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

OSCAR J. OLSON, JR.

Interviewed by: Raymond Ewing
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 30th of August 2004, and this is an interview for the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program with Oscar Olson. My name is Raymond Ewing, and we're having this interview at the offices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center.

Oscar, it is good to have a chance to talk with you today.

OLSON: Thank you, Ray.

Q: I know you came into the foreign service in October of 1957 because…

OLSON: How do you know that?

Q: We were together in the same class, and I know you were born in Corpus Christi, Texas, but I would like to talk to you a little about where you grew up and how you came to have an interest in the foreign service.

OLSON: I grew up in Corpus Christi. I did my undergraduate work at the University of Texas. I guess now I have to say "at Austin," but at that time, I simply would say the University of Texas. That was it.

My father was a building contractor who loved to travel, and we went all through the west, all the way to Canada from Corpus Christi. Of course, we went to Mexico often. In semi-tropical Corpus Christi you can build throughout the year, so my dad was able to take off during the summer, which he loved to do for travel. So I got a bit of a travel bug as we saw new places. But, most important I had the good fortune between my junior and senior years of attending the University of Oslo summer school. This had been established very early after the war, maybe in '48, with St. Olaf College in Minnesota, in conjunction with the University of Oslo. It was conducted in English and was primarily

for American students although there were a few international students as well. The summer school really came into being simply as an expression of gratitude for Marshall Plan aid and in recognition of the close ties between Norway and the United States. A larger percentage of the population of Norway immigrated to the United States than did that of any country other than Ireland. This was a wonderful experience for me; it was my first glimpse of Europe and my first chance to travel by ocean liner, to and from Norway on the S.S. Stavangerfjord. That I especially enjoyed. This chance to travel, to experience a different culture—that's what really got me interested, I think, in foreign service.

I had a political science degree, minored in history and economics. I did my Army service, Transportation Corp, which sent me to Germany, again by ship. I was stationed at the port of Bremerhaven and primarily engaged in the transport of Army personnel returning to the U.S. This was 1955-1956, when most of the movement of troops and dependents in and out of Germany was by ship.

After a few months, I imported my fiancée from the states. Pat and I were married in Bremerhaven. We returned to the U.S. and had a year at Yale University. I got my masters degree and took the foreign service exam.

Q: Your graduate study at Yale was in what field?

OLSON: In international relations.

Q: So it was while you were in New Haven that you took the foreign service exam?

OLSON: Right. I drove to Hartford and took the exam and then was scheduled for the oral examination in New York on the 30th of May 1956, Memorial Day. As I look back on it, I thought what kind of an outfit am I getting into that has people working on Memorial Day.

Q: Because in those days, Memorial Day was always on May 30th.

OLSON: Right. I finally decided maybe this was part of my test, because I was told to report to the General Post Office next to Penn Station, which is now Madison Square Garden, and to go to Room 435 or whatever. I got there, and, of course, the post office was closed; it was Memorial Day. I went up to a guard and said I needed to get to room such and such, and he said, "The place is closed, go away!" I said, "No, there is somebody waiting for me up there." He said, "The place is closed, go away!" Well, I finally talked my way in, found an elevator that was working, and got to the office. Of course, they were waiting for me, and I had my oral exam. So later I wondered whether all of that had been part of the test, to see if in fact you could persevere to reach your destination. I was told I passed the exam and would be getting notice to report to Washington in September.

Q: Of 1956?

OLSON: 1956, no this is 1957. Out of the Army in '56, Yale in '56 to '57. I'm sorry, this is '57, but it was not until October that we finally got the call. I think maybe in the case of our Foreign Service class it was a budget problem, because I recall they had not brought in a new Foreign Service class for several months before we came in. We entered at the end of October.

Q: Well, I think it was always kind of confusing. There was a class that entered the first of October, and we were near the end of October.

OLSON: Yes, right.

Q: The 31st.

OLSON: Yes, as you will recall, there were I believe 25 in our class, including three females. And all but the three or four members that had the biggest families stayed in Washington for an initial two-year tour of duty, not because there were no assignments waiting for us overseas but because there was no travel money to send us overseas. So most of us were here together for the first two years. I think that because of that fact our Foreign Service class became a little closer than most because we really had a longer opportunity to be together and get acquainted. Most were married but not all, as in your case, at that time. But that meant that this particular class established some very strong ties.

Q: One of the other questions I thought about often over the years is that, is as you say, we were kept in Washington for two years instead of being sent almost directly abroad which has generally been the case over the years—the A-100 class, language training, maybe some other training and then more or less directly abroad. In our case, as you say, we were in Washington for about two years. I always thought that there were some advantages in that…

OLSON: Absolutely.

Q: Understanding the way foreign policy worked, how the Department operated.

OLSON: Exactly. In particularly how to make contacts, networking, whatever. Also, finding a good mentor, I think, is very important in the foreign service as it is in most circumstances. And so we had a chance to meet people, to see how the department works, how foreign policy is made. But, perhaps most important was how the bureaucracy works, how in particular the State Department bureaucracy works.

Q: On the other hand, we were Foreign Service Officers, and I think all of us thought we really ought to be going overseas, as quickly as possible.

OLSON: We were anxious, and I think part of the problem was we didn't know in advance that this was going to happen. In our case, we had a furnished apartment, thinking that we were going to be gone in a few months. My wife took a temporary job at

not that great a salary, and only later did we find out that we were going to be there a while. So we started accumulating furniture, moved, and she changed jobs.

Q: Now, in your case, after the A-100 course you had Spanish language training? Had you already had quite a bit of Spanish language living near the Mexico border?

OLSON: Technically, yes. The Corpus Christi school system introduced Spanish language instruction for the first eight year of school when I was in the 3rd grade. (My brother was four years ahead of me and never had one word of Spanish instruction.) Then I took at least one year of Spanish as an elective in high school. But this was not really conversational Spanish; this was under the old tradition of teaching languages. Yes, I had a little bit of a leg up, but I certainly needed FSI's (Foreign Service Institute) instruction.

Q: How much FSI's Spanish language training did you have?

OLSON: Because of the fact that they really didn't have anything to do with us, they extended the normal four-month language course to six months. All that time buried deep in the Arlington Towers' garage, where FSI was located at the time—no windows.

Q: You were off language probation…

OLSON: Right

Q: by the end of your language training.

OLSON: That's correct.

Q: As I was too, but I suspect your Spanish was probably a lot better than my German.

OLSON: Yes, it was good. Then happily I went, after time in the Department of State, to Spanish speaking posts.

Q: What was your, after your Spanish language training, what was it that you did in the department?

OLSON: I was assigned to what they called an E Bureau training program, in the Economics Bureau; before it became Economics and Business. New officers, junior officers, were given a four or five month assignment to a particular office and then moved on to another. You were in that too, were you not?

Q: Yes, except I did four months in the Office of International Trade, then rotated to the assistant secretary's office and didn't rotate again.

OLSON: Yes.

Q: So it didn't quite work that way with me.

OLSON: The advantage of it was that you got a lot of exposure to different offices. Again, it was interesting to see how the department worked and what was going on in the world. On a rotating basis we trainees got to sit in on the daily staff meeting of Tom Mann, the Assistant Secretary, which was interesting and an even better way of getting a feel of what was going on in the department, and how the department worked. I started out in the Office of Commodities with "Mr. Wheat"—a Mr. Highby, a wonderful gentleman, a civil servant, who was absolutely the world's expert on wheat. I found out that we belonged to an International Wheat Agreement and that there were other such commodity agreements. Mr. Mellon was the office director…

Q: Two L's I think.

OLSON: Right. We weren't that interested in melons but we were interested in wheat and coffee and copper and such. That was a good experience. I sat in on meetings and drafted memoranda of conversations—memcons. Then I moved to the Office of International Finance, headed by Chuck Adair, later ambassador. Also an interesting tour. Probably the best of all was my time with Fred Oechsner, who was the Public Affairs Adviser for E. Fred had been the United Press reporter in Berlin in 1939, 1940, 1941, until he was interned when the U.S. entered the war. He was a colleague there with Richard Hottelet, later with CBS, and with William Shirer, and he loved to talk about those times. I also quite often was able to attend or actually to represent the E bureau at Lincoln White's press briefings. The noon press briefing by one of the legendary, for us old timers anyway, press spokesmen for the Department of State. That was a fascinating experience as well.

The E Bureau was located on the fourth floor of the old Munitions Building, the temporary building on Constitution Avenue—that is, World War I temporary. They built temporaries in World War I a bit more sturdily. This one originally had three stories and a tall façade. In World War II they added the fourth story with a couple layers of tar paper for a roof. The air conditioning went out on one August day, and it was about 117 degrees within 15 minutes. We actually got to go home. But it was a fourth floor walk-up, no elevator.

Q: So it was really a, this rotational program was an effort to get a variety of experiences.

OLSON: That's right. One other way I learned the ways of the State Department—each junior officer then was assigned a 'big brother,' a middle-grade officer who was to have some contact with his plebe and show him the ropes. Mine was Steve Winship, who had just come back from being consul in Perth, Australia, then a one-man post. He described it as ideal—running his own show at the post farthest from Washington and the post (he said) which was the greatest distance from its embassy. At this time he lived way out in the country in an old farmhouse—Herndon! When we had measurable snow, he couldn't make it to work because of the poor roads. It was another era! Steve and his wife eventually retired to a large sailboat. Years later as Acting Deputy Chief of Mission at

Quito I helped get them the necessary permission from the Ecuadorians to sail into the Galapagos Islands.

We also networked back in those early days with periodic AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) luncheons. I recall one at the Blue Room of the Shoreham Hotel with the Secretary, John Foster Dulles, to celebrate his 70th birthday. After we sang 'Happy Birthday,' he related that his early ambition was not to go into diplomacy but rather to be a railroad engineer. Believe it or not, the Washington Post the next day had Dulles pictured in a railroad engineer's cap with a broad grin on his face!

Q: In those days, of course, we did not have the specialized personnel cones, so you didn't come in as an economic cone officer; but did you have much economic background in the courses that you'd taken?

OLSON: Not as much as I wished. And yet that was obviously the way I was pointed and where I had an interest. So my first assignment then was to Caracas as an economic-commercial officer.

Q: Did you have any input into that assignment and did anyone ask you if that is where you would like to go? Or did you just…

OLSON: We did have the opportunity to indicate general geographic interests. My wife likes to point out that we made our preferences known each year on April 1st, April Fool's Day! I can't recall that I specifically asked for Caracas. I think I had probably requested Latin America. At some point a group was playing softball, I recall, on a Saturday, and someone rounded third base, saw me over on the side, and shouted out, "Oh, I hear you're going to Caracas." That was the first I had heard. That was before I got any official notification.

Q: That's my story too. I was playing softball…

OLSON: Maybe you were the one that told me…

Q: I don't know about that, but I remember going to first base after getting a hit, and Pat Funk, remember, who was in Personnel, kind of looking after Junior Officers, said to me, "Hey, Ray, you got a good assignment, I think". I looked at him, and he said, "Yes, I think it's Tokyo. Give me a call tomorrow, and I'll check and let you know". That is what it turned out to be.

OLSON: Where you could practice your German.

Q: Anyway, you went to Caracas not as an economic officer, but as a commercial officer.

OLSON: By the time I got to Caracas, I found that someone in the consular section was dying to get out of consular work and had moved into that slot. I was put to work in the consular section to replace her.

Q: Oh, so you had gone with the idea that you would be in the economic section?

OLSON: I had gone assigned to the economic section, but that didn't seem to make that much difference. Being assigned to consular work in a first assignment was normal or typical, so I didn't feel as done in as I should have. I was pretty new to the job and naïve at the time. And I then had an especially good chance to practice my Spanish.

Q: Big consular section in those days?

OLSON: It was a good-sized consular section. The one thing that I remember as a peculiarity of Venezuela was the fact that, of the maybe 23-24 local employees in the consular section, all but one were foreign born. Venezuela was an unusual Latin American country in that it had almost no surviving indigenous population. It was under populated, with rich farm lands, and blessed with oil and minerals, everything. They haven't done too well with it all. The Venezuelan authorities quite wisely were generous in opening the gates wide to immigrants after World War II. They had a very considerable influx of people from southern Europe, eastern Europe, from all over. I sometimes wondered what all the Venezuelans were doing to make a living, because where we lived, all the shops seemed to be owned by eastern Europeans.

Q: So the foreign service national employees in the consular section were mostly from Europe?

OLSON: Yes, as were so many small shop owners and also professional people. And of course there were an awful lot of Americans in Caracas, mostly in the oil industry. Our new Embassy chancery was across the street from the much larger Mobile Oil headquarters. About a week after I left Washington, the E Bureau moved from the Munitions building into the just completed New State structure. And, as I got to Caracas, I found that one week earlier, the embassy had moved from a downtown office building into its own building in the suburbs. We were actually not even in the federal district. It was as if the Venezuelan Embassy was in Arlington or Bethesda. So the timing was very good—I missed both moves.

Q: Did you do visa work throughout your time in Caracas, and again this is from '59 to '61?

OLSON: I started with non-immigrant visas and then was issuing immigrant visas. Again because the Venezuelans had opened the gates to immigration, we found that there were a number of local applicants for U.S. immigrant visas who originally came from Russia and the Ukraine. Often these were two or three generation families that came to Venezuela in the late forties. At that time they applied for immigration visas to the United States and were on the waiting list until the late '50's. Some of those names were coming up. Often the younger generation by that time was well established in business in Venezuela and was going to stay. But the older generation perhaps had other family in

the States, and they wanted to immigrate. They would show up for their immigrant visa interview speaking neither English nor Spanish, but speaking Ukrainian.

Q: Or Russian.

OLSON: Or Russian. So I would give a call to Nat Davis, later our ambassador to Chile during the overthrow of Allende. He was number two in the political section, having just arrived from Moscow. I would call him, and he would come down and translate for me, which was fine. The problem was he would be so interested in asking them about the conditions when they left the 'old country' that I couldn't get him out of my office. I would say, "The interview is over. You'll have to continue this on your own outside some place".

In early '61, President Kennedy appointed Teodoro Moscoso, of Puerto Rico, to be Ambassador to Venezuela. It had been a long time since there had been a political rather than career ambassador at post, and there was no staff aide position. It was determined that having one would be a good idea, and so I was moved up to that position. A very interesting assignment, giving an excellent overview of how the embassy functioned and what was happening with our relations with Venezuela.

Q: You did that for what, six months or so?

OLSON: Yes, it must have been about six months. He left before I did…

Q: Oh.

OLSON: …moving on to Washington to head the Alliance for Progress, so he was there a relatively short time.

Earlier on I was talking about the fact I was assigned to one position and ended up in another. I was therefore accredited as a Vice Consul only. The department had for some time reminded the embassy that any new FSO (Foreign Service Officer) assigned to the embassy was to be accredited both as vice consul and as third secretary (a diplomatic title). But the embassy hadn't bothered to do that for anyone assigned to the consular section. Therefore I did not have diplomatic status and technically did not have import privileges. The lack of diplomatic status meant that our first child, Michael, born in Caracas, was a Venezuelan citizen under Venezuelan law. We had to get him a Venezuelan passport to enable him to leave the country. According to the Venezuelan law at that time, he and his progeny forever have Venezuelan citizenship without any way of renouncing it. This was a problem for the American oil people whose sons of draft age would usually find refuge in the United States rather than face conscription into the Venezuelan military.

Q: Your son was also a United States citizen?

OLSON: He was also a United States citizen.

Q: From birth.

OLSON: Yes, born of two U.S. citizen parents.

Venezuela at that time was a very expensive place to live. Caracas was said to have the highest cost of living of any city in the world. This was toward the end of the oil boom. My State Department allowances were more than my salary, so we could make do except for medical expenses. As I recall, the normal, uncomplicated birth of our first-born cost us four months salary. At that time the Foreign Service Protective Association, our insurance, had a $250 maximum for maternity benefits because that was what it cost to have a child in the States.

The high cost of living hit especially hard because at that time there was no embassy commissary. Often overseas the expatriate American business community will be envious of embassy personnel's access to a duty-free commissary and military mail (APO) privileges. In Venezuela then it was just the opposite. The oil companies all had subsidized commissaries for their people. We had neither commissary nor APO. Embassy personnel did send combined orders to Ostermann Peterson in Denmark for potables and caseloads of food stuffs. We consular officers were allowed to participate in these orders unofficially until State Department foreign service inspectors arrived. They were shocked, shocked that the consular section was allowed to be part of an importation under diplomatic privilege. Of course, the Venezuelans could care less.

Q: But this lack of diplomatic status, for you when you moved up to be this ambassador's staff aide. Did that cause you problems in terms of relations with the Foreign Ministry…

OLSON: No,

Q: … in terms of doing your job?

OLSON: No, because it was generally ignored on both sides, by the Venezuelans and us. Being in the consular section and left off the diplomatic list was strangely ironic, however, as we vice consuls were very active in diplomatic social circles. We often got invitations to other embassy receptions and national day celebrations that more senior officers in our embassy on the diplomatic list did not receive. This was because we had a very active consular corps in Caracas, and our consular colleagues connected to other embassies would make sure we were included. Many of the members of this consular corps were rich Venezuelan business men, who acted as honorary consul generals or consuls of smaller countries around the world. They were a very socially active group, and we enjoyed joining in. Typically when a foreign embassy celebrated its national day invitations would go out to our ambassador, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), head of the political section, and head of the economic section. Then the two or three of us vice consuls that were very active in the consular corps would also be invited, from the very lowest end of the protocol list. So there was an interesting dichotomy there.

Let's see what else happened in Venezuela. It was a fascinating time. Romulo Betancourt had just taken office, the first democratically elected president of the modern era. The return to democracy was difficult. Among other things, Venezuela was almost in a state of war with the Dominican Republic and its dictator, Trujillo. Trujillo almost succeeded in blowing up President Betancourt. A car bomb went off in Caracas as Betancourt's car was driving by. Betancourt's bodyguard was killed, and the president was wounded slightly.

The extent of the enmity between the two countries became apparent to the embassy during one arrival of the Santa Paula, a Grace Lines passenger/cargo ship, at the port of La Guaira, close to Caracas. (We, of course, had traveled by Grace Lines from New York to Caracas.) The two ships on this run, the Santa Paula and the Santa Rose, carried about 100 passengers, but the cargo was more important to Grace Lines. As longshoremen began unloading the ship, one noticed bags of potatoes in gunnysacks labeled "Product of the Dominican Republic." And so they immediately stopped unloading the ship.

In effect, the Dominican Republic didn't exist as far as Venezuela was concerned. You could not telephone between the two countries. If you tried to send something in the Venezuelan mail to the Dominican Republic, it would be returned "addressed unknown." These were very tense "non-relations," and Grace Line's officials were very aware of this problem. They could not understand how such cargo could get aboard one of their ships, which never went near the Dominican Republic. After about a day's negotiation with the longshoremen, it was agreed that if the ship went to Aruba, the nearest non-Venezuelan port, off loaded the offensive material, then it could return and the longshoremen would take off the rest of the cargo. But by the time the ship arrived back at La Guaira, the longshoremen's union had decided that the entire cargo had been 'contaminated' by the offending gunnysacks. They would not allow anything else to be unloaded. So the ship returned to New York without delivering its cargo for Venezuela or taking on new cargo for New York. Grace Lines finally determined that some frugal potato grower in Maine had seen a good deal on used gunnysacks, which happened to say "Product of the Dominican Republic." He put his potatoes in those gunnysacks and caused the Grace Lines a terrible problem.

Trujillo was not the only perceived threat to the Betancourt government from the right. Followers of the recently deposed Venezuelan dictator, Perez Jimenez, were thought to be congregating across the Colombian border in hopes of instigating a military coup. And there was a threat from the left. This was the time that Fidel Castro was taking over Cuba, and he was thought to be sending guerrillas to Venezuela to attack the new government. So there were fairly constant rumors of groups coming across the border from Colombia. They tended to have the same effect as hurricane warnings here. Everybody would head for the little "abastos" (the little stores) and clear the shelves of bread, milk, and other groceries. Some of us finally decided it was probably the owners of the "abastos" that were spreading these rumor. When their inventory got too high, this was a chance to sell everything off. It was an exciting time.

Q: To come back to Venezuela's relations with the Dominican Republic, explain for me at least just a little bit, why were relations so bad? It seems like the Dominican Republic is quite a ways away?

OLSON: It was simply the fact that Trujillo was a dictator, thought to be a twin to the recently overthrown Perez Jimenez. The Venezuelans had just gotten rid of their dictator and were anxious to assist elements in the Dominican Republic that wanted to overthrow Trujillo—to let the Dominicans experience what was happening in Venezuela. Trujillo was not going to take this lying down and determined that he would have a counter offensive, to include the attempt to assassinate the Venezuelan president which came very close to being successful.

Q: Let me ask a little bit about relations with the U.S. I know that Vice President Nixon had big problems on a visit to Caracas in the 1950s.

OLSON: That was the year '58 .

Q: There were demonstrations against him—want to talk a little more about it?

OLSON: Yes, there was residual resentment for our having cozied up to Perez Jimenez, the deposed dictator. President Eisenhower had given him a medal of some kind, a military decoration. We had what we considered correct diplomatic relations with Venezuela during that time, during the Perez Jimenez regime. We had very strong economic interests there, not just because we were dependent on oil coming out of Venezuela, but because that oil was being pumped by Texaco, Mobil, Standard Oil—American companies that were very much a part of the Venezuelan economy. Some Venezuelans considered it too much a part. This also helped create some of the anti-American feelings that sort of boiled up in the reception for Nixon.

Q: Were the American oil company officials, workers and other Americans mostly in Caracas or were they mainly in the oil fields in Maracaibo?

OLSON: They were all over the country, but a lot of them were in Caracas. Across the street from this new embassy building in La Floresta, in the suburbs, there was the Mobil headquarters, which was twice, three times the size of the embassy. A large presence, and that was just one of several companies. Venezuela has rich mineral resources as well. One mountain peak, Cerro Bolivar, had recently been discovered to be virtually pure iron, not iron ore, but iron. American companies were interested in developing that. So on the one hand there was considerable interest in American investment. But with the exuberance of newly found democratic freedoms, some felt the need to shake off outside 'exploiters' of their natural resources. Venezuela had a history of long term, mostly benign dictators. The new democratic experience had some of the population 'feeling its oats,' to the misfortune of Mr. Nixon at the time of his visit.

Q: Now you mentioned that a new ambassador came early in the Kennedy Administration in 1961. How did your Venezuelan contacts see this change of party in the United States? Was there a lot of expectations for a different policy, a different approach?

OLSON: Yes, because they were caught up in the Kennedy mystique. Here was a young couple that was easy to relate to, to have an interest in following, rather than just another politician. He was Roman Catholic, of particular interest there. I can't recall whether in his campaign he talked about Latin America or not, but there was an expectation more attention would be paid to the South. That was guaranteed by the problems that Castro was causing us by '61. Our embassy was still open in Havana, but soon whatever hopes we had for good relations with the Castro regime were gone. So, of necessity, the U.S. was forced to look south.

Q: The new Ambassador was…

OLSON: Teodoro Moscoso. He had been a Puerto Rican businessman who was active in the economic development board that was attracting investments to Puerto Rico.

Q: Did he bring a new deputy chief of mission, DCM, or did the old one stay on?

OLSON: The old one stayed on, Alan Stuart, who was a former journalist.

Q: Okay, you are talking about Alan Stuart, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission).

OLSON: Yes, he had been with AP (Associated Press), so I guess he came into the service with USIS/USIA (U.S. Information Service/U.S. Information Agency). Anyway, he was very personable, a very good man. Ambassador Moscoso was there for a short time because President Kennedy appointed him head of the new Alliance for Progress, his administration's attempt to make a real difference in supporting economic and political development in Latin America. So after five or six months he was gone. Alan Stuart became Chargé d'Affaires and then was appointed ambassador, which is rather unusual.

Q: To Venezuela.

OLSON: To Venezuela, in other words, remained in place and was appointed ambassador, which is unusual in the Foreign Service for a DCM to move up at the same post.

Q: Did you continue to work with him then as staff assistant?

OLSON: Yes, but not for very long because my two years were soon up, and I was leaving. I talked about just missing the move—timing is everything. I then missed an exciting time in the Embassy. President Kennedy visited within a couple months after I had left, getting a much warmer reception than Nixon had received. I missed that, and then shortly after the Kennedy visit someone managed to smuggle a bomb up to the top

floor of the embassy, to the men's room just adjacent to the spot where I would have been sitting if I had been there. And it exploded. There was heightened security at the time, with a Marine Guard sitting in the top floor vestibule by the Ambassador's office. The force of the blast blew him down the stairwell, but he was not badly hurt. No one else was injured. There was no one in the office where I would have been.

Q: You were fortunately gone.

OLSON: I was out of there.

Q: Anything else we should say about two years in Caracas?

OLSON: I mentioned growing up in Corpus Christi. My mother would send me the headlines and articles from the Corpus newspaper about Venezuela and about Caracas. The country got a lot of attention in my home town because of the strong oil connection there. There were regular articles about those rumored coup attempts or when there was some skirmish out in the hinterlands that perhaps I had faintly heard about. Then I would read all about it in my hometown newspaper! There would also be stories about turmoil at the university in Caracas, which at that time was suppose to be off limits to the local police. There were various leftist groups on campus at odds with each other, including Maoists. I recall that one dormitory the students referred to as Stalingrad shot bazooka rockets at another, called Leningrad. Soon after arrival, Ambassador Moscoso (without consulting his staff aide) decided to attend the opening of a modest exhibit that USIA was showing at the edge of the university campus. He arrived in his black, official Fleetwood Cadillac, and the driver made the mistake of parking it on campus. The students soon spotted the U.S. diplomatic plates.

Q: Was the flag flying?

OLSON: And the flag was probably flying on the front fender. They attacked, set fire to the limousine, and managed to pop the trunk lid. They grabbed the ambassador's briefcase from the trunk of the car. Unfortunately, he had taken along some homework, classified material, which he was not supposed to do. It included a great dispatch, or probably an Airgram, written by Jack Cates, who was the head of the political section at that time and later went on to many years at USUN (United States Mission to the United Nations). He did a wonderful piece on the members of the Venezuelan Cabinet, including their various economic interests, side business dealings, and amorous affairs. Within several weeks it was quoted on the front page of Havana's Granma.

Q: The Havana newspaper?

OLSON: Yes. So that caused us some consternation. But apparently it was not a problem for Ambassador Moscoso, as far as then being promoted to head the Alliance for Progress.

Q: Okay, anything else on Venezuela?

OLSON: Perhaps not—something may come to me.

Q: You went on to Barcelona in 1962. How did that assignment happen, and did you have some training in between or go directly?

OLSON: I had a very long home leave in between, waiting for child number two to be born. Michael was born in Venezuela, and Kirsten, our daughter, was born in a hospital in Winter Park, Florida. As I left Caracas, I did not have an assignment. We, my wife, were pregnant again. We didn't think we could afford to have a second child in Caracas, so my wife flew back with our son a couple months before I left. That meant we didn't get to go back by ship—we sailed to Venezuela on the Santa Rosa.

Q: You flew back. Did Pat have family in Winter Park?

OLSON: Close by. She flew back first to my family in Corpus Christi, and I joined her there. Then we went to her family in Apopka, just outside Orlando. I did not have an onward assignment which meant packing in Caracas was a problem. Items had to be separated and marked, what was appropriate if we were provided furnished quarters or not, or if we went to a tropical post or not, and so forth. Anyway it was a bit of a maze trying to sort things out. Actually, being provided furnished quarters didn't happen very often back in those days, as you will recall. So sometime when we were in Texas or Florida, I got my assignment to Barcelona. I was told that for the first six months I was to fill in for the administrative officer, who was being 'selected out' (forced retirement). Then I was to replace the economic officer, who was due to leave in six months. We were scheduled to sail from New York to Barcelona at the end of March.

Q: '62?

OLSON: Yes, '62. The American Export Lines would accept a child six weeks old but no younger. Which meant that the baby had to be born in a timely fashion.

Q: In time.

OLSON: To the day. Our daughter was born on Valentine's Day, which happened to have been the birthday of her grandfather, with whom we were staying. And it was six weeks to the day that we sailed on the S.S. Excalibur. So that little bit of timing worked out. However, the timing of the assignment proved to be a problem, as when I got to post I found that the economic officer had extended his tour. So I remained admin officer.

Q: For the full time?

OLSON: For the full time, yes. It did prove to be an interesting experience.

Q: Did you have a particular training to be an administrative officer?

OLSON: None. I had a very good foreign service national staff to help with my on-the-job training. The biggest help came from a Philippine gentleman who had been running things for a while. His name was Joe Luling. I learned a lot from him. He would occasionally remind me of the fact that the U.S. government apparently had reneged on a promise to given American citizenship to natives of the Philippines who fought with the Americans in World War II..

Q: How did he happen to be in Barcelona, in Spain?

OLSON: Good question. I don't remember.

Q: How large was the consulate general in those days?

OLSON: I would say, medium sized. What does that mean? We had a consul general, deputy principal officer, economic-commercial officer. No, we had an economic officer, that I was to replace, and also a commercial officer. Then an admin officer and one, two, three consular officers, a political officer, a USIA public affairs officer, a Binational Center director, and the consul general's secretary. So that was about 12 Americans.

Q: That was pretty good sized.

OLSON: Pretty good sized, yes.

Q: Probably near its peak, I suspect now it's smaller maybe?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Probably gradually got smaller over the years.

OLSON: Yes, now it's smaller, and there are periodic threats to close the post. There were five American consulates general or consulates in Spain when I was there, in addition to the embassy in Madrid. Now Barcelona is the only one left. The consulate general there, after some 200 years in rented quarters, now has its own U.S. government-owned building, so some think it is time to close. I am reminded of our visit to Tangiers while we were assigned to Barcelona. We went to see our A-100 classmates and good friends George and Frances Ogg and Ed and Heather Peck. The oldest piece of real estate the United States owns outside our borders is the old legation in Tangiers, a gift from the Moroccan Sultan early in the 19th century. It was in continuous use as legation or consulate until the security folks discovered that it's right in the middle of the Medina, the oldest section of the city. It has common walls with its neighbors, and so the consulate couldn't stay there. They built this modern, three-story glass box out on the edge of Tangiers—and then closed the post. At that point they were using the old legation as the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) school for Western Arabic (which is where Ed Peck was in training). FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) was desperately trying to find tenants to occupy the soon to be deserted Tangiers consulate building—Voice of America or anybody that need a regional office in North Africa. Once I was driving around

Barcelona with Joe Luling, my admin right hand, and we came to a spot in central Barcelona. He remarked, "Someone tried to give this half a block to the American government twenty years ago, and they wouldn't take it". When I arrived, the consulate general had just moved to a new building overlooking the Cathedral Square, occupying most of the fifth floor.

Q: Rented space?

OLSON: Rented space, and at that point in Barcelona you built a new building trying to make it look like it was at least one hundred, maybe two hundred years old. It was adequate, but I wasn't very impressed with the space. But everyone would say, "You should have seen what we moved out of. This is terrific." Anyway, according to Joe Luling, someone had tried to give us some real estate. But we apparently said, no, we've only been here since 1798; we don't want to be bothered with property. We did not own a residence for the consul general or any of the staff when I was there. I think just before the Olympics in Barcelona, FBO finally obtained an office building out on the edge of town. The story I heard was that Barcelona would have closed at that time except for the Olympics.

Q: Who was the principal officer at the time you were there?

OLSON: David Fritzlan. He was a Middle East expert. He went on then to be Consul General in Alexandria, Egypt. Born in India of missionary parents; he had a British wife.

Barcelona was a fascinating place, especially for a romantic that loved seafood—guilty on both charges. And also our very own Catalana, our daughter Kathy, was born there, just before Christmas in 1963. My wife and Kathy were the only patients at the Foreign Colonies Hospital over Christmas. Nevertheless they were serenaded with Christmas carols because of a visit by a group from the local underground Baptist church. Protestant churches did not exist legally in Franco's Spain. The English-speaking community attended the Anglican Chapel, which operated under the auspices of the British Consulate General. It was a small gothic structure, obviously a church, but without markings except for a small card on the door reading, in English, "For information, call …" and then a telephone number. We went to church there, and in fact I substituted as organist. They were really hard up, because the organist had to lead the many sung responses in this high-church Anglican service. I had no experience with such a service and was only an amateur organist to begin with.

The preceding Christmas had also been memorable, our first White Christmas! It never snows in Barcelona, or so they said. Our second story bedroom opened onto a small "Juliet" balcony, with a beautiful view of the city and the Mediterranean. That morning as I attempted to open the shutter doors to the balcony, I felt resistance. Eighteen inches of snow, completely unexpected! Barcelona was totally unprepared, with the nearest snowplow in Andorra. People were skiing down the streets from the upper reaches of the city. Fortunately there was an excellent subway system that continued to operate.

We had good times and some difficulties. After Kathy's birth, Pat had several medical problems. And early on we were not well advised as far as our search for living quarters. We had two small children and thought we had to have a house. Well, houses were difficult to come by. Most people lived in apartments, and there were nearby parks where children could play. But somehow that word didn't quite get through to us. As a result we were in a hotel for four months, two children in diapers, waiting to find a house. There were no paper diapers, no Laundromats—Pat washed the diapers in the bathtub. What we needed was a FLO (Family Liaison Officer) to offer helpful advice.

Q: So eventually you found a house?

OLSON: We found a house.

Q: Way out?

OLSON: No, it was in town, a good location, a 'romantic villa.' My wife said, "If you ever again tell me we're moving to a 'romantic villa,' I'm leaving you." Tall ceilings and impossible to heat, plumbing problems, and so forth.

Q: Within the housing allowance?

OLSON: I don't think that was a problem. Just that it was inappropriate, not very convenient. The plumbing went out, and we were without hot water for quite a while, even without any water for periods. So, it made things a bit difficult. Still Spain was a great place to experience. If you want law and order, we had law and order in Franco's Spain. You could walk down any street with a feeling of security. The one thing that got me out of the office, the most interesting part of my duties, was my role as the principal liaison with the U.S. Navy. Barcelona at that time was the most popular Mediterranean liberty port for the Sixth Fleet; we had fleet visits constantly. I would take the ranking skipper to make a courtesy call on the Spanish admiral and translate. The consulate had a little Studebaker Lark compact car, and sometimes I would be taking a 6'3" U.S. Navy skipper in his dress uniform with sword in this car to make his call. People would line up on the streets just to see him try to get into and out of that tiny car.

Q: Did you have a driver?

OLSON: We had a driver. I really got to know and appreciate the U.S. Navy in Barcelona. I grew up in a Navy town, and my uncles and cousins who served in World War II were all in the Navy. But I didn't know that much about the Navy. The liaison work was greatly assisted by a Greek gentlemen, Mr. Kureshi, who had the contract for provisioning our ships. Whatever they needed he could come up with. There were very few problems. He was very cooperative with the consulate. We also had excellent liaison with the police. One Spanish police officer, a very smart fellow, was the permanent contact for the U.S. shore patrol. Barcelona had been welcoming sailors for centuries, and the only times we had problems were when there were simultaneous U.S. and a British fleet visits. Then we knew there would be fights, if not near riots, in some popular bars or

spots. So they would have extra police on duty. It was really a joy to have the Navy there. Again without commissary or PX, we would occasionally be able to pick up on a visiting ship a special cough syrup or something we weren't able to find on the local market. And as a young vice counsel, it was pretty heady business being piped aboard a ship and greeted by an occasional admiral. One memorable visit was the first arrival of a nuclear carrier, the Enterprise. It anchored outside the breakwaters, but sent boats in for the public to come aboard. We were invited to dinner at the officers' wardroom, and ate with several of the ship's doctors. Pat was pregnant, eight months plus! Those doctors really wanted to induce labor, I think looking for a headline in the "Navy Times" reading: "Carrier Enterprise Opens Maternity Ward."

Q: Did the consul general have much to do with these ship visits?

OLSON: The consul general did especially if we had a flag visit. Then the Naval Attaché or his assistant would also come up from Madrid.

Q: Flag meaning an admiral?

OLSON: With an admiral, right. The commander of the Sixth Fleet would visit about once a year, and the consul general would have a reception. I believe the consul general also took the admiral to make a call on the Governor General. I was not directly involved in that. It was usually a Navy captain that I accompanied to visit the Spanish admiral.

Q: Yes, as the skipper.

OLSON: The ranking skipper, I would take to call on the Spanish admiral and then a courtesy call on the consul general. He would sometimes host a reception if it was a very large group of ships, even without an admiral.

Q: Was there resistance on the part of the Spanish authorities or the Spanish people to these constant Navy visits, or did they welcome the dollars?

OLSON: Absolutely, they welcomed the dollars and welcomed us. The U.S. and Spain had very good relations militarily at that point, having already built the air force base at Zaragoza, not too far from Barcelona, and the navy base at Rota.

Q: Was that in your consular district too?

OLSON: Zaragoza was.

Q: And Rota was…?

OLSON: Rota was in the district of our consulate general in Seville. Those of us at the Barcelona consulate would make consular visits to Zaragoza, primarily for registration of American citizen births and provision of notarial and other consular services for U.S. Air

Force personnel and their dependents. That duty was rotated, so occasionally I would travel to Zaragoza for that purpose.

Q: Did you do much else as the administrative officer outside of Barcelona, outside of the consulate? Was there much local travel that you would do other than occasional visits to Zaragoza?

OLSON: No, and I only got to Madrid once for consultations at the Embassy, carrying the classified pouch.

Q: So you were pretty much out on your own.

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Did you have anything to do with other consulates in Spain?

OLSON: We did not have any consular meetings. Barcelona, Catalonia, was the center of the opposition during the Spanish Civil War, and so Franco visited only once during the two years we were there. I can remember he passed by in a closed car, and there were police on the rooftops. He was not a welcome visitor. During my two years there, Barcelona "celebrated" the 25th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War, '39-'64. There were posters all over the city: Veinte-Cinco Anos de Paz (25 Years of Peace). A number of them had 'Paz" (Peace) crossed out and 'Paciencia' (Patience) written in (25 Years of Patience). The hope was to live through this Franco era, which of course most of them did.

Q: Was there much feeling in Catalonia, in Barcelona, toward the United States since we were seen as having a good relationship with the Franco regime? We had these military facilities in the country. Or was there more feeling against Franco than opposition to the United States?

OLSON: There was a very strong bond again with our president, our young and vibrant, Catholic president, John Kennedy. His assassination was very much felt in Spain and certainly in Barcelona, in Catalonia. I recall when we received the news. We were on our way to the Binational Center on that Friday night in Barcelona to see a film. As we approached the entrance, the center director came out and said that President Kennedy had been shot. In astonishment, my wife said, "You're kidding." Of course, he wasn't kidding. We went home immediately and turned on the short-wave radio. I can recall that our maid said, "And so you will have a civil war." She was certain that if Franco were shot, another civil war would begin. I told her, "No, we don't think so." My most vivid memory was of the funeral. As I recall, this was one of the first live transatlantic television transmission by satellite to Spain. So we witnessed the funeral procession with de Gaulle and all of the leaders walking from the White House to St. Matthews Cathedral. That was most impressive.

Q: Yes, we were in Vienna at the time and I don't remember whether it was live there or, you know, taped earlier.

OLSON: We saw it live which was quite a feeling. Then mourning in Spain was something not to be taken lightly. As admin officer I ordered stationary with a black band around the edge and a memorial book for people to sign. And there were hundreds and hundreds of people that came to pay their respect. The Kennedys were very popular. We wore black ties, black armbands, for I think six weeks.

Q: 30 days.

OLSON: 30 days, yes.

Q: Okay, anything else about your time in Barcelona, '62-'64?

OLSON: I guess I can tell a tale about my lack of perception at the time. Young Juan Carlos, the Spanish prince, had just been taken under Franco's wing and was in school to begin his grooming as a future head of state. There was some disastrous flooding just inland from Barcelona, to the extent that the government in Madrid felt it had to take note of this. So I imagine some high official thought someone needed to make a visit to express sympathy, and why not Juan Carlos. He needed to start getting use to making such ceremonial visits. Juan Carlos was probably in his early 20's. We went to the airport as his special plane landed, at this time of devastation and sadness. Juan Carlos stepped off the plane in his double-breasted blazer with ascot tie looking like he was on his way to a polo match or ready for the tables at Monte Carlo. The costume and attitude did not appear appropriate to the occasion. We had already heard rumors that he was not too bright. I thought, "Oh, what a disaster this is going to be for Spain," eventually having him as king. I could not have been more wrong, as Juan Carlos turned out to be the savior of Spanish democracy.

Q: You mentioned that you had a lot to do with the U.S. Navy on ship visits. Were you involved at all with U.S. shipping companies? Commercial ships, passenger ships? You traveled on the American Export Lines.

OLSON: Somewhat. Primarily when there was a problem with an American seaman, which occasionally happened. The one incident that I do remember concerned a seaman from one of the American shipping lines who missed the ship when it sailed. So we were involved in repatriating him to the U.S. or getting him on another ship. For whatever reason, a consular officer brought him up to the consulate, to our offices. He was drunk or on drugs, in a bad way, and whatever the consular section was arranging for him he didn't like. He suddenly saw one of the old type fire extinguishers with the ring around the top mounted on the wall. He tore it off and started down the hall swinging this extinguisher by the ring over his head. At which time the admin officer was called on to get rid of him. We managed somehow to calm him down and decided not to wait for the next ship but to get the shipping company to pay his airfare back to the States. That was a bit of excitement.

Q: Well, you did not have a security officer, I'm sure, or Marine Guards, so you were responsible for security, or at least overseeing that.

OLSON: Yes, nor did we have a communications staff for classified cable traffic, most of which we would get by classified pouch. Anything received telegraphically had to be decoded by means of a one-time pad, very time consuming. Once during the problems in the Congo the Department found that one of the leaders of that civil war had been exiled and was spending time in Barcelona. So someone in Washington decided to put Barcelona on as an info addressee on a steady stream of cables about a debate on the Congo crisis in the United Nations, all coming telegraphically. Which would have kept us going for six weeks with our one time pads, but we were finally able to get off the telegraphic addressee list for that.

Q: How did you receive and send classified pouch material? Did you have a courier come? Or did you have people come back and forth to the embassy?

OLSON: We had people coming back and forth, mostly embassy folks who wanted to visit Barcelona. The one time that I got to Madrid for consultations with the admin section was when I was carrying that classified pouch.

Q: Okay, anything else on Barcelona?

OLSON: Barcelona. The lesson learned—it's hard to judge an assignment in advance. Even though Barcelona can claim to be one of the most delightful places on earth, circumstances dictated that our time there was not all peaches and cream. Then we were sent to Juarez, easily considered a hellhole, where we had a marvelous experience in many different ways. We did enjoy the trip home via the SS. Constitution.

Q: Ciudad Juarez was your next assignment, beginning in '64 but I think we are just about finished with this tape so why don't we save that for next time.

OLSON: Very good.

Q: Thank you.

Oscar. It is the 13th of September 2004, and this is our second conversation. We are going to start off this morning talking about your assignments from '64-'66 in Ciudad Juarez as economic-commercial officer.

OLSON: Yes, would you believe that we actually had an economic-commercial officer slot at a Mexican border post, which did mostly consular work. The Juarez economy was interesting enough, based on, let's see, prostitution, divorce, gambling, alcohol, drugs, pornography—what else is there? But the economic interest was not really on the border but in the consular district, the state of Chihuahua, with important mining, cattle ranching, agricultural, and other economic-commercial interests. I found that many of the

ranchers and businessmen in Chihuahua had closer ties—banking, commercial, even family ties—to the north, in Texas, than to Mexico City. Yet especially in Juarez, living right on the border with many connections to El Paso, our contacts seemed especially proud to show off the best attributes of Mexican culture. I imagine Juarez and El Paso were much closer to being two parts of the same community when I was there than is the case now. Then it was much easier to cross the border in either direction. Several of us from the consulate would often pop over to El Paso for lunch on workdays.

We were returning closer to home after two assignments abroad. Having joined the foreign service from Corpus Christi, my original fear was that they're going to send me immediately to Matamoros or Laredo, and I would be 150 miles away from home. Now what kind of foreign service would that be. But by this time it was good to be back closer to the States. People said, "Oh well, you are going home." I replied, "Yes, a mere 750 miles from El Paso to Corpus Christi."

Since I was the only one in the consulate doing other than consular work, I spent a lot of time down in the consular district. We had a wonderful time there, with interesting places to visit. There was the flourishing Mennonite colony that made wonderful cheese. And Colonia Juarez, a colony of Mormons who left Utah when polygamy was abolished. Gov. George Romney of Michigan was born in one of the Mormon communities in Chihuahua. One of the ranchers I became acquainted with would take me up in his Piper Cub for beautiful views of the range land.

I was the first to arrive at the consulate under new rules that said, "If you are to draw a housing allowance, you will actually live in your consular district—you will live in Juarez." Before, the consulate's American staff lived in El Paso. The new rule was, I think, completely appropriate, and we were able to find a nice place to live for our family of three kids. There was an active social life on both sides. My wife had lots of interesting things to do, and I was the only gringo member of the Juarez Rotary Club, which I enjoyed. An excellent source of contacts for the legitimate local business community, and I actually was asked to speak to the Rotary District Convention in the interior of Mexico. A bunch of members and wives went down by train to Guanajuato, which was a fascinating experience as well. The train suffered a 'hot box' and was stalled for several hours in the middle of the desert of Durango. Also at several stops along the way the local Rotary Club would come to serenade us during our brief stay.

What was then Texas Western University, now the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), had a very active relationship with the University of Chihuahua. The consulate had a Jeep station wagon. Many times when I was going, at least once a month, down into the interior, I would take along a professor or two, perhaps with an art exhibit or with books or with all sorts of scholarly materials—all for an interchange with the people at the University of Chihuahua.

Q: The University of Chihuahua was not in Juarez but…

OLSON: In Ciudad Chihuahua, the capital. Juarez also had close ties to Texas Western, with a number of Juarez residents enrolled there. We were there when unknown, underdog Texas Western pulled off the upset of the century, beating #1 ranked Kentucky for the NCAA basketball championship. At least in our social circle in Juarez, there was a lot of interest in the playoffs. Social invitations for a night when there was a game would be accepted on the understanding there would be access to a TV set tuned in. And we could hear firecrackers in the streets in Juarez the night the championship was won. I wonder if there is still the same feeling between the two cities.

On most of my trips down to the state capital, I would make a courtesy call on the governor of Chihuahua, who at that time was a retired general. He had spent his youth as an aide to Pancho Villa. I don't think he was all that busy as governor, because he would love to spin tales, which I loved to listen to. A peek into history, an added pleasure to my duties there. My wife and I also got to know the mayor of Chihuahua and his wife well. He was also a Rotarian. During one of the NASA Gemini launches, the consulate had a chance to do a bit of 'show and tell' for some Chihuahua state officials and also the mayor. Our air force attaché in Mexico City sent down his plane to carry the consul general and me, together with our Mexican VIPs, to the NASA tracking station in Guaymas, Mexico, to witness its operation during this launch. It turned out that the launch was postponed or scrubbed, but in any case we had a good tour of the facility. I recall they pointed to a small consol that had been what was used to track the Mercury missions. Then they had a whole wall full of instruments that would be used for Gemini. And they showed us the several rooms added to the building to house all of the computers and equipment they would use for the coming Apollo missions. They also had a computer monitor programmed to converse in Spanish with anyone who approached, asking questions and making appropriate responses. Our guests were most impressed, as were we hosts.

At one time there were rumors that Che Guevara was out in Chihuahua's Sierra Madre mountain range recruiting and training guerrillas. The rumors proved false, but they added a bit of excitement. The consul general and I actually took an extra trip deep into the interior just to ask people what they were hearing about such goings on. It all added interest to the assignment.

I got a call after two years informing me that the person who had been designated for university training at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy had at the last minute dropped out. The Department wanted me to fill that slot. I think this was mid-August. The department usually had one mid-career officer in training at Fletcher, plus one from AID (Agency for International Development), and one from USIS (United States Information Service). An academic year interested me—I may have at some time said something along that line on my April Fool preference form. Only later when I got back to the Department after that nine months did I find that there had been some debate as to the appropriateness or the timing of this assignment. I would be doing graduate economic work, but my undergraduate economic coursework was weak. I barely had an economics minor—it was more political science and history. Apparently Jock Reinstein, director of the FSI year-long economic course that gave the equivalent of a under graduate degree in

economics, argued that I should have that first and then be sent for graduate work. He lost the argument—someone in personnel wanted that open slot filled. And off I went.

Q: To Fletcher?

OLSON: To Fletcher. The timing was bad, and my decision was bad in another sense because the Department had decided to open a one-man post in Ciudad Juarez, and I was the one who was to have gone there.

Q: To where?

OLSON: I mean to Chihuahua, Ciudad Chihuahua. Chihuahua would be opening as a one-man post. They were beginning to open these limited listening posts at several places in Mexico and elsewhere. I don't think this program lasted very long, but in retrospect it's what I should have done rather than thinking that I would never again have a chance at an academic year. That was pretty ridiculous. Plus the difficulty of moving the family twice in nine months.

Q: Before we talk a little bit more about Fletcher, your experience there, let me ask you just a couple questions about Juarez. You did economic and commercial reporting; did you do it directly to Washington or through the embassy?

OLSON: It was through the embassy primarily.

Q: And, did you go to Mexico City fairly often?

OLSON: No, we were able to go to Mexico City for consultations and discussions just once.

Q: Was there much coordination or contact with the other Consulates in Mexico on the border?

OLSON: No, not very much. The USIS public affairs officer with responsibility for our consular district was assigned to the consulate in Hermosillo, Sonora. He would visit us occasionally and join us on one of our treks with Texas Western professors down to the University of Chihuahua.

Q: And who was the consul general during most of your time?

OLSON: Bill Hughes. William Hughes had been the head of FBO (Foreign Buildings Operations) during its glory days of the '50s, early '60s, when we hired the world's most renown architects to design and build these wonderful unsecure…

Q: Palaces.

OLSON: Well, not just palaces but very good architecture. A very interesting fellow—he was a good person to work for.

Q: But he was not particularly interested in the consular side of the staff?

OLSON: You know, this was his retirement post, his reward. He and his wife then retired to El Paso.

Q: Okay, I think those were my main questions. So you went to Fletcher, and I usually think that university training is to do economics, or to do area studies, or to do labor relations, or something like that. But, in your case?

OLSON: Fletcher and I guess the Department were most interested in having a foreign service presence there for each academic year, given the importance of Fletcher in recruiting for the foreign service. And since it was sort of last minute, neither my advisors nor I were perhaps as focused as we should have been in preparing for what I was going to do. I had by this time decided that I should broaden my geographical range beyond my Latin American experience.

I had an interest in Europe, Western European affairs, plus economics—that was my concentration of studies. Following this I came back to the Department assigned to INR (Intelligence and Research) in the Western European office, doing regional political analysis. This meant primarily NATO affairs (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). I also covered the start of the European space program, in competition with us. I did some research and studies for the beginnings of the conference on European security. I also had one trip to our NATO mission in Brussels as a resource for talks on confidence building measures between East and West—issues that were beginning to be put forward and debated, such as giving advance notice and sending observers for military maneuvers.

That then took me to Berlin.

Q: Well, let's see. You were in INR for four years.

OLSON: Four years, yes.

Q: Four years doing pretty much the same work throughout that period. As you said this was the beginning of what became the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) process that moved to Helsinki in '75. Were you involved in MBFR (Mutual and Balance Force Reduction) much or mostly was it more political?

OLSON: No, just the CSCE beginnings.

Q: Okay, and you went to Berlin, but how did you get there? You did something in between I think, more training?

OLSON: That was my FSI economics course, nine months, and then language training.

Q: German language.

OLSON: Yes, German language.

Q: It just occurred to me thinking back in my own situation in the summer of 1966 when you went to the Fletcher School, I, that summer, started the economic course here at FSI. At the time it was 22 weeks in length, and we started, I think, in July and went through the end of the year roughly.

OLSON: I guess maybe that was what it was. I can't remember how long my course was. Yours is the class I should have been in.

Q: You could have been in it.

OLSON: That's right.

Q: And then I was in the department also the same time you were but in a very different bureau and different activity. Okay, so you did the economic training at FSI in '71 thereabouts and then you went to West Berlin.

OLSON: To West Berlin, and, believe it or not, by ship. The rules said only by American flag carrier, and by this time the only possibility was a Lykes Lines freighter. So we sailed from New Orleans to Barcelona on the good ship Reuben Tipton. Not really that good a ship, one of the oldest on the Atlantic, and on its way next to Taiwan and scrapping. Anyway we got to visit Barcelona again on our way to Berlin.

Berlin was a very unusual, different sort of foreign service experience. This was occupied Berlin; we were sovereign in the American sector of Berlin. Actually we still considered ourselves sovereign in all of Berlin, as one of the Four Powers victorious in the war. But it actually worked in West Berlin, where we reigned together with the British and the French. The U.S. alternated with its allies so that once every three months we chaired the Allied Kommandatura. That then presented us with unusual responsibilities.

Q: In West Berlin?

OLSON: In West Berlin. Theoretically we had those same responsibilities for all of Berlin, but we weren't able to exercise them in what we termed the Soviet sector, or East Berlin. Among the esoteric responsibilities that fell to me in the economic section of the U.S. Mission was clearing West Berlin's accounts with the Universal Postal Union. West Berlin had its own postal system, issuing its own stamps, separate from West Germany. At the end of each year all members of the Universal Postal Union must settle up accounts based on differences in the amounts of incoming and outgoing international mail. Again I depended on good help from foreign service national employees.

I was responsible for assigning radio frequencies for taxi cab owners or others needing ratio-telephones in the Western sectors. East Berlin authorities would often protest that the particular frequency in question belonged to them. I was the gun control officer. There were strict gun control regulations in effect, and no gun permits were issued to individuals. Hunters, however, were permitted to organized clubs for target practice, and the clubs themselves were licensed to keep rifles. Then when a hunter wanted to go to West Germany or elsewhere to hunt, we issued a special permit for transport of a rifle out of Berlin and its return. So this was all very different bureaucratic stuff. We were of course also interested in economic matters and particularly in the economic viability of the city. We dealt with contingency plans for problems such as another blockade, even that long after the original one. The Soviets were still capable of launching another such attack. We were fearful that they might tighten the noose once again. There were mountains of coal stockpiled in West Berlin, ready in case no more coal was coming in. We also served a very strong American business presence in Berlin. There was one commercial officer in our economic section, Felix Bloch—you may have heard the name. He did most of the work on U.S. export promotion.

Q: Were you involved with civil aviation matters?

OLSON: Very much so. The three sovereign powers had a monopoly on flights in and out of West Berlin—PanAm, British Air, and Air France. We also were involved in the construction of the new Tegel Airport in West Berlin to alleviate the crowding and other problems at the very congested old airport, Tempelhof, which was used for the airlift. Schoenefeld was the East German airport. The Austrians, Austrian Airlines, had decided by that point that they would like to fly in and petitioned the three allied powers. It was sometime after we left before they finally did allow other airlines into West Berlin. I believe they did that before we gave up sovereignty.

Q: Lufthansa was not serving West Berlin?

OLSON: No, Lufthansa was not serving West Berlin.

Q: A lot of what you did was unusual. Probably no where else in the world were such things being done in terms of making decisions, some very bureaucratic, some very routine I'm sure. And some very sensitive.

OLSON: Yes. And happily we had the most marvelous German staff who really did understand how the Universal Postal Union worked and knew all about the legalities that permitted the East Germans to operate the S-Bahn, elevated rail system, in West Berlin.

Q: Now to what extent were you involved in going to the east zone, to East Berlin, or involved in Four Power meetings as opposed to Three Power with the British and French?

OLSON: I was involved marginally in the Four Power meetings. Minister David Klein was in charge of the State Department side of the U.S. Mission and was deputy to the

U.S. commanding general for the American Sector. Kline chose me to assist Kenneth Rush, our ambassador to West Germany, when Rush was in Berlin. The Ambassador was spending much of his time in Berlin because of the important Four Power talks on the status of Berlin which resulted in the Four Power Agreement that was signed in Berlin, I guess in '73.

Q: When you were still there?

OLSON: Yes, I was still there. When Rush was in Berlin he trusted two of us in the mission to be available to be with him, to escort him, and to do whatever the ambassador needed done. That was Felix Block and I. I do recall that I was to go to a meeting in Paris of economic officers assigned to Western European posts. I was looking forward to that, but it coincided with an ambassadorial visit to Berlin. Felix was away, on home leave I believe. I missed the trip to Paris. That's your reward for being indispensable.

Q: Did the ambassador bring along his own aide or staff from Bonn?

OLSON: He did not.

Q: He relied on you.

OLSON: Right. I recall we were often arranging to get "Henry" on the phone for him. Henry Kissinger was still the National Security Adviser at that time. I guess I failed to mention that Harvard University is one of the co-sponsors of Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and not just Tufts University where it is located. Thus Fletcher students are able to enroll in Harvard classes as well. So I had signed up for a "seminar" with Professor Henry Kissinger. This seminar ended up in the biggest room they could find, a conference room in the law school. It had a very long table that maybe would seat about 20 people. Harvard students taking the course for credit sat at the table and then spilled over into the second row. Then Harvard students auditing the course were in the next row. Finally Fletcher students taking it for credit would be behind and then Fletcher students monitoring or…

Q: Auditing.

OLSON: Yes, those auditing would be in the fourth row of chairs at the table. So this "seminar" enrolled at least 80 people. Professor Kissinger mostly brought in other people rather than lecturing himself. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was one of them. This was during Viet Nam, and I recall that he got into our building through the steam tunnels, the utility tunnels. There were so many anti-Viet Nam demonstrators when McNamara reached the campus that he couldn't walk through the normal door.

Q: So, but when you were in Berlin you helped Ambassador Rush reach your former professor.

OLSON: Exactly. Then when Secretary Rogers, William Rogers, came for the signing of the Four Power Agreement, someone decided that it had been a long time since a Secretary of State had visited the Soviet sector of Berlin. So Rogers should venture over to the other side of the Wall. This visit shouldn't appear to be a big deal, since our 'theology' maintained that the U.S., as one of the four original occupying powers, was still sovereign throughout the whole city. So for a routine, low-key visit, it wouldn't be appropriate for the commanding general to accompany the Secretary to East Berlin, and perhaps not even appropriate for David Klein, the Mission head, to go with him. So Oscar Olson went with him as his escort. There were a number of American tourists in East Berlin who recognized him. We visited the war memorial on Unter den Linden with the goose-stepping ceremonial guard. We went to the much bigger war memorial that the Soviets had built immediately after the war while the city all around lay in ruins. And we visited the famous Pergamon Museum in the center of town. He had a good time.

Q: Were the Soviets notified that he was going to do this?

OLSON: We did let them know that he was coming. That the big black Fleetwood Cadillac, the ambassador's limousine, would be coming through Checkpoint Charlie with the Secretary of State.

Q: But he didn't stay overnight.

OLSON: He did not.

Q: And did not go outside East Berlin.

OLSON: He did not go outside of East Berlin, nor did any of us at the mission normally get into the forbidden territory of East Germany. Poland was about 80 miles to the west, excuse me, to the east, but we could get there only by way of Frankfurt and Copenhagen. Potsdam was five miles from where I lived but was unknown territory. Until, that is, we attended the Leipzig Trade Fair. "Commerz Uber Alles" (Commerce Over All). We were able to arrange special permission to get into East Germany to go to the Leipzig Fair. This was the most important trade fair in Eastern Europe, and so we would have a significant presence there from the Berlin mission.

Q: So you got permission? Permission from whom?

OLSON: We arranged it through our Soviet buddies; they would then tell the East Germans we were coming. We made the trip, not in big black Cadillac limousines, but in big black Fords. Since we were sovereign in West Berlin, each had a license plate that simply said "Department of State" in English. No numbers, not even U.S., simply Department of State. So we were very conspicuous. No chance of not being noticed when we went into East Germany to go to Leipzig. We entered East Germany with an extra page in our passport, which as I recall, was something similar to travel between Jordan and Israel at one point. You would get an entry stamp on that extra page. In this case the East Germans would feel good that they had stamped our passports, as if we recognized

their existence. And we would rip the page out as if nothing had happened. Again, it's part of what I called our 'theology' of that time. It was fascinating to be in Leipzig, and once we were there we could get permission to visit other parts of East Germany. It was almost as if we were getting visas for these other cities. We would then get permission to go to the places like Weimar, Dresden, and even Potsdam, in our own backyard. So we did get to visit Potsdam, but only on the way home from Leipzig.

Q: Now you do quite a bit of reporting when you make those trips?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Twice a year?

OLSON: Right. We were sure we would be followed to some extent on our visits to Leipzig, but the city was overrun with visitors so it was hard for them to keep up with everyone. I never met anyone who actually stayed in a hotel. We would be assigned to private homes, which was even more interesting because you got to talk to real East Germans. The East German authorities may have been capable of picking out who we would be living with, but I certainly never had the sense that we were pre-assigned. We encountered various, interesting situations. The one I remember most, perhaps, was during the '72 Olympics. I was with an engineer with the East German railroad. He would talk about the fact that the railroad system was very important to the country's leaders, and so he was able to get the latest equipment, the newest communications innovations, and whatever--he would get scarce foreign exchange to buy all this from the West. "But do you think the bureaucracy would allow me then to bring in spare parts to maintain any of this?" He would continue on this line but in a slightly different vein as we would be watching the Summer Olympics from Munich. These were the first games where the East Germans did very, very well. He was very proud of the East German team, but then he would turn to me and say, "Do you know how much it is costing us as taxpayers? You would not believe what we spend on these athletes, to get these athletes up to speed." I thought, wow, maybe taxpayers around the world are not all that different.

Q: How long would you be in Leipzig and East Germany? A week or two weeks?

OLSON: No, I don't think it was as much as a week. I think we would be maybe three days, three or four days at the fair and then a couple extra days for a side trip. I think for the most part we probably only did one side trip per visit. I was in Berlin three years, and I'm pretty sure I went to the Leipzig Fair six times.

Q: Other than the Leipzig Fair period, you didn't go into East Germany. But you did go into the Soviet zone…

OLSON: Soviet sector.

Q: Soviet sector of Berlin routinely? Without notification? Or did you always have to sort of let them know?

OLSON: No notice was given. Routinely I went through Checkpoint Charlie to take visitors or to go to the opera. But not all that often, because it was a hassle. You couldn't buy opera tickets or theatre tickets in West Berlin, so it usually meant two trips. One trip to go buy tickets, and a second trip to go. We had a lot of visitor's, personal visitors; and we had lots and lots of official visitors. I escorted Governor Jimmy Carter on his visit to Berlin. He was there over Armed Forces Day when there was a big parade and a reception at the Charlottenburg Palace. I recall afterwards we were going for a meal, and he said, "I would like to go to the most typical Berlin restaurant you can think of." I said, "Okay." We went to a typical Berlin eatery, and then he wanted to order something very typical of Berlin. I believe he ended up with ox shank, something strange, but he was going to take advantage of being in a different place.

Q: Was he pleased with the dinner?

OLSON: Reasonably so. He was in Germany to lobby Volkswagen to build the plant that they were planning for the U.S. in Georgia. As I recall, they built it someplace else.

Q: South Carolina, maybe.

OLSON: South Carolina.

Q: The first one.

OLSON: Let's see. One other visitor was Eleanor Dulles, the State Department's expert on Germany and sister to John Foster. Another visitor I escorted was Terry Sanford, who had just completed his term as Governor of North Carolina and was seriously considered as a candidate for the democratic presidential nomination. He was visiting Germany and had asked for an appointment with West German Chancellor Willy Brandt. The scheduling didn't work out while he was in Bonn, so Sanford came to Berlin. We took the helicopter trip along the Wall and the other normal elements of an official visit. Probably took him over to East Berlin. Then we found that Willy Brandt was back home over the weekend in West Berlin, and so Sanford was granted his missed meeting with the Chancellor there. And I got to sit in on it. The most interesting part was the two politicians talking about campaigning. Brandt not that long ago had been in the States and had been with Hubert Humphrey in Minnesota. Brandt accompanied Humphrey as the latter was addressing some mid-western group, and Brandt was asked to say a few words. He started in English, then some German, and finally Norwegian to this Minnesota crowd. He was fluent in Norwegian, having spent years in exile there. Brandt then reported to his visitor the fact that Hubert Humphrey had quipped, "Thank goodness you aren't campaigning against me here."

Q: You went to East Berlin, to the Soviet sector, for private reasons, and you took visitors; did you ever go to do economic work, economic reporting?

OLSON: Not really, although I shared observations with the Mission's Eastern Affairs section. These officers were visiting East Berlin regularly and doing that type of reporting. I did more, as far as reporting, after visiting the Leipzig Fair than I did routinely just on what was happening with the economy in East Berlin.

Q: You mentioned that David Klein was the Minister, the Chief of Mission, and he was also the Deputy to the U.S. Military Commander. What was the office called, the State Department office? Was it called a Mission?

OLSON: Yes, it wasn't an embassy or a consulate, so it had to be a Mission. We were in an old Luftwaffe headquarters on a street that was renamed Clay Allee, after U.S. General Lucius Clay. The economic section was right by the front gate of this complex of buildings. When one of the three allied commandants departed Berlin, there was a ceremony with a salute. Not a twenty-one gun salute, but rather a one tank salute. The tank would be parked just beneath our windows at the front gate and would fire its cannon, a blank I assume. Anyway it would always blow out all of the economic section's windows. We were prepared, with everyone evacuated and workers standing by with new windowpanes ready to be installed. The picture of German efficiency. The Germans in fact were paying for it because as an occupying power we were still able to charge quite a bit of current expenses to the German taxpayer.

Let me mention also a very important part of our life in Berlin and that was that my wife, Pat, who came with a degree in radio/television. She was asked to put on a television program for our Armed Forces Network station there. She called it <u>People, Places and Pat</u>. It was…

Q: People, Places and Pat.

OLSON: <u>People, Places and Pat</u>. The Air Force was in charge of the Armed Forces Network outlet in Berlin. Someone must have noticed that there was not a female face anywhere on the broadcasts and ordered one to appear. I'm sure what they had in mind was a program for the dependents on how to use your leftover turkey after Thanksgiving or reporting the meeting of the Woman's Sewing Guild. But when she was approached she explained that she would like to do a show that would highlight the fabulous city in which we were residing, to try to encourage those that would tend to stay in the PX and the commissary and the housing area to get out and get to know Berlin. She wanted to point out the ease of transportation, the fact that there were people who spoke English, and that there were all sorts of fabulous things to do and see. She interviewed folks from the museums, the opera, the zoo, the 'volkfests,' and lots of different people talking about what was going on in Berlin. Then she got to visit a lot of these places, which was fun for both of us. And we both got to meet some interesting people through this effort. She also interviewed visitors to town, which included James Michener, who was on some kind of a tour for USIS.

Q: Did she ever have you on the program?

OLSON: No. I got to go along once when she actually got up in a helicopter to do filming along the Wall, from the West Berlin side of course. This took some doing because before that females were forbidden to go up in the helicopters. As I recall, when Eleanor Dulles visited earlier, I was not able to include the helicopter tour as part of her VIP (very important person) tour because she was, obviously, female. I think at one time the helicopter pilots, then all male, were using the helicopters as party pads, and that's how the prohibition came about. But finally it got overturned by People, Places and Pat.

Q: Okay, was there anything else you wanted to say about Pat's television program? Was it on in the evening or the daytime?

OLSON: It was on in the evening.

Q: Live?

OLSON: It was live and once a week, as I recall. Before tape, or at least before Armed Forces Network in Berlin was able to tape things. We had some kinescope film of a few of her programs. I guess they just had a movie camera pointed at the TV screen.

Q: How big was the economic-commercial section? You mentioned Felix Bloch. Was there someone else who was the head of it?

OLSON: Yes, Bill Root was our boss, and there were three of us that were in the section besides Bill. We were four altogether.

Q: Okay, anything else we should say about your time in West Berlin, '71-'74?

OLSON: We had a very nice house, farther away from the Mission than anyone else, in a completely German neighborhood. Our only furnished quarters in the foreign service. Requisitioned from the Germans at the end of the war. We later learned that it had been built in the 1930s by one of the German generals executed in the unsuccessful plot to kill Hitler in 1944. Most of the remaining requisitioned houses occupied by Americans were huge barns, hard to keep up. Our house was perfect for our family and bordered on the Grunewald, Berlin's huge green natural area, and a beautiful lake, the Schlachtensee.

Q: Were you there when the embassy was established in East Berlin?

OLSON: No, that was after I left.

Q: Where did you go from West Berlin?

OLSON: From West Berlin we went to Panama.

Q: That was quite a change.

OLSON: Quite a leap. I was assigned as financial officer. Panama was becoming an international center for offshore banking. The understanding was that the economic counselor was leaving in a year and that I would have a leg up on moving into that position. I arrived in Panama to find out that the economic counselor had bailed out and was leaving three days after I arrived. A replacement was already assigned. This was, you may recall, the time of GLOP (Global Outlook Program). Secretary Kissinger had just visited Mexico City during an OAS (Organization of American States) foreign ministers conference and decided that the staff at our embassy there were much too parochial. Too many Latino specialists that didn't know anything about the rest of the world. Timing is everything because, Robert McBride had just left the embassy as, let's see, was he DCM or was he ambassador? He had very broad experience in Africa, Europe, and Latin America. Had he been there, it might have changed the Secretary's viewpoint. But anyway, we had this program whereby…

Q: Oh, he was in Mexico, I think, as DCM, I believe, at about that time.

OLSON: Yes, he was DCM. So the new GLOP program was instituted to move people around to areas in which they had no experience. This was the case with our new economic counselor. He was a gentleman with very broad commercial, trade promotion experience and was fluent in several languages, but not including Spanish. And he had never had an assignment as an economic officer. So it really was an unfortunate assignment, unfair to him and, in fact, unfair to those of us who had to keep things going.

It was a difficult time in Panama, during the canal treaty negotiations. Relations with the Panamanians were on edge, and relations between the embassy and the people in the Canal Zone were very much on edge. Residents of the zone were very unhappy about the fact that their world was about to change, and they were afraid, I think quite legitimately, that their interests were not going to be taken into account. So it was a difficult time. Ambassador Bunker was negotiating the canal treat on Contadora Island completely away from Panama City. Most of the embassy, certainly the economic section, had nothing to do with the negotiations. Understandably most of the dealings had to be on a need to know basis. But keeping some of us completely in the dark made it a bit more difficult for me to do my work. My contacts, American and Panamanian businessmen, bankers, and others would understandably think that I would have some insight or a little more information than I actually had as to what was going on with the treaty negotiations. So I made it a point first thing every morning to read the Miami Herald so that I would know at least as much as the people I would be talking to during the day.

We had a lot of visitors from Washington with an interest in the international banking center that was established. We would have bank inspectors coming to look at the American banks that had branches in Panama. There was concern with money laundering and other problems. But we developed close relations with the Panamanian banking supervisors; they were very interested in building up this financial center as an economic benefit for Panama. They wanted to bring in as large a group of international banks as possible to open branches there, and as soon as possible.

Q: Now I suppose the Treasury Department, not only the Controller of the Currency or the bank regulatory people, but other parts of Treasury were probably quite interested in what was happening.

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Was there a treasury attaché in the region who tried to cover Panama?

OLSON: There was not. And the U.S. greenback was circulating as Panama's paper currency. What was then Chase Manhattan Bank's branch in Panama more or less functioned as an extra U.S. Federal Reserve branch, as it was Chase's responsibility to make sure there were sufficient physical dollars, greenbacks, in circulation in Panama to meet the needs of the economy.

Q: You mentioned that relations were somewhat tense between the Canal Zone people under, I suppose, the Department of Army and the embassy. To what extent were you as financial officer involved with things going on in the Zone?

OLSON: Not so much as financial officer as simply the fact that we were neighbors in a sense. My kids were going to school there, and we went to church in the zone.

We had another problem having nothing to do with the treaty, but which concerned some very difficult labor negotiations between United Brands, formerly United Fruit (Chiquita Banana), and its labor unions in Panama. The company owned very important banana plantations in western Panama, and this dispute was soon referred to, at least by the newspapers, as the 'Banana War.' I still have a good sized boulder that I use as a paper weight that came through my office window during a demonstration by banana workers in front of the embassy. Somebody was probably trying out for baseball, which was very popular in Panama. The embassy was well set back, and I was on the second floor. It was a heavy rock, but this pitcher still managed to get it up there. The embassy really had nothing to do with this dispute, but we were a convenient target.

Q: Were you in the embassy at the time that this happened?

OLSON: I was in the embassy, but happily not near the window. At that particular time there was an announcement in the schools in the Canal Zone to the effect that the buses bringing kids back to Panama City, embassy kids, would be on hold because the embassy was under siege. This brought immediate, spontaneous applause on the part of the students, the American kids living in the Canal Zone. Our embassy kids had to contend with that kinds of an atmosphere.

Q: You mentioned that one of the reasons that this position, your position was established in the embassy was because the banking center had developed their offshore banking and so on. I assume this had regional significance that went beyond Panama?

OLSON: Right.

Q: Were you involved with other countries or other embassies?

OLSON: No, not very much. Panama realized that most foreign banks would not be able to establish branches all over Latin America or even in the principal countries of Latin America, as most of the big American banks had already done. The smaller U.S. regional banks, European banks, and Japanese banks that simply wanted a presence in Latin America would be encouraged to establish that presence in Panama. They could then serve, or attempt to serve, their Latin American interests from that central spot. But I don't recall there was much coordination involving other embassies.

Q: Were you involved at all with issues related to the Canal Zone? Or was that pretty much being handled within the framework of the treaty negotiations?

OLSON: No, I wasn't really involved. Things weren't going to change very much until we actually…

Q: Until it had been agreed to.

OLSON: We actually had the canal treaty. Right.

Q: And the treaty was concluded after you had left?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: And you left in '76? You were just there for two years or so?

OLSON: Yes, I curtailed my assignment. We had some medical problems. We were particularly anxious that our oldest, our son, be able to have two years in high school in the States. In Washington. So we left early.

Q: To come back to the Department? Was there anything else you wanted to say about Panama before we come to the Washington assignment?

OLSON: We quickly developed an appreciation of what an engineering marvel the Panama Canal is—the moon shot of the early years of the century. I got to participate in the ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the opening of the canal in 1914. I even was able to transit the canal on a nuclear submarine, the Daniel Webster. Believe it or not, when I mention this some folks ask if it was submerged. The canal really isn't that deep! Happily it wasn't, because the crew threw a barbecue on deck for the guests. We also went through the canal aboard a Grace Lines cargo-liner. Another happy memory was taking the kids to visit Barro Colorado, the Smithsonian's island nature preserve in the middle of Lake Gatun in the Canal Zone.

Q: Okay, what did you do in the Department?

OLSON: I came back then ahead of time and not in the normal cycle of bidding for positions. So I had a limited choice or opportunity for an assignment. Thus I ended up once again in a very unusual and very interesting position. I was attached to the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), to be the executive director running U.S. participation in a environmental research, resource management program that UNESCO had started. It was called "Man and the Biosphere" (MAB).

Q: The United States was a member of UNESCO at the time?

OLSON: We were a member of UNESCO and were particularly interested in this very innovative environmental program. There was considerable interest throughout the country in this program for various reasons. It ended up being in the Department of State because the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO was the logical sponsor to coordinate our participation. It was also helpful in that the State Department proved to be an honest broker and umpire between various interests within our government who would benefit from participation. The program brought together the physical scientists and social scientists. It's "Man and the Biosphere" and not just about wilderness areas. The program initiated an early look at how we can best manage our natural resources, how can we work towards a sustainable development, and how can we ensure biodiversity. These are concepts we hear a lot about now. But this was back in the '70s, and they were fairly new concepts then. MAB was really a pioneer program. U.S. participation provided an umbrella organization for bringing together not only physical scientists and social scientists, but also private, university, and government researchers and scientists. And it was international, bringing together U.S. and foreign practitioners, providing the framework for international collaboration. A lot of things going on there that made it a very worthwhile and very interesting endeavor.

I mentioned the State Department as honest broker and umpire. In the United States, most national parks have adjacent to them national forests. National parks are under the Department of the Interior, and national forests fall under the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Agriculture got the forest service early on because, I'm sure, its mandate was to help foresters cut down trees. But over the years we have developed a different slant on our forests as being resources both for harvesting trees but also for sustaining the environment and biodiversity. There are scientists interested in natural resource management and environmental research both in the forest service and the park service. But Department of Agriculture officials worry that congress will notice the increasing similarities of function for both services and will decide that the forest service really belongs in Interior. Therefore they have raised obstacles for cooperation between forest service and park service scientists. It was just a bureaucratic barrier. Then we found that under the neutral umbrella of the State Department and this UNESCO program, we were able to bring together much more easily the scientists who were interested in the same research, those doing similar studies in adjacent acreage. They now were able to talk to each other, even to have common programs that they could fold under this international program. Beneficial collaboration that, because of bureaucratic problems, they had some difficulties in undertaking otherwise. That was one of our

interesting challenges in MAB and something that we were able to do. Again, the concept of the physical scientists and the social scientists working together was not new, but still this was something that didn't always happen. We worked very closely with AID (Aid for International Development), which was then trying to help developing countries with resource management and also protecting the environment. Part of the MAB (Man and the Biosphere) program was the establishment of biosphere reserves. Several of our national parks were also designated as biosphere reserves. This is a concept of a protected area that is not just a wilderness but, ideally, wild at the core, then an area of limited access where man is directly impacting but still making good use of the natural resources and making them sustainable.

The program got some criticism from those who distrusted anything connected to the United Nations. Some of our right-wing conspiracy theorists were unhappy that the Smokey Mountains National Park had been designated as a biosphere reserve. They feared there would be black helicopters bringing in tri-lateral commission personnel to establish a base to take over our government.

I think the program has proved its worth for years. After the United States left UNESCO because of freedom of information issues, we continued to participate in the "Man and the Biosphere" program. UNESCO was pleased to permit this continuing participation because of its value both to our own scientists and natural resource managers and to those of other nations with whom we collaborated.

Q: Had the program been going on for some time when you got involved in '76?

OLSON: It was new, and so I was able to be one of the pioneers in getting things started. It was very fulfilling, and with a considerable amount of travel--to Paris and to Vienna for UNESCO or MAB meetings. I also attended meetings around the country with the various committees that were organized to deal with specialized topics--tropical islands, forested regions, and such. There were about a dozen such groups that we organized and facilitated their meetings.

Q: And I suppose, depending on the area and the topic different agencies would be involved…

OLSON: Exactly.

Q: as well as university and private sector scientists.

OLSON: Right.

Q: I suppose it would include the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Science Foundation.

OLSON: In fact, we had EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and National Science Foundation staffers, scientists assigned to my staff. Also folks from AID (Aid for

International Development), the National Park Service, and the Forest Service were assigned for temporary duty, helping to organize and coordinate the work of MAB.

Q: How big was your staff?

OLSON: Well, it would be usually be three or four at one time. The National Park Service made an especially strong contribution to the effort.

Q: The U.S. National Commission for UNESCO which you were part of was located in the International Organizations Bureau (IO)?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: Of the State Department?

OLSON: That's right. But I was working even more closely with OES (Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs). Don King was the head of the office of Environmental Affairs. He was the Chairman of our U.S. Man in the Biosphere Committee, and so I worked particularly close with him and with OES.

Q: Did you have very much to do with the National Commission for UNESC? How big was it, maybe ten members?

OLSON: No, it was a good-sized group. Some 25 or 30 members, a wide variety of people--political appointments, but folks with academic, cultural, and scientific credentials. I enjoyed participating in the annual meetings simply because they were such an interesting bunch of people. I recall one member was the fellow from the Smithsonian who started the annual folk-fest. Several of the commissioners are still close friends. A number of them were enthusiastic supporters of the MAB program.

Q: Were your offices in the Main State Department building?

OLSON: We were in SA-2, across the street, where I'm currently located in my present part-time work reviewing documents for release under the Freedom of Information Act.

Q: Again.

OLSON: Again, back to SA-2.

Q: That's Columbia Plaza?

OLSON: No, it is an old apartment building just around the corner from what used to be the Governor Shepherd building and is now diplomatic security. What is it, 515…

Q: 22nd street.

OLSON: 22nd street, yes.

Q: Okay, anything else about your period with the MAB?

OLSON: I don't believe so.

Q: Okay, '76-'79, three years.

OLSON: I left MAB reluctantly, but decided that I wanted, if possible, to stay longer than the department was generally allowing people to remain in Washington for a tour in order to get all three of my kids through high school. That would take six years. The only way to do that, I figured, was to arrange two three-year assignments. I went from MAB to look for another assignment and ended up in management operations, the group providing analytical support to the undersecretary for management. I was working primarily on the economic and commercial side of our presence overseas, which we were always trying to reduce for balance of payments reasons.

The most memorable time of this assignment was being part of the negotiating team with the Department of Commerce for the establishment of the Foreign Commercial Service. I was told the Department of Commerce had its own foreign service back in the '30s. But eventually only Agriculture had its own separate entity, the Foreign Agricultural Service, apart from State's Foreign Service. But the Department of Commerce was determined that it would again have its own foreign service. They lobbied for that until finally they did succeed in having a separate Foreign Commercial Service established by Congress.

Q: So at the point you were negotiating with the Department of Commerce as part of the negotiating team, and Congress had already passed legislation?

OLSON: Yes, legislation had created the FCS, and so we were involved in how the resources involved would be divided up. When I was in Berlin, if I remember correctly, congress did establish a Foreign Commercial Service, and Nixon vetoed it. But soon another bill to create the FCS was introduced. So those of us at post were periodically asked to please detail for the Department how much time each economic-commercial officer was spending on economic affairs and how much on commercial matters. You know, it's almost impossible to divide the two. But obviously what the Department needed was some ammunition to go to congress and demonstrate that State's foreign service was spending lots of time and effort on commercial work/trade promotion. No need to have an independent FCS! Then maybe four months later there would be another such survey, then after a while, another. I recall on the last one of these, I added a note at the bottom, "Please, next time, add one line for how much time do you spend filling out these forms for 'how much time do you spend on commercial work.'" It appears the posts were more and more generous in estimating the time devoted to commercial work with each ensuing survey, perhaps going from an estimate of 28% of an officer's time the first time around to maybe 42% the last time. The Department of Commerce then came to us in these negotiations, armed with these statistics. Hard to refute at that point. The result was that Commerce was able to wrest from State an inflated number of personnel

positions for its use in forming the new Foreign Commercial Service. And State economic officers lost a disproportionate number of assignment and promotion possibilities. I'm afraid we dug our own grave on that one.

Q: Were you also involved yourself in the question of which officers, State Department or foreign service officers, would join or go to the Foreign Commercial Service in the early period?

OLSON: No, because that was voluntary on the part of officers who were given the opportunity to…

Q: To choose.

OLSON: Not really to choose. We were given the opportunity to apply, and commerce was not obligated to accept. As a result, not that many from State applied, and not all that did were accepted. The Department of Commerce at that time was very much of a mind that we Foreign Service Officers were simply State Department bureaucrats that had demonstrated they can't do it right. They really wanted people who had no experience in government but instead had all their experience in business. That was mainly what they were recruiting.

Q: From outside?

OLSON: From outside. What had been the economic-commercial cone ended up with fewer positions and a surplus of officers, as I said, adversely affecting assignments and promotions.

Q: I seem to remember that, at least in the early period of the foreign commercial service, there were several pretty senior State Department officers who were involved in leadership positions. That was correct or did that make it easier?

OLSON: Yes, that was correct. This was after we had completed this resource transfer negotiation. The people that we were dealing with were long time Department of Commerce personnel who had a lot of experience working with the State Department. Many had been on loan to State, serving in Washington and also overseas. They knew were all the skeletons were buried. One of the persons that I was negotiating with was on the assignment panel that had sent me to Berlin. He probably was seconded to State at that time, but he was still a Department of Commerce employee.

Q: Okay, anything else about that or anything else for your period of management operations, MMO?

OLSON: MMO. Don't believe so.

Q: Okay, that was from '79-'82 and your last child graduated from high school.

OLSON: You are right.

Q: And where did you go after that?

OLSON: Then I was assigned as economic counselor at the American Embassy in Quito.

Q: Economic counselor and not economic and commercial counselor?

OLSON: Economic counselor, period. We had a brand new foreign commercial service officer, straight out of the business world, never worked in the government, a bit of a loose cannon who didn't want much to do with the embassy. The concept of a country team was very foreign to him. He immediately managed to establish a presence not in the embassy chancery, but instead took offices elsewhere. He didn't get into trouble, but we would occasionally have to step in to help smooth over some of his problems.

Q: Were you nominally supervising him or was he reporting directly to…

OLSON: Certainly not. He was technically reporting to the ambassador but he didn't think much of that idea either. As far as he was concerned, he was reporting to the Department of Commerce, period.

Q: However you reported to the ambassador through the DCM, right?

OLSON: Right.

Q: Did you have others working with you? Or were you pretty much on your own?

OLSON: Yes, I had three others. A pretty small operation; we were decreasing in numbers at that point. Ambassador Gonzalez had been my DCM in Panama.

Q: Ray Gonzalez?

OLSON: Yes, Ray Gonzalez. He was involved in my assignment there, but then had departed before I arrived. It was a long time before we got a new ambassador, who had come into the foreign service about the same time…

Q: Is that Sam Hart?

OLSON: Sam Hart. Right.

Q: He went to the economic course with me.

OLSON: In '66. Yes. So there was this long interval when the DCM, John Youle, was Chargé d'Affaires. The political counselor and I alternated as Acting Deputy Chief of Mission for a while. This was the early '80's, the time of the economic melt down in Latin America, with problems of heavy foreign debt. This certainly affected Ecuador, and

we were concerned about the economic viability of the country. This concern was shared by the appropriate government ministers, who turned to the U.S. for help. One group that was trying to get a handle on the problems was the Council of the Americas, which sent a team of economists and financiers on a tour of Latin America. The problem really began when Mexico had problems in taking care of its foreign debt. Then there was a realization that foreign banks had been pushing 'easy loans' on Latin American nations for too long, loans which they could no longer service.

Q: The Council of the Americas, that's a private sector group?

OLSON: Yes, private sector. David Rockefeller, who was head of the Council, came down with the team. Bob Hormats was also with the group. I think he was already with Goldman-Sachs.

Q: He had already left the State Department?

OLSON: I believe so. He was working on his PhD at Fletcher the year I was there. That was a very effective team that was trying to raise awareness of the seriousness of this debt problem, among Latin American governments, in Washington, and with financial institutions.

Q: Ecuador, besides its debt and financial problems, one always thinks of bananas. Was that a major issue for you?

OLSON: That was not an issue in the sense that it had been in Panama because the American involvement was nil. Ecuador is the exception among banana exporting countries. The plantations are owned by Ecuadorians, so we had no problems involving the embassy.

Q: How about tourism?

OLSON: Tourism was very important, and they were beginning to develop better facilities. The Galapagos Islands were very popular, and the country was beginning to exploit the eastern region, the jungle. The Flotel--they had a floating hotel out in the middle of the jungle that they were publicizing. And at that at time they still had a very special adventure, the rail tour between Quito and Guayaquil on an old narrow gauge line. It was later damaged by an earthquake and landslides. We had a wonderful time exploring Ecuador. It developed historically as almost two countries. 'La Costa,' Guayaquil in the coastal areas, and then 'La Sierra,' the mountains, with Quito.

Q: And the eastern regions?

OLSON: A third part, 'El Oriente.' The eastern part is Amazonian.

Q: It is almost a third. Because the Amazon does come into Ecuador doesn't it, or starting in Ecuador?

OLSON: According to the Ecuadorians, yes—actually Ecuador now only has tributaries of the Amazon. The river was discovered from Ecuador, from the west apparently before anyone had found the mouth of it. Every sheet of government stationery in Ecuador at that time was imprinted with the phrase, "Equador Es un Pais Amazona" (Ecuador is an Amazonian Country). They lost their real claim to the Amazon to the Peruvians years ago, and that remains a very sore point with the Ecuadorians. It is the reason it has been so difficult to finally come up with a border settlement with Peru, a dispute that dates back to World War II. The eastern region is a particularly important part of the county, not so much for tourism as for the petroleum. Texaco was the major exploiter there. We were very involved in trying to protect the interests of an American company and making sure it was not being discriminated against. Also, by that time the oil pipeline carrying crude over the Andes was inadequate, with the definite need for either increasing its capacity or building a new pipeline. Texaco was beginning to negotiate as to who would do that and how.

Q: Where did the pipeline go? From where to where?

OLSON: From the jungle to a small port on the Pacific.

Q: In Ecuador?

OLSON: In Ecuador, yes. More or less a straight line, east-west, to the Pacific.

Q: So it would have been south of Guayaquil?

OLSON: No, it was north of Guayaquil.

Q: Were you involved in Civil Aviation?

OLSON: Yes.

Q: '82-'84, economic counselor, Quito, talking civil aviation.

OLSON: Yes, not that there were problems, but I happened to be there during the periodic renegotiation of the air rights agreement with Ecuador. That gave me some insight as to how the people from FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) and from State's Office of Aviation Affairs operated. I sat in on the discussions. As I recall, we were able to extend or complete a civil aviation agreement.

Q: How about aid development assistance. Were you involved in that?

OLSON: That was very important, as we had a good-sized AID Mission. We worked very closely with the AID folks.

Q: Peace Corps?

OLSON: The Peace Corps also had a good-sized contingent. I had a lot of contact with the supervisory staff and got to know a lot of the volunteers out in the field. I always looked forward to talking to them when they returned to Quito because they had good insights as to what was going on in the countryside, economically and otherwise.

Q: I know some other countries are active, or were active in Ecuador over the years. I think Japan, Switzerland. Did you do much reporting on what others were doing? I know AID does its own economic analysis and may get some advice from you, and you may look at some of their macro-economic work. But how about other countries. Did you do reporting on that much?

OLSON: No, I think Ecuador was still a little bit in the back water so that there was not that much attention paid by many countries. I'm sure there was some interest on the part of European countries, but not that much of a presence at the time. The Japanese were interested commercially. In addition to bananas, one thing that was developing very rapidly beginning at the time that we were there was shrimp farming.

Q: The what?

OLSON: Shrimp farming in ponds. It was not too long until imports of shrimp into the United States from Ecuador were second in value only to imports from Mexico.

Q: Was there American investment in shrimp?

OLSON: There was American investment and some Japanese interest as well, as I recall. Also, just beginning, Ecuador entered into the flower business, cut flower exports to the U.S. This was an enterprise in which the Columbians had a monopoly for some time.

Q: How about ocean fishing. Was that a problem in terms of U.S. fishing boats? .

OLSON: Yes, particularly on the restrictions that we were trying to negotiate on tuna fishing. Ecuador was threatened with having its tuna prohibited from entry into the United States until its tuna boats could get certified that they used dolphin free and sea turtle free fishing techniques.

Q: Even in those days?

OLSON: That was a beginning problem back then as I recall.

Q: This is not an economic section question, but to what extent was security, the threat of terrorism, a factor that you thought about much in those days? '82-'84.

OLSON: It was beginning to be a problem and something we focused on. One of my duties was to chair the embassy narcotics group. We had DEA (Drug Enforcement Agency) people at work in the country. One question that I often asked of Ecuadorians

that I met for the first time was why does Ecuador exist as this peaceful oasis, with few security problems, few drug problems, while located between Peru and Columbia, where these problems are rampant. The three countries have a common heritage, a common history, common geography. How is this possible? And I never got an adequate explanation. Each would be different from the one I heard before. Most would point out that there were in fact significant historical, tribal differences dating back to the Incas. Some would simply attribute to luck the lack of civil strife, the guerilla upheavals that both Peru and Columbia suffered. But Ecuador was developing into a very important transit corridor for drugs, with very little grown in the country and relatively very little use of drugs back in those days. I think it has become worse since. Then Ecuador really was more peaceful than its neighbors, and probably more peaceful than it is now. Although I think it is still better off now than its neighbors to the north or south.

Q: You mentioned transit did take place. What, mostly by air?

OLSON: Air, truck. I guess by sea, although boats would not necessarily have to stop in Ecuador unless they were very small. There was a lot of truck traffic on the Pan American Highway from south to north, and that was a problem.

Q: Did you travel a lot in the country? From my very brief experience in Ecuador, I didn't get to Quito, but I was in Guayaquil on the way to and from the Galapagos earlier this year. My sense is that Guayaquil is a very big bustling, mostly commercial city, probably a financial center.

OLSON: Exactly, it is…

Q: Did you go there often?

OLSON: I did, I went there more often than anyone else at the embassy, and enjoyed it. It was important to cultivate and keep contacts there in business and banking, also at an important economic think tank. Also we arrived in Guayaquil before we got to Quito. Once again we traveled from New Orleans on a Lykes Lines freighter, landing first in Manta, Ecuador, where they make the real Panama hats, and then departing ship in Guayaquil. And once again visiting a former post along the way, as we passed through the Panama Canal. Let's see, this was four years after the treaty came into effect, and we were already turning facilities in the old canal zone over to the Panamanians. I recall as we rode by taxi from the ship's dock in Balboa into Panama City, the driver, observing that we were American, berated us for having "given the canal to us Panamanians. Just look at how everything is going to rack and ruin." Admittedly some of the buildings were already looking a bit shabby. But Panama has done a good job subsequently of running the canal.

I earlier stated that Ecuador almost seemed like two different countries. This quaint little narrow gauge railroad through the mountains that I mentioned was just about the only link connecting the two regions, coast and mountains, Guayaquil and Quito, from its construction early in the 20th century until after World War II. There was almost no air

service within the country until after the war, nor any roads you could call a passable highway. So interchange between the two parts was difficult. Now transportation and communications are easy enough, but the differences remain. The commercial and financial center is still Guayaquil; the administrative, bureaucratic center is Quito. More importantly the mindset of the people living in the Sierra and on the coast is different. Politically they are often on opposite sides. Folks in Quito tend to look down on their cousins in Guayaquil. And a little bit of that washed over into the Embassy, so I didn't have much competition in visiting Guayaquil.

Q: Now we've had a consulate general there for a long time, and it is still there?

OLSON: Right, yes.

Q: Did they do some economic reporting through you? Did they encourage you to come and develop contacts?

OLSON: Yes, both. We had a good working relationship, and the consul general was particularly interested in the economy. He did not have anyone assigned to do other than consular work.

Q: Was Guayaquil an important port?

OLSON: It was important for Ecuador, the stop for freighters like the one that brought us there.

Q: Were there U.S. Navy visits?

OLSON: Perhaps so occasionally, but that was the consulates business.

Q: Okay, is there anything else we should talk about?

OLSON: Maybe a bit more on the pleasures of traveling in the country. We did visit the Galapagos, as you know, a unique experience. We enjoyed taking visitors to the well known indigenous market at Otavalo. We 'cruised' by dugout canoe for four hours down and five hours back on the Napo River, a tributary of the Amazon. Our destination was the Hotel Anaconda—completely rustic, no electricity, overnight in a thatched hut, run by teenagers. Unfortunately they had on prominent display a caged specimen of the place's namesake. Pat really hates snakes. She flew to Lima, Peru, for consultations at our embassy during the year she was Quito's Family Liaison Officer. I got to go along and can say I literally flew—we were in the Air Force Attaché's plane and I took over the wheel for a minute or so high above the beautiful Andes. Of course we took advantage of an opportunity to go on to Cuzco and Machu Picchu.

Q: What happened after Quito?

OLSON: I reached time in class and took retirement. During my first year in retirement, I fell into an opportunity at the Smithsonian Institution. It had a small international affairs office with three staffers, two of whom are ex-FSOs. The third member of the group took a sabbatical, which I heard about it through some of my MAB connections at the Smithsonian. I applied to replace this gentleman, which I did for a year. Unfortunately, he came back.

Q: You had a good thing going.

OLSON: Exactly. So that was an interesting beginning to retirement. The Smithsonian has very active relations with foreign museums around the world. They have, of course, a presence in Panama, in what was the Canal Zone.

Q: Any other places in the world?

OLSON: I'm not sure the Smithsonian is actually located any place else. They have an awful lot of official foreign visitors, and they have exchanges of exhibits to negotiate with foreign museums. It was an interesting time. Our office was in the top of the turret at the northwest corner of the old Arts and Industry Building next to the Smithsonian Castle, a walk-up!

After that, I started part time doing freedom of information review, declassification work at State. I also signed on with a company called Business Environment Research Information, BERI, which did country risk assessments on countries all over the world, information meant to help someone interested in investing in or doing business with a particular country. So I covered several Latin American countries and Spain for them, something that required me to keep up with what was going on in Latin America. In those days before the internet, I found the State Department library especially helpful, plus contacts at the IMF, the Inter-American Development Bank, and State desk officers. I'm still doing the declassification work at State part time.

Q: Okay, thank you, Oscar, and you organized the 40th gathering of our foreign service class in '97. We will have to do another one in three years.

OLSON: Yes, I will look forward to that.

Q: Well, thank you very much. I think this is the end of this. Good.

OLSON: Thanks.

End of interview