run it. We found, without too much trouble, through the government's help, a building in Guayaquil, which was Ecuador's largest, most populated city.

The question of where to run it revolved around getting an editor who would be pro-administration. We found one working in USIA, who had just been let out, and he went to work for the president in that newspaper as editor. I think he enjoyed the new experience. That newspaper has grown ever since.

Q: I hope it still remains a pro-U.S. paper!

NORRIE: I don't know how it ranks politically anymore. I've been out of that field for a long time. You have to remember I retired 21 years ago.

Q: It gave Galo Plaza his press outlet.

NORRIE: It gave him his press outlet. He was a very brilliant president and, as I say, became the head of the Organization of American States.

Q: Had the paper become rapidly self-sustaining?

NORRIE: Yes, yes. It got adequate advertising and help, especially from U.S. and international interests.

Q: So that it wasn't any further burden to USIS. It just operated on its own?

NORRIE: On its own, yes, from my understanding. I left Ecuador not too long after that, but my understanding is that it developed rapidly.

After Ecuador, I went back to work in the Agency.

Q: Before leaving your discussion of Ecuador, how about saying a word on Leonard Bernstein's visit there, which you spoke of earlier when we were not recording.

NORRIE: Oh, yes, I should mention that one of the presentations groups that came there was Leonard Bernstein, who came down with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He was a hit from the moment he arrived there until he left. One famous anecdote. He heard of the reed players, people who play with reeds up in the mountains, and he wanted to hear them. So after his last performance in Quito, which was at night, a group from USIA took him in a car up to this village, which was sound asleep when we got there, but they got up in a hurry for Leonard Bernstein and played in a smoky little cottage with their reeds. He sat there. I can picture him now, resting in a hammock. Finally, he got up, made some notes, and believe it or not, the next night in Guayaquil, his orchestra arranger produced a piece for the Philharmonic Orchestra that sounded like the reeds and followed their tunes. It was great. Down in Guayaquil, they thought it was fabulous. [Laughter]

Q: It's too bad you didn't have any kind of tape recorder like we have today.

NORRIE: I think we did. I'm sure the whole concert was taped, because we did show it.

Q: I mean up in the village itself.

NORRIE: Oh, yes! We should have, yes.

1960: Assignment to Washington and the Inspection Corps

Q: That's a good anecdote. Now, what was your assignment once you got to Washington?

NORRIE: First it was to do some writing for the Agency on an administrative handbook, but then I was transferred after that to the Inspection Corps, and spent the next many months and miles traveling around, inspecting our operations.

Q: In 1958 or '59?

NORRIE: Yes, right in there. 1960, I think it was. Anyway, I inspected our services in most countries of Africa, Asia, the Near East, and some South and Central America, not many in South America, but Venezuela, for one.

Transfer to State Department Cultural Presentations Program

While I was assigned to Washington, I was also later appointed to the cultural presentations program in the State Department. This was after I finished the tour as an inspector.

Q: Did you actually transfer over to State then?

NORRIE: Yes, but on loan.

Q: Because at that time State was controlling the Washington end of the cultural exchanges.

NORRIE: Yes, that's right. I enjoyed that experience over there. We used to go to New York to meet with the committee that had been appointed to select cultural presentations groups and individuals, and I acted as secretary of that group. We selected things like "Hello, Dolly," Cleveland Orchestra. I also escorted two cultural presentation programs, one to Africa, another to the Middle East and Far East.

Q: This is while you were working out of the Department?

NORRIE: No, later. One of them was the De Paur Chorus, a fabulous chorus mostly from Harlem, New York, and very talented singers. We went to every country in Africa that would receive us. A couple of them didn't want us. They played at the homes of the leaders of the country, Haile Selassie, for instance, and others, all around Africa. The group had learned the songs of those countries, the native songs, from records and tapes taken in the back countries, where native groups lived and sang. They sang those songs in such a way that it brought the house down on every concert.

Q: Last night, when you were talking about this briefly, you showed me a picture of yourself cradling a youngster from one of those countries. I don't remember which one it was.

NORRIE: That was in Nigeria, way in the back country. The De Paur Chorus was singing, and the crowds gathered, but they were stand-offish. They stood away from us. They're a very bashful people. I sat in a chair with a scattering of people in the front row of the audience. There weren't many people in the audience, but there were a lot of people standing some distance away. One little tot wandered into the inner group and promptly fell asleep on the dusty ground there. I picked him up, put him on my lap, and he kept right on sleeping. But it warmed up the crowd, and they all came moving in on me, and that picture was taken with the other kids and young people gathered closely around me.

Q: In the picture I saw the mob that was around you at the time.

NORRIE: Yes. [Laughter] Scared me for a minute. I thought maybe they thought I was stealing the kid. But it was a warm, friendly group, not hostile at all, but shy before then.

Another group I took was from Springfield College basketball team.

Q: Your own alma mater.

NORRIE: My own alma mater. That's where basketball originated, Springfield College. I took them on a round-the-world trip starting in Rome. I left Austria right at that time and joined the group in Rome. They played about 100 games and won them all. [Chuckles] But mostly it was clinics. I have that whole story written up in a little black book here somewhere. They held clinics everywhere. The top people in the country came to hear them and see them. It was a very good experience. I think we made more friends with that gesture to the common people of the country and the youth of the country than anything else we could do.

Q: Did any of their ports of call on that tour involve Latin American countries?

NORRIE: No, no. Just Europe, Middle East, and Asia.

Q: The reason I ask is that at some point in the early 1960s, there was an American grantee who was sent to Bolivia, I think it was, and he organized a basketball team among the Indians. They played basketball at altitudes of 14,000 feet.

NORRIE: It was Ascension, probably. No, we just went on the tour starting in Rome and went east from there, stopping along the way. The first stop, I think, was Africa, Egypt, then Iran, India, Ceylon, Hong Kong, etc. They played in Italy to start the thing off. Anyway, they made a lot of friends for the United States and for basketball. Basketball was developing rapidly, as you may know, throughout the Middle East.

1962: Ed Murrow Requests that Norrie be Sent to Austria as Country PAO

In 1962, at the request of Edward R. Murrow, who was in Paris at the time, he phoned Washington and suggested I go to Austria as County Public Affairs Officer, and

counselor of embassy for public affairs, and I did. That was, of course, another great experience. My wife enjoyed that a lot. In fact, wherever I went, she was part of the show. She is an accomplished artist in her own right, and immediately got close to the artists of the country, helped form art groups where they were not formed, promote art exhibits, etc.

I have to go back for just a minute to Germany, to describe our first contact over there. The artists had been deprived of freedom to paint what they wanted to paint, and they were delighted to be free, but they had no materials to be free with, no paint, no paper. They were a dispossessed group, almost, in Germany. A group was formed called "Prolog," in which all the artists were asked to paint a picture of their own desires, and all was put into one pool given to raise money to help the artists. It was a total success, and I think it's a collector's item today. Prolog was sold immediately among the Americans, and money went to buy paper and paints and brushes and that sort of thing, which were made available to the artists. A strong art group developed right there in Berlin, Germany.

Q: Thelma then provided the nucleus for the formation of this group?

NORRIE: She was one of the helpers at the start. There were also others who worked very hard on it.

Now, let's see. Where was I? I was just getting to Vienna. I served in that country for about four years, and then returned to Washington. In Vienna, we had a very strong Amerika Haus program, which had been thriving before I got there, but we developed other outlets for USIS material down in the Tyrol and in Klagenfurt and in Linz. We also had a very strong Amerika Haus built in Linz. We had to fold it later, and we gave books from the library to the public library there, with the understanding that they would be placed on special shelves of the library, which they were.

Q: Was this terminated because of budgetary restrictions?

NORRIE: Yes. Terminated by Washington.

U.S. Ambassador to Vienna Objected to a Joint Hungarian-Austrian Student Discussion Program Sponsored by USIS and Broadcast on Austrian Radio

Q: When we were talking last night, I think you mentioned a couple of other programs that you had organized. Wasn't this the country where the ambassador was somewhat hostile to the USIS program?

NORRIE: In Austria.

Q: Yes. You said you brought some youth from other countries, to which he objected.

NORRIE: There was one particular program that he disliked, but then so did Washington. [Laughter] Our area executive didn't like it either. At no expense to the U.S. or USIA, we encouraged meetings between the Hungarian students and the students in one of the nearby cities of Austria, Graz. At one point, they came together for discussion and debate. It had a wide public acceptance and was televised and placed on radio by the Austrians. I thought it was a very successful thing, but some people took exception to having youths from a communist country meet the youth of Austria. However, in my mind, Austria served the United States great purpose in so many ways because it is neutral. The youth and people from other nearby communist countries were free to come into a neutral country from Hungary, in fact, all of the surrounding countries. Austria, being neutral, with a free press, a free radio, free access to all government processes, was a wonderful example.

As a matter of fact, we--I say "we" rhetorically, the Americans--made it possible for youth from other countries who were in Austria to fly to Berlin, see the Berlin Wall, and come back to Vienna. This was a great experience for them. I think in the long run, it's paying some dividends in these days.

But we also set up around Austria relay stations for Vienna Radio, which carried our stories on agriculture and other facets of American life.

Q: These are broadcasts that were audible in surrounding Eastern bloc countries?

NORRIE: That's right.

Q: I'd like to go back just a minute to ask you two or three questions about this debate between the Hungarian students and the Austrian students, which I think you said last night was in German.

NORRIE: Yes.

Q: How long did the conference last? How long was the debate going on?

NORRIE: Oh, I think just one weekend, along with other student activities such as soccer.

Q: Were the students from Hungary actively supporting a communist political viewpoint and then were met in debate by the Austrians and their different viewpoint?

NORRIE: I think the debate was more defending what they're doing in education, but also inquiring into what's the ultimate result of something the Austrians would mention about democratic life. There were periods of questions and answers, questioning the answers. But I think it was a wholesome thing.

Q: It wasn't a terribly contentious debate, then?

NORRIE: No, not at all. They're too close together, those two countries. As you see today, the Hungarians are welcome in Austria. It's part of the old Austria-Hungarian empire.

Q: What year was this? 1964? Somewhere in there?

NORRIE: Yes, right in there.

Q: I think the individual whom you were referring to as area director at that time didn't come into that job until late 1964 or early '65.

NORRIE: But he was on the program. He was part of the staff at that time in Washington.

Q: So it must have been late 1964 or early '65, then.

NORRIE: It could be. I left there in 1965.

Q: Was the objection from Washington just based on the fact that they didn't want to have anything to do with communist youth?

NORRIE: We should not bring those students together for the purpose of debate. He primarily wanted to make sure we didn't spend any money on it--and we didn't.

Q: I'm trying to remember what the attitude in Washington was at that time, because I left in 1964 to go to Turkey. I think I have some idea. It doesn't seem logical at this point.

NORRIE: Well, it didn't to me because of the importance of Austrian youth in the democratic education of the rest of the countries around them.

Q: Having an opportunity to express a democratic point of view to countries that were under the aegis at that time of the Soviet Union.

NORRIE: Yes. I got one telegram that asked how much did this crazy program cost. [Laughter] It didn't cost us anything. We put nothing into it. All I did was report it!

Q: It must have been a great satisfaction on your part to be able to wire back, "Nothing."

NORRIE: We did spend money on developing America Days. For instance, we brought an American dance group from the plays in Munich that had an American folk dance group. We brought them on the borders of Hungary in a bus and they put on a program along with an Austrian group, and they both gave a show and folk dancing. We had an exhibit of American photography provided by USIS, very popular photographs of American life, big ones. We showed American films in the main theater, etc. The local radio and television used USIA material. It was a success.

Q: Did any students across the border come to these, too?

NORRIE: We wouldn't know, but we believe so. It was no problem. They probably did, because it was well publicized. We showed American films there and a lot of other programs, American music, and so forth.

1966: Back to Washington for Final Assignment

I went back to the Agency then, and spent the rest of my days before retirement helping to develop a program of placement of retiring USIA personnel, in industry and cultural agencies around the United States.

Q: This was 1966?

NORRIE: Yes, that's right. We had seminars on the problems of retiring, and they were well attended. We had excellent personnel from AARP and other agencies to come and present programs.

Various Voluntary Activities Before Government Service and After Retirement

Now how about some voluntary things that I've done along the way?

Q: Yes, I'd like to hear that.

NORRIE: First of all, pre-retirement. In Hawaii, I was appointed to the first Statehood Commission, which was appointed by the governor of Hawaii, and we worked for about a year and a half and sent representatives to Washington, but statehood was denied at that time. It later became a reality.

Then I was appointed by the governor to the Charter Commission, a commission to develop the charter for Hawaii. The city of Honolulu, you may not know, is the largest city in the world by miles because it includes Midway, which is 1,500 miles away or something like that.

I was appointed to the United States Employment Service Board. This was during the Depression in Hawaii. They had a very strong U.S. Employment Service Board there.

Then post-retirement, I spent ten years as a member of the City Planning Commission of Holmes Beach, where we lived, a thriving small city on the island out here.

Q: Just across from Bradenton.

NORRIE: Just across from Bradenton, yes. I became commander of the United States Coast Guard after several years, ten years, I guess, of search and rescue and examination

of boats and teaching in Coast Guard classes. That was an interesting experience, believe me.

I have also been active in other boating organizations such as the Yacht Club and the Power Squadron and served at both local and higher levels of activity.

As for languages, I studied Japanese at the University of Hawaii, but never had much chance to practice it since leaving Hawaii. French I studied in college, got my master's degree because I passed the French examination. [Chuckles] I studied Spanish diligently in Latin American, and German, of course, in Germany and Austria. I became fairly fluent in both languages. Now my wife and I are studying sign language! I think we may need it here.

Writings. You've just seen one, The Youth Between Yesterday and Tomorrow, which had to do with the status of German youth when we took over and three years later. I think you will find that interesting, because it shows the influence of the American military, as well as the personnel sent over by the cultural exchange program, as well as our regular professional staff.

I have two other documents over there that I did on the side. It was a research study of the city of Vancouver. One was The Arts in our Town, and the other has to do with the community chest, where the money was going and why.

Q: Was this in connection with volunteer work outside of the Agency?

NORRIE: This was outside of the Agency or anybody. This was all volunteer.

I think that about covers everything. I am still involved in voluntary work here. This village has an elected advisory council of which I am secretary. It takes a lot of my time, as you just heard, because we were interrupted by a call from the chairman.

Return to Discussion of Activities in the German Youth Program: 1945

Q: Larry, I'd like to go back for a few minutes before we terminate this interview, and talk about your work in organizing the youth and breaking up the old centralized sports complex that the German Government had had under the Nazis. I think you mentioned the GYA organization. I'd like you to talk a little bit about that before we close.

Great Contribution of U.S. Military in Organizing and Democratizing German Youth

NORRIE: I'm glad to talk about it, because it's probably the most important time in history where the military played a role of such importance in the democratization of another country. An edict was sent out from the military command asking each U.S. military organization in the country to get busy in helping German youth with their organization problems. They needed places to meet, they needed play facilities,

basketballs, nets, tennis rackets, and so forth. Through voluntary giving and help from the United States directly, voluntary help in the United States, they were able to supply unlimited [amounts] for these needs. Much material was transported to Germany on government ships.

Holiday times, the youth were entertained in American military homes. Skilled troops acted as coaches for basketball and other games, e.g. baseball. They acted as hosts for social events. A hall was provided for dances and things like that. It was a program involving all of the military throughout the American zone. I think it lasted and is still going on in a way. I just had Christmas cards from the GYA retirees, who are now approaching my age, in Berlin, and they still meet. They still have their organization going. They still are promoting U.S.

Q: Was it under your general jurisdiction that this GYA, this German Youth Association, was established?

NORRIE: The policy regarding GYA relationships was worked out in HICOG, yes. But the initiative was worked out in Washington, including the Pentagon.

Q: It was your operation that presided over the breakup of the former Nazi centralized sports groups?

NORRIE: Yes, the "Einheitsverband." Yes. We didn't like the idea of the inclusion of all sports group under one head. It lent itself too much to dictatorial policies. We wanted a more democratic approach to sports, and therefore we urged organization at the local level. And not till some years later did we permit youth groups to organize above the local level.

Q: So that you provided for their leadership to emerge from the local groups.

NORRIE: To emerge. Right. We tried to give them as much leadership as we could by establishing leadership training schools for their personnel.

Q: This was under the jurisdiction of the public affairs program?

NORRIE: It was under my direct jurisdiction, yes, and our local staff out in the field. Our staff was a branch within the Public Affairs Program.

Q: Then did you later provide for some specialized groups, like the athletic groups, under this particular program, as well as the camping facilities and so forth?

NORRIE: They organized at the local level--such groups as soccer. Later, with our permission, they enlarged the circle to include other cities and counties.

The Army rose to the occasion on one special event that I will never forget. I think it was the precursor of European Union. I like to think that, anyway. The youth all over Europe were interested in European cooperation. You see, we established what we called Kreis Youth Committee. Kreis is a county. The Kreis Youth Committee was made up of youth groups of that county. That was the first instance of intergroup cooperation. They later developed regionally in the Regungsbezirk and then nationally. But they decided they wanted to hold a European conference in Germany, and the site was set at the Lorelei on the Rhine, famous in German lore. They came from all Europe, from Finland south. But they had to have a place to stay.

Q: The facilities and the transportation were provided by the Army?

NORRIE: Certainly the facilities. The Army provided huge Army tents. They were set up like a city. They elected their own mayor and city council to control it, and the conference went on for a week. I went up there on several occasions during that week. It was not too far from where we were stationed.

Q: Whose concept was it? I know that the youth had wanted to do this, so that the idea was already implanted, but who was it that motivated the Army to do it? And how did the information come to the Army to accomplish this?

NORRIE: That came through us. From their needs through us to the Army, and the Army was immediately responsive without any problem. There are many other ways in which the Army helped in that endeavor. Sanitation, facilities were provided, a mess hall was provided, and so on.

There were other occasions when we needed help from the military.

Q: There was another instance which you discussed last night, which I think ought to be on tape, too, and this was with reference to the universities, in which the universities were looking for help. You said you went to the commanding general and said the universities were asking assistance, and what should you do about it. He told you to come up with a decision or recommendation.

The Russian Attempt to "Steal a March" on the Allies by Holding an Enormous Youth Rally in Berlin as a Propaganda Coup. Army Provides Means to Outmaneuver the Soviets.

NORRIE: No, you're thinking of another event. The communists sponsored World Youth Rally in Berlin.

Q: Oh, that's a different event.

NORRIE: I customarily went to a meeting. We had in Berlin the Kommandatura and the Control Council. I would represent the Americans on things which concerned youth. We

had a meeting on one Friday. I went to that meeting, at which the Russian delegate announced that the Russians were bringing in--I forget how many they said, a million and a half or two million or something like that, youth from all over the world, to a conference. One thing he said, "We're going to march in all the other sectors of Berlin."

I thought General Clay ought to know about this. I found out later he already knew more about it than I did. But anyway, I went right back and asked for an audience with him, and I got it for Saturday morning and went to see him, and told him what had been announced. I said, "They plan to march in the American sector."

He said, "Well, just tell them if they march in the American sector, we'll wash them down the sewers of Berlin. They won't march in the American sector." And they didn't.

Well, I learned the biggest lesson in my life in terms of being somebody's underling. I said, "Well, they're coming and they're going to be here, and there is going to be a lot of propaganda against the United States. What do you want me to do about it?"

He thought for a moment and he said, "How long have you been here?" I told him the date I arrived. He said, "Yes, I remember. We hired you to advise me on youth affairs."

I said, "That's right."

He said, "Then why in the hell don't you advise me instead of asking me questions? You're supposed to be the expert." I learned a lesson. From then on, I would write up a paper of suggestions to get his approval, but I never asked him for his opinion as to what I should do. [Laughter]

[Note: A fuller discussion of what the Americans (with outstanding U.S. Army assistance) did to counter Soviet efforts appears later in this oral history.]

U.S. Army Assistance to German Universities From McCloy Fund

Q: It seems to me that you were also talking about a time in which you brought together a group of the chancellors or presidents of several of the German universities.

NORRIE: Oh, yes. That was after the McCloy Fund had been formulated. McCloy Fund was a block of money taken from the German marks that were paid to us.

Q: The Garioa fund.

NORRIE: Out of the Garioa fund, but separate. That's right. We called a meeting of the university rectors in Bad Neuheim. They came to the ambassador's house. Mrs. McCloy, as always, was the perfect hostess, and all of these people were there. McCloy outlined the purposes for which the money was given, and asked the rectors for their opinion as to what they would need. They all submitted papers at a later date, but discussed openly

there with him their needs for the universities. Some places, they needed a new building. Some places, they needed scientific equipment. Others wanted to exchange professors, wanted to send theirs to the United States and bring someone over to lecture on some new facet of education. It was a very successful meeting, and we were able to get the money to help them in the way they felt they needed help.

Q: Again, it was your section of the university presidents?

NORRIE: We convened the meeting, yes.

Q: Did you then also sort of vet and organize and coordinate the responses of the--

NORRIE: That was turned over to the education department. That was in their bailiwick, and they carried it out.

Q: The education department of the occupation.

NORRIE: Of the occupation, yes.

Q: This was part of the public affairs organization.

NORRIE: Yes. One staff member from my staff became the manager of that McCloy Fund and received petitions or requests from various youth organizations and communities and schools and churches and other groups. E.g., I went with McCloy to see the damaged church at Cologne, the tower of which had been bombed out. He said, "Well, we'll fix that up," and he did. He got the new dome put up there. These were the kinds of things that created public impression that we were there to help and not to just boss them around.

This fund went far and wide. There is a book published on this, a report, on the entire McCloy Fund. Unfortunately, I've lost mine. I sent it to American University of Vienna. A couple of professors there were writing a history of the American occupation and its influence on education. They came to the U.S. to interview several early participants in the HICOG staff. I was one of those interviewed.

Q: The one you gave to the German consulate?

NORRIE: Yes, I sent it by way of the German consulate in Atlanta, which I was advised to do by the professor from the University.

Incidentally, in this respect, I like to think that in a way, the Free University of Berlin had at least part of its encouragement to start right in our home. We had a program in Berlin in the very earliest days, whereby Americans invited groups of university students to meet in their homes. We had two groups meet at our home, one on Thursday night and one on Sunday. They came from Humboldt University. Humboldt University was in the Russian

zone. These students were constantly hungering for more independence, more ability to pry and ask questions, but they felt they were being indoctrinated all the time. They constantly expressed a wish for a university in the American zone or the British zone or somewhere where they could attend in complete freedom. McCloy, I suppose, got the pressures from various groups and people, but eventually he did grant a building and funds to establish a Free University in Berlin, which has prospered ever since.

Q: To which, of course, the Humboldt University people, I suppose, after the erection of the Berlin Wall, would not have been permitted to come.

NORRIE: I think you're probably right. But this happened before it went up.

Q: I'm told by Hans Tuch, whose last post over there was in USIA before retiring, he said that unfortunately, during the period of his incumbency over there, when Arthur Burns was the ambassador, that the radical elements in Germany all congregated toward Berlin and virtually destroyed the academic quality of the free German university there, because they insisted on appointing only radicals to the administration and the professorships in the university. The appointees weren't competent. The whole thing went to pot and has not fully recovered since.

NORRIE: I think you're probably right. You know, to show how Americans react, when the access to Berlin was cut off by the Russians, in spite of the treaty agreement, the Americans set up an airlift, brought coal into freezing Berlin, and food and clothing and other supplies, one plane after another landing at the Tempelhof airport, and unloading and taking off again and bringing another load. It was a great undertaking.

Q: With Spiers and buildings all around the field, like coming into Hong Kong.

NORRIE: That's right. [Laughter] Yes.

Q: Larry, this has been a very interesting interview, and I do thank you very much for giving us this time.

NORRIE: There may be one thought I'd like to add.

Q: All right.

Further Discussion of American Moves to Outdo Soviets on the Plan for Worldwide Youth Rally

NORRIE: I started to talk about the conversation with General Clay about the Russian plan to stage an enormous youth rally in Berlin. I'd like to add a little bit to that. Of course, when I say "we," I'm talking about Americans; I'm not just talking about myself or my immediate staff, although we were part of the show. But we (our staff) got together a plan, which was greatly enlarged upon by the Department and by USIA and by other

branches of HICOG. We imported "Medea," the great New York play, and "Oklahoma," intact, the whole staff brought over to play in Berlin. We set up hot dog stands near the Russian sector, with free hot dogs. The imported youth came over in droves. We developed several million copies of U.S., what you call propaganda, placed them at convenient places. They were gobbled up and taken away, tucked in their shirts. We opened every American home to visitors. There was a notice that everybody's home will be open and people will be invited to come in. They were invited to come in and see an American home.

Q: These were the people that the Russians were bringing in, that you were invited into American homes.

NORRIE: Yes. Also many other things. American companies set up TV broadcast stations and furnished open-air TV sets. We had arranged a scrap between Tim Hoff, the German champion, and Sugar Ray Robinson. That was, of course, a success. But the thing that stole the show, the Navy brought over the Madison Square Garden Automobile Show of the Year. You can imagine what that did to the kids from Moscow and other communist countries. Well, the whole thing was a great show of American ingenuity of countering a major attack. They didn't march from the other side. The rains helped. They had set up a tent city along the Elbe, and the rains washed it out, which helped us no end in morale. Also, by hook or by crook or by accident, the Russian food train was misguided into the British zone.

Q: How could that have happened?

NORRIE: Well, it got off into the British sector somewhere and didn't get there until the show was over. But the Russians also did bring in some excellent talent. The Ballet Russe was brought in and several other important Russian cultural groups were brought in. But they had to compete with a pretty good show in the West, because the British and the French put on shows, too, at the same time. The whole Russian plan was a flop, as far as the Russians were concerned.

Q: Again, I suppose that it's very fortunate all this happened before the wall went up, because they wouldn't have been permitted to get out.

NORRIE: You're right. It may be why the wall went up. [Laughter]

Q: Undoubtedly something like that, because this was about what year? About 1953 or '54 or somewhere along in there?

NORRIE: Let's see. Yes, somewhere in there. I've got the whole story somewhere, with pictures, one of those on Berlin. Anyway, it took a lot of money, a lot of ingenuity to get that show on the road.

Q: Again, the military was, of course, tremendously cooperative.

NORRIE: Oh, tremendously cooperatively. They had to be to put on that show.

Q: I think it's a pity. That's one period of time when for informational and cultural exchange purposes, you had the complete cooperation of the Department of State, the U.S. Information program, and the Army and Navy, and they were able to do things that the U.S. Government has never been able to do before or since.

NORRIE: That's right.

Q: And that cooperation has disintegrated now. It's not there the way it was.

NORRIE: Is that right?

Q: Yes.

NORRIE: I'm sorry to hear that. I didn't realize that.

Q: One of the people that we interviewed was Henry Kellermann, who was the man at the State Department end. I talked to him after his interview. He is very upset that the great cooperation between the Department and the informational activities--there's not the opposition that developed in the 1950s, but the cooperation is not there.

Comments on, and Evaluation of, U.S. Government Information Work Career

I neglected to ask you, before we terminate the interview per se, whether you had any general comments about your career, any reminiscences that you would like to make or any assessments of how you felt about the career that you had in the information program, both under the Army auspices and later under USIA.

NORRIE: I could say at the outset that it has been an absolutely fabulous experience. I learned a lot. It took everything that I had to do the job. I had lots of good help. Excellent experts from the United States were recruited to belong on my staff, and they made their contribution. When I say "we" did this, I include all of them, because we did everything in cooperation. We discussed every plan.

One thing that really put me to the test. I had been loaned to the government for one year. I was the head of a big organization that encompassed seven western states, of the YMCA. My deputy took over when I went to Germany. I later recruited him to be on my staff in Germany. That's where problems began. I needed him. He was a very able man and able to step in and facilitate many of the projects we had started.

But my year was about up. I had thought up till the time I recruited him that he would arrive about the time I would leave. But then General Gailey, who had taken over from General Clay, had sent a wire to my organization, saying it was imperative, in his

judgment, that I remain on in Germany. I went to see him. I've got a copy of the cable sent from the head of the YMCA in New York. I went to talk with General Gailey about it, and he stressed the problems that were coming up, and the fact that if we'd start dissolving that program and changing leadership, we might lose some of the gains we had made. He earnestly hoped I would stay on for at least another year.

So I wrote to New York, saying, "I would like to stay on here for another year. I agree that it is imperative that we continue to do the job we came for."

Then the fat was in the frying pan. The head of our district board, the Pacific Southwest Area Board of Directors, wrote sharp letters to New York, saying, "We're letting our best men go to other organizations and we have to go out and recruit raw recruits. This is not right," and so forth. They insisted that the order be changed, that I be brought back.

Well, New York refused to do it and encouraged me to stay on. So they left it up to me. So I said, "Well, I don't want any fighting over my body, dead or alive. So I resign." I sent back my letter of resignation, and in due time, I applied for Foreign Service entry, and stayed on. My deputy went back after his year was up, and took over.

Q: That was the end of your YMCA involvement?

NORRIE: Well, not really. I kept my interest in it and I know I was influential in recovering the YMCA in Germany and separating it from the church, to which it had escaped under the Nazis. I helped to get it on its own feet again. The religious affairs group also was active in that regard.

But I stayed with the government, and I'm not sorry. I enjoyed the YMCA work and I'd still be in it, I'm sure, if I had not had this opportunity to do something which was important at the time.

Q: But you feel that your career was not only an interesting one, but also a very rewarding one?

NORRIE: Absolutely rewarding, yes.

Q: Do you have any other comments about your career, generally, in the information program?

NORRIE: No, I think the information program is invaluable where we're doing the job. It was limited somewhat by attitudes, just in some places by other departments of government that felt we were somewhat interlopers. This has been noticeable somewhat. I think it was noticeable in Austria and in some other places, but I don't think it hampered the program too much. I think we went ahead and did our job, which was independent of what was being done by the others, the political advisors. Not independent, because we

had to rely on them for policy guidance, and they had to rely on us for things that we had, such as press officers and films officers, cultural officers.

Q: Yes, I think a lot of the opposition and hostility that existed when we were first getting under way 30 or 35 years ago has now dissipated in most cases. There are still a few hard-core people who don't feel that the information program has a place in diplomacy, but I think that's gradually being overcome.

NORRIE: I think so.

Q: There is still some feeling, I think, on the part of many of the State Department officers, that somehow we're not quite up to the caliber that they think they are, but regardless of that, there have been so many instances of people in high places, ambassadors, who felt that the information program was a constituent part of what they had to do, and have recognized it as such, that I think we're in a much better position than we were. Certainly if I didn't think so, I'd be afraid that we'd lost 35 years of effort.

NORRIE: Yes, that's right.

Q: Again, Larry, thank you very much for submitting to the interview.

NORRIE: I want to say, on or off the record, that your visit here has been a pleasure to us. You've visited us before and we've always enjoyed it.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview