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IRWIN PERNICK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ambassador Leonard Unger
Vietnamese presence

State Department: Office of Political Military Affairs 1971-1973
Under Secretary Curtis Tarr
Personnel
Vietnam

State Department; Press Office 1973-1975
Secretary of State William Rogers
Press Spokesman Charlie Brea
Henry Kissinger
Briefing of Congressional wives
Operations

State Department: FSI; Yugoslav language studies 1975-1976

Belgrade Yugoslavia: Deputy Chief Political Officer 1976-1978
Belgrade Conference (Helsinki follow-up)
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)
U.S. Ambassadors
Human Rights
Government
Ethnic and religious problems

State Department; Political and Military Affairs 1978-1980
Office of Security Assistance and Sales
Arms transfers
Policy Statement PD 13
Congressional interest

State Department: Political and Military Affairs, Security 1980-1982
Office of Assistance Special Projects
Conventional Arms Transfer Talks (CATT)
Policies of Presidents Carter and Reagan
Congressional interest

State Department: Bureau of Public Affairs, Deputy Director, 1982-1984
Office of Opinion and Analysis
Polling
Monitoring newspapers
Operations
Public diplomacy strategy
Relations with USIA
Secretary of State George Schultz

White House interest

State Department: Office of the Undersecretary of State for Security Assistance, Science and Technology — 1984-1989
- Counselor Edward J. Derwinski
- Northwest Passage negotiations
- Fishing
- Worldwide programs
- Cyprus
- Greek lobby

Retirement — 1989
- Counselor to the Undersecretary for Veteran Affairs
- Worldwide issues
- Law school

INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview has not been edited by Mr. Pernick]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs oral history interview with Irwin Pernick. It is being conducted on the ninth of July 1997 at the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center. I am Raymond Ewing. Raymond you came into the Foreign Service in 1963. I cannot tell from your brief resume where you went to school or how you got interested in the Foreign Service. Is this something that happened in school, in the army or somewhere else?

PERNICK: My interest began long before the army in fact probable in high school. I was born and raised in Brooklyn and I think there were family expectations that I become skilled in some profession, plumbing or electricity. Having decided that this made sense I went to an excellent school called Brooklyn Technical High School. I was preparing to become an engineer. Then I entered CCNY.

At the same time I vaguely recall having developed an interest in things oversees, in both world and American history, and other social studies subjects and issues. I recall my father, who passed away when I was nine, having been born in Russia and coming to this country as an immigrant, telling me only once about someone at an American consulate who impressed him with his knowledge of the particular language. It turns out, strangely enough, that my father and his family from Russia, somehow had migrated to Argentina. I suspect that the consul was a Spanish-speaking consul in Buenos Aires. I did not know any of this about my father until after he passed away. Nonetheless, there was a bug there. This plus the interest in seeing the world and learning a lot more about it first hand and my inability to overcome calculus in college led me to the Foreign Service.

Q: Calculus is essential for engineering.

PERNICK: It is absolutely essential. I suspect though that the pressure was off when I decided I had enough of calculus. If I were to build a bridge, who would stand on it? Electricity was dangerous and you could get hurt. I pretty quickly decided I was interested in something called diplomacy. I had read some books by that time and I had a vague inkling as to what it was all about, but not a great deal. I felt it was necessary make a transfer from one college to another. I transferred from engineering to a major that they had at CCNY called international relations. There were not many people in it but I was moved by the fact that the professors were interesting and they were interested in pushing people along. That is where my interest came from

Q: Did you take the Foreign Service written exam while you were still at CCNY?

PERNICK: I took the Foreign Service written exam a few weeks before my graduation. That was in December 1960, then I graduated in January. It is a long story but I went to a technical high school and had to extend six months in high school. I knew that if I passed, and I was fairly confident, there were be an oral exam and that would not come up for six months. So, I did several things. I explored possibilities in the army and applied to graduate school for the September semester. I took a job in the New York City Department of Welfare as a social investigator, which I had for about a year, while also in graduate school.

Q: You started graduate school the following September?

PERNICK: I started graduate school in September.

Q: CCNY?

PERNICK: No. New York University. I applied to a number of schools. I was accepted to all but none of them offered me any money. Coming from the rather humble background that I did I needed some support in school. Ironically the day before the oral exam, the summer of 1961, I was home studying. I was in the bathtub reading an atlas, trying to figure out how to get from one place to another and I received a phone call from the University of Florida. They had accepted me but they had said nothing about money. Now they were offering me a fellowship. I told them I would get back to them the next day.

Q: After the oral exam?

PERNICK: After knowing something about the oral, exactly.

Q: Let me back up. When did your father immigrate to the United States from Argentina?

PERNICK: It was Argentina and I did not even know that until after he died. We never

talked about that. It was very strange.

Q: Was it when he was a young man?

PERNICK: He must have been a young man because there are pictures of him as a young adult looking very dashing. The pictures have Spanish captions. I knew nothing about it. I did not explore it with my mother very much. She was born in Poland and she also immigrated here about the same time, in the early to late 1920s.

Q: And they met in New York?

PERNICK: They met and married in New York and had two children, my sister and I.

Q: So you passed the oral.

PERNICK: I did.

Q: This would have been 1960?

PERNICK: The summer of 1961. I took it at the U.S. mission to the UN. There are things about that you do not forget about the test. Like some of the questions. Or when I got out of the oral feeling terribly nervous. I should have felt more relaxed and there was a very relaxed looking gentleman about to be examined and I thought, Oh, God, he is going to make it and I am dead.

Q: You saw him after or before?

PERNICK: I saw him after I took the exam but before they told me the results. They tell you the results shortly after you take the exam. They said it was close but I had a lot of facts at my disposal.

Q: But you did not come into the Foreign Service immediately? It looks like you did do some active duty with the army.

PERNICK: Yes. We were all draft eligible and I decided that I would go into the service in some capacity and I joined the National Guard. Subsequently that would not have kept me out of the regular army or active duty. I was in the army for six months. I joined the National Guard. I let the department know at ever stage where I was. They of course, after the oral, had to undertake the security exam and I had a physical as well. When I was about to finish my active duty I was visited at Fort Dix but State Department security people who were finishing up the security exam. They told me that things looked good and I was very happy.

Q: So when did you actually enter duty with the Foreign Service?

PERNICK: Before the commissioning it was April 1963. Subsequent to the A-100 I had a month of details around the department. One in Intelligence and Research which I found most peculiar. They found me peculiar too because they had never had a Foreign Service officer assigned to that department. It was something called external relations. Even though I had a security clearance by then, they did a lot of unclassified summaries of foreign affairs literature.

Q: Academic?

PERNICK: Academic, exactly. I did that for three or four weeks before my A-100 class began.

Q: Did you have language training before you went to your first post?

PERNICK: I did indeed. Thank God.

Q: You did not have a language.

PERNICK: No, I did not. You would imagine someone who studied French for two years in junior high school, for two years in high school, for several years in college and taken a French exam for graduate exams would know the language but I still could not speak a word. I was zero plus when I entered. Two plus in reading, however. They had asked me where I wanted to go and I think number one was a French speaking post. I never assumed Paris or anywhere on the European continent. I also asked to go to East Africa because I had done some work in college on Ethiopia. I was interested in GTI, the old GTI (Office of Greek, Turkish, Iranian Affairs).

Q: It looks like you ended up in Rome.

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: Did you have Italian?

PERNICK: They gave me four months of Italian. It was wonderful. Absolutely wonderful. In part because I met my soon to be wife between the A-100 course and the Italian language course. She was working on the hill for a Senator from Colorado and I was assigned to his office for a two-week period. It is sort of semi romantic because I was sitting in her seat for a week and a half. Then I showed up one morning and there was a wonderful looking redheaded lady sitting in my seat and I thought what is she doing in my seat? So we courted for the next three or four months while I was studying Italian and taking the consular course and she agreed to go to Rome with me.

Q: That is a good place to go.

PERNICK: It is a good place to go.

Q: So you honeymooned at your first post. I took my bride to Vienna. The people at our wedding were more excited about her going to Vienna then about our marriage. In Rome you rotated around the different sections. Was there anything particularly unique about your time there?

PERNICK: The first six months in the Foreign Service were in the economic section in Rome. This was the first official assignment, setting aside the I and R and the external relations and the Italian desk for two weeks and the congressional relations. It was difficult because my Italian was not as good as I would have liked it to be. I spent more time trying to court this lovely redhead than studying Italian.

Q: Four months is not very long.

PERNICK: It was not. They could get you to say hello, good morning and where is the bathroom? I started Italian there. There was a very top-notch group of people in the economic section. I was very impressed with the size of it too because it was not just a bunch of economic officers. Gene Wilkowski was the deputy. Sidney Mellon was the Counselor for Economic Affairs. These were brilliant people who knew economics cold and who knew Italian cold and I felt like a moron. Treasury was represented, Commerce was represented, I think the FBI had an agent in the section. Maritime administration. A whole group of different agencies and this really opened my eyes to a little about the Foreign Service. Especially that we work with a panoply of agencies that have foreign affairs interests.

Q: I was assigned to Rome about five or six years after you were there in the economic section and some of the same people, like Gene Wilkowski, came back again. I also worked with the Treasury Attaché, Ralph Korp.

PERNICK: I don't think he was there.

Q: I don't think he had come as early as this. He was really a super, experienced officer.

PERNICK: The next part of the rotation was the more interesting part for me. It was political work that I had for about nine months.

Q: What sort of political work were you doing?

PERNICK: Domestic and something called Pol/Mil. I had no idea what Pol/Mil was but I guess they thought since I had been in the army just a short while before maybe I knew something. I did not really do too much in Pol/Mil because there was a NATO person in the section as well as the attaches who were very interested and close to the Italian armed services. I thought things were happening. There weren't any coups or anything like that. The head of the Italian communist party died while I was there and I covered his funeral. This was a monstrous funeral to which half a million to a million people attended.

Q: Palmiro Togliatti?

PERNICK: Togliatti, exactly. He died when he got to the Soviet Union. He died in Moscow, I believe, and they sent him back and I was sent down to cover the funeral.

Q: You were probably the junior most political officer?

PERNICK: Yes, that I was. I was a show off in the embassy and I walked down that morning and I hooked on with a bunch of students who were about my age and we were sitting around yapping. Suddenly the entourage showed up and the casket was pulled out and put on this platform and all the right hands went up. I looked around and thought I was the only one without his right hand up in the air. I must be the only one not a member of the Italian communist party. It was very interesting to see that. There were events like that, which gave me my first experience in being a control officer. There were a lot of visitors. Rome seems to of interest. Not for the politics necessarily.

Q: Were you involved in any of the external politics like dealing with the foreign ministry or the Vatican?

PERNICK: Occasionally. I mostly did very junior officer type functions like taking visitors over to the Vatican. I was Arthur Goldberg's control officer, for example, when he was on the Supreme Court. One of his interests was the Pope. The Pope invited him for a visit and of course I was excluded even though I took him all the way out to the Pope's summer retreat outside of Rome. It was interesting seeing Goldberg. I had him again ten years later in Yugoslavia under different circumstances. I delivered messages for the foreign ministry. I was never with the ambassador or the political counselor as a note taker but I did some reporting. It was very interesting though and I enjoyed it and thought that this is what I really wanted to do.

Q: Rotational assignments to a large embassy really give you an opportunity to see the range of Foreign Service work. You can't necessarily contribute much but you begin to understand what it is all about. I hope that rotational assignments will continue.

PERNICK: They should and junior officers should be sent. The one thing I must admit is that several things early in my career made a big impression on me. Going back to my economic time when Tony Cromo was my boss. He was the head of internal economics. During my first pay period in Rome the secretary had, for some reason, given me some comp time even though I hadn't asked for it. She pointed out that I had worked a few extra hours several days. I said that I didn't know that we had it. Well, Tony Cromo came screaming out of his office awhile later. "Irwin!" "Yes sir, I replied". "Foreign Service Officers, Irwin, are on duty 24 hours a day seven days a week. We do not earn comp time, we do not earn overtime". I said, "Fine, Tony". So I had some comp time on my card for the next ten or fifteen years because I never drew against it. The impression he made though was clear. When you are working overseas, even when you are at home, you are

on duty all of the time. I find it a little different from my present position. I am now with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The people there are very tied to the notion of nine to five and it is very disappointing. Even the younger people. I try to disabuse them of that but I don't have any legal standing because the law supports the notion that all you have to do us show up and work 30 or 40 hours a week and you get paid.

Q: On the other hand maybe we have overdone it over the years. We assumed that working overtime and Saturdays was normal and it was hard on our families.

PERNICK: Absolutely. No question about it. The jobs I had usual required Saturday work. I had to show up and read cables in the embassy or in the department. Being on duty meant that I would have a whole week blocked out to the exclusion of nearly everything else. Occasionally I worked Sundays and holidays. Still, I thought that if you worked for the State Department, the Federal government, you were really a career Foreign Service officer or civil servant and you were honored by having been selected for this job and so you should take it seriously.

Q: Before you left Rome it looks like you did some consular work. Visas I suppose?

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: That is an important early experience.

PERNICK: I think there were three sections of the consular section. Visas and passports and consular services or welfare. As you can imagine in Rome there was a lot of American citizen services. Rome is not an immigrant visa issuing post so we were suspicious and we were instructed to be suspicious of everyone who walked in there. Everybody. It was hard to be that suspicious. Someone like myself who came from two immigrant parents thought that anyone who wanted to go deserved a pat on the back but obviously could not be allowed to go. It was difficult. The authority that the consul has can not even be overcome by the Secretary. Well, I suppose it can.

Q: Certainly not by the ambassador.

PERNICK: No, not by the ambassador, indeed. It never came to that, fortunately. I never felt that kind of pressure from any of my supervisors in that particular job. They were always supportive. From time to time I would get notices that would say, hey jerk, the non-immigrant visa you have issued is now being flipped to immigrant status. Oh, shoot. You knew they had that in mind the whole time and they were defrauding the U.S. government. On the passport side you just checked up on people who lost their passports. There was one particular experience that was disturbing. A young American kid came into the embassy. He was in his early twenties and this was at the beginning of Vietnam noise back in the United States. It was hard to get an appreciation for that even reading what we did as there wasn't very television coverage of the world locally. He came in and wanted to denounce his American citizenship and I was really distressed by that. We tried

to work with him and tried to council him but he did not want anything out of it. He said he was entitled to someone else's citizenship. One of his parents was not a native or American. We filled some stuff out that basically said this man was renouncing his citizenship. It was really distressing to me and he said it was the fault of the US government and the actions of the government that drove him in that direction. I couldn't believe it. I found it very hard.

Q: Subsequent Supreme Court decisions probably made that very difficult to do. I don't suppose you know what ever happened to him?

PERNICK: No, I don't.

Q: It is possible he could have gotten it back at some point.

PERNICK: Oh, I think so. My two children were born overseas. Their original birth certificates state they are Italian and Thai, respectively. Those countries probably have some legal claim.

Q: But they also have American citizenship?

PERNICK: Yes, indeed.

Q: After Rome you went to Thailand. That was a different direction. How much training did you have for that and what did you do there? It looks like you were detailed to USIA.

PERNICK: That was about the time of the build up of US and diplomatic forces and interests in South East Asia and I recall a telegram sent around the world asking for volunteers to be assigned in South East Asia and perhaps some other agency. I did not know what my prospects were in my current assignment. I discussed it with my wife. I did not know what was going on. It could be Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, anything. She said sure, why not. I was assigned to Thailand. I found out later that it was likely I would be assigned to the US Information Agency. I only knew a little bit about it from my contacts in Rome. I studied Thai for ten months. It came out much better than my Italian. I had another month of intense area studies including Vietnam. Then I went to Bangkok. I did not know where I was going in Bangkok or what I would be doing. I was just to show up and report to the US Information Service Office for my assignment. Once I arrived they said that I would be a Branch Public Affairs Officer. They had about five USIS posts and were planning to open several more in the next few months. The likelihood was that I was going to get one of those. I had no idea if it would be in the northeast or in the south. I was pleased that it turned out to be a very obscure place in mid-south Thailand where we spent over two years.

Q: This area was subject to insurgency?

PERNICK: Well, the Thai government was a little concerned about the political situation.

There is a Thai communist party, which was a covert party. They were making noises in the northeast because of the activities in Laos. Also, in the north and to a lesser extent in the south. The south is divided into two regions. The southern border has a high Malay speaking and Islamic population in the mid-south. I was assigned to the mid-southern where there was some concern about communists from Burma coming in. The program was basically a counter-insurgency PSYOPS program. It was not a traditional USIS program. We had a little library. It wasn't a flashy program of any sort. We did some facilitating for American Field Service for scholarships but it was all put together using Thai language materials. It included films and publications, handouts and posters. We worked with Thai government officials to get them into the villages. We had three or four jeeps. There was only one American man. I had four or five Thai local employees and they were very good. I had two provinces, each with a governor. I would call the governors frequently along with the local village chiefs and encourage them to go into the villages to show the people what the Thai government was doing for them in the areas of security and development. It was very simple.

Q: You had aids to do that. Films and posters.

PERNICK: We would go to some very obscure villages. I would go as often as possible. I found it very eye opening. I had never slept in a Thai village before or in a Buddhist temple or somebody's back yard. It helped me with my language and with the appreciation and knowledge of the culture.

Q: You were the only American in this provincial place?

PERNICK: No. There were two CIA people but they were in different programs. One was working with the police and the other with intelligence. Neither of them spoke Thai so I often worked for them doing a little translating. The first couple that was there had no Thai at all. They had been there about six months. When we showed up the first thing that they asked us was if we played bridge. I don't play bridge; I play gin rummy and poker. About the third dinner they invited us to they said we are teaching you and they sat us down and forced us to play bridge. So we played a lot of bridge for the next many years. There was also a Thai military base outside of town. There were two or three military advisors on the base.

Q: US?

PERNICK: US, exactly. None had families. An incoming person found out that there was an incoming family with children so he brought his wife and children down instead of leaving them in Bangkok and that was nice. My kids were perfectly comfortable with everything that was going on locally. They didn't have to have Americans involved.

Q: Did they go to school there?

PERNICK: Well, my son was born in 1967 and we were there only until 1969. My

daughter was a little older. She started going to the local Thai kindergarten before she was three because she has some friends and was very precocious at the time. My wife was invited to bring her down because she was teaching English at the time and knew some of the teachers. She was so open and interested and her Thai was excellent so they said to bring her back all of the time and let her go to school.

Q: Now, did she go to the Thai language training at the Foreign Service Institute?

PERNICK: My wife did but only for three months.

Q: So she had at least a start?

PERNICK: Oh, yes.

Q: Irwin, how would you assess 30 years later or so this period from 1966 to 1969? For you personally it was a very unique and special experience. How would you rate it in terms of US government? This is the sort of thing we don't do anymore, to have people off in the provinces. It was kind of a special situation in South East Asia at that time.

PERNICK: Very much so. It was clear that we were there, helping and encouraging the Thai government to do its job. A lot of people recognized this. That part of the program at the time I was sorry to see. That aspect was killed almost as soon as I left. It had nothing to do with me. By the time that I left (Thai name) there were 13 branch posts around the country. Most of them were closed in the next two or three years. My successor who was a traditional USIA person was very happy to learn that the whole aspect of the position was going to be done away with. I think we probably did a little more than we should have. Our work with the Thai government probably could have been subtler. Too often I got a lot of credit that I often didn't deserve. I would go into villages where I had not been for six months or a year and people recognized me. I enjoyed that and it certainly helped me with my language. Professionally, for myself it was an excellent assignment. Very unique. There were only four State FSO's who were given those posts. Do you know Jim Wilkinson?

Q: Sure.

PERNICK: Jim studied Thai language three months after I did. There were quite a few of us who became close. He was in the same region as I was but further south. It was a place, I think, called Songkhla. It had a little more to it like a golf course. Well, I had one too but it wasn't the same.

Q: Songkhla was, I think, a consulate.

PERNICK: Exactly, a Consular was opened shortly after. John Kelly was Consular down there. It's a very important city in the south. The place I was in was really out of the way. There are parts of that region that have become big tourist sites. I see it in the New York

Times travel section all the time. I was there when they didn't have enough rice and you had to paddle overnight to get there.

Q: The world has changed.

PERNICK: The world has changed indeed.

Q: Did you do much reporting? Was the embassy interested in what was going on in your area?

PERNICK: I had the feeling that the embassy was only partially interested. We reported to the field operations office in USIA. I actually had to report on just about every trip that I took, in detail. This village, how many houses are in it. We gave a lot of detail they probably didn't need. This is how many pigs are in the village. Where the nearest store was.

Q: I assume they were very interested in whether people were coming in from Burma. Infiltrating?

PERNICK: Yes, but I didn't have access to that type of information because the two agency types had pretty good contacts and they had more money and were able to use it better. I did not have much except my jeeps. The embassy did comment on an election. A national election, which was really surprising because they don't have too many elections in Thailand. There were a lot of coups and changes in government. I wrote a very comprehensive report on the electoral process in these two provinces and someone from the embassy political section about a year later told me it was very interesting. It was an air-gram or an operations memorandum. I couldn't write classified stuff since I didn't have classified capability. In order to talk to Bangkok I would have to make an appointment with the local radio/telegraph office for the next day. I couldn't pick up the phone and call anybody in Bangkok. I had very little access and no access to anything secure. I couldn't depend on gift bags, which came through. They weren't secure as Thais carried them.

Q: I have thought about what is the most remote place Foreign Service people have served and I thought maybe Australia in terms of distance from Washington. In terms of the facility and ability to communicate I would think that mid-south Thailand was very remote.

PERNICK: Absolutely. Knowing it would be remote the first thing I did, before my family came, was to make sure to meet all five doctors in the area. We were friends with the doctors. Then I visited the governor.

Q: Your son was born in this place?

PERNICK: He was born in Bangkok. There was a military hospital.

Q: Okay, why don't you say very slowly the name of this place that we have been talking about?

PERNICK: Thai is a tonal language. It has to be pronounced very carefully. It is Nakhon Si Thammarat.

Q: Nakhon Si Thammarat.

PERNICK: It means roughly the city of good morals and ethics. There is a very famous Buddhist temple in the city but people don't visit it anymore. There is a museum attached to it with very little light and you could hardly see any of the artifacts. I liked to go anyway because the curator was a nice old guy.

Q: How big was the city at that time?

PERNICK: The city had forty thousand inhabitants. It was long and thin. I suspect it is not much bigger now. The regions around it have grown but not this particular city.

Q: It is not on the coast?

PERNICK: It is not far from the coast. Perhaps a thirty-minute drive from the coast.

Q: Okay, after Nakhon Si Thammarat…

PERNICK: Very good.

Q: After that you stayed in the country and went to Bangkok, after home leave, I suppose?

PERNICK: Right.

Q: What did you do there? You were in the Political Military section?

PERNICK: I was in a very large Political Military section. I think Bangkok was the second largest embassy we had in the world, after Vietnam.

Q: This was 1969 to 1971?

PERNICK: Yes, 1969 to 1971. The Pol/Mil section had nine people in it. This was all officers, not including the secretaries. We had three military officers on detail. One of the major roles of the section was to act as a liaison with the Thai military. The purpose was to let the Thai government know what we were doing with Thai bases as far as Vietnam was concerned. Ambassador Unger took that responsibility very seriously. He wanted to make sure that in no way would our relations with the Thai government be compromised

and in no way would they have an excuse to force us to diminish our use of the bases, which were very crucial in terms of Vietnam. I know there were at least three maybe four air bases plus the naval capabilities in addition to other things going on that I never learned about. I do recall one interesting thing. I suppose it is declassified now. Once a day we would get a very classified cable from Saigon. This would give us the coordinates of the places that were going to be bombed that day by the B-52's based in Thailand. It was the responsibility of the Pol/Mil duty officer, he couldn't go to lunch but had to wait around for that cable, to check it against the maps and send back the ok. This was interesting because on two occasions that I recall the coordinates seemed to be inside of other countries. Specifically, Cambodia, which we weren't authorized to bomb, at least not to our knowledge. Within hours there were generals at the embassy in Thailand pointing out our mistakes or telling us that we had bad maps and then supplying us with new ones. The whole notion of what the US government was doing from Thai bases was very important.

Q: Did you coordinate or discuss some of these things with the Thai government?

PERNICK: I had a different job. I was the eighth man in a nine-man section. I was the SEATO affairs officer, which was a very important job. John Kelly was my predecessor. I didn't know much about the job. I knew a little from my university studies and from having been in the region for almost three years. Why did anyone give a damn about SEATO? It turns out that we took it very seriously. It was our legal justification for being in Vietnam and the need to keep other nations informed about the Vietnam Conflict. So we took SEATO seriously without taking the details seriously. However, somebody created this organization, not just a treaty but an organization, which required some tending.

Q: Were the headquarters of the South East Asia Treaty Organization, SEATO, in Bangkok?

PERNICK: Exactly. There were various groups that met regularly. We even had some Foreign Service types detailed to SEATO. Ambassadors would meet once a month. They were called the council representatives. Under the ambassadors was the permanent working group. I was the deputy working group person. I did all the work. We would meet once a week with the representatives from the other embassies. There was a budget sub-committee looking at the spending habits of this outrageous organization. I was on the committee. There was a ministerial meeting of the councils, which took place once a year. The foreign minister, Mr. Rogers, attended the two I attended when I was in Saigon. There was one in Manila and London.

Q: Were you able to go to those as part of the US delegation?

PERNICK: Well, yes. Only because the desk officers in the department knew that I was the only one that knew everything that was going on. Even though I would be the twenty-first person in twenty-man delegation, which was outrageously large, they still needed

me. At one of the meetings, Ambassador Unger was sitting next to Secretary Rogers and the Chief Military Advisor, Admiral McCain and I was sitting all the way in the back because I wasn't a big shot at all. I was just an FSO six or so. Ambassador Unger would look at me and pull his finger toward him and I would excuse myself and walk up to the front. He pointed to a seat that was occupied by someone important. I think maybe the legal advisor. That person stood up and I sat down and he asked me what was going on and I told him and he then told Rogers and Rogers was able to reply to somebody's question.

Q: It is good to have a little expertise.

PERNICK: Absolutely. This experience taught me about the size of the delegations that we tended to send. I attended one in Manila, one in London, and one in New York the following year. There were just thousands of people.

Q: Were you involved in some interesting issues in SEATO or was it just nuts and bolts and details?

PERNICK: Well, there were interesting issues in the sense that the eight members of SEATO were not a coherent whole, which is not surprising. The French showed up but were not at all interested and thought we were overstepping our bounds. The Pakistani's had long since given up interest in SEATO but still showed up. The Thai and Filipino were pretty close to us because we were providing a fair amount of assistance but we had to be sensitive to their concerns. The Australians and New Zealanders were very good at that time. This was way before the nuclear issue in New Zealand. The Brits were members and the Brits were a pain in the ass. Did they have a Labor government at that time? I can't recall. They may have. They raised all kinds of issues about Vietnam.

Q: OK, you were talking about Secretary Rogers and his relationship with the British foreign secretary.

PERNICK: I was never privy to the closed meetings, the bilaterals, which they had during the SEATO council meetings, but they seemed to get along famously. However, the Brits were often a pain in the ass. I made a lot of friends in the British Embassy. I learned to play squash as a consequence. Still, the issues were that we used the SEATO treaty, not the organization, as justification for being in Vietnam. We also often tried to incorporate the view of the Vietnamese, the South Vietnamese and have Vietnamese present at various meetings. Mostly at the administerial level but also in Bangkok. The Brits usually were not very happy with that.

Q: Because Vietnam was not a member of SEATO?

PERNICK: Right. Although it was covered by the treaty.

Q: Your role with SEATO was to represent the United States and support others who

were doing the same? Not to liaise or deal with the Thais?

PERNICK: Right. My main responsibility was on the Pol/Mil side. I worked with SEATO as well as trying to keep a lot of American soldiers out of jail. That had nothing to do with SEATO. I did liaise with the Thais but really on SEATO issues. The Thais took it very seriously because they were the hosts. The top diplomats were always assigned to be the SEATO liaison. Their ambassador here did SEATO work for awhile.

Q: OK, is there anything else we ought to say about Thailand?

PERNICK: It was lovely place.

Q: We are coming to the end of about a five-year period. Then you came back to Washington and it looks like maybe you did not leave Washington except for official travel?

PERNICK: Well, I had the Yugoslavia assignment. Then I had a lot of domestic assignments.

Q: Your first assignment was where? Political Military?

PERNICK: Political Bureau.

Q: What were you doing?

PERNICK: At that time Congress had authorized the establishment of an Undersecretary for Security Assistance position. I was assigned to an officer to help put together the support for that position. Both in terms of its relationship within the State Department, regional bureaus and functional bureaus and also with the Defense Department and AID and OMB.

Q: And Congress, I suppose?

PERNICK: We didn't do that much with Congress. We all assumed that once named the undersecretary would become our boss and we would be taken out of the bureau. It didn't happen that way. I remember George Newman who was one of my DCM's in Bangkok came back to become the acting undersecretary. He was very good because he had done political military affairs himself. Then a gentleman by the name of Curtis Tarr was nominated and appointment as Under Secretary of Security Assistance. Tarr's interest was in the Pentagon. He had all of these paintings of Air Force planes in his office. He had been the head of the Selective Service System. When he became undersecretary we then got the letter designation for the new Undersecretary for Security Assistance, "T." People don't know that.

Q: T for Tarr.

PERNICK: T for Tarr. Our office remained in PM. Ron Spiers was the Assistant Secretary. I am not sure if he was Assistant Secretary. He may have been director of PM at the time. Tom Pickering was the Deputy Director in charge of Security Assistance. Pickering is absolutely brilliant. I really enjoyed working for him except for the fact that he was always about forty steps ahead. The interesting thing about this office is that it opened my eyes to the notion that it is the State Department that determines or is the prime determinant and advisor to the President on issues of foreign policy, including military and political military issues. It was tough getting that across to the Pentagon. It was tough also getting that across to AID.

Q: Including the level of assistance that should go to one country as opposed to another?

PERNICK: Absolutely. The levels and kinds. There were many major battles. Of course we looked to the other agencies for their knowledge and expertise. We liked to think we made all the decision ourselves, but I don't think that we did all of the time because the Pentagon could always rely on its contact with the White House. AID couldn't. They had another argument.

Q: The feeling that the staff that did all of these things should remain in the Political Bureau was to avoid having too many staffs attached to Under Secretaries?

PERNICK: I am pretty certain that was the reason. By that time we had a mixed staff. We had a few people from DOD. We also had one or two from AID and a few Foreign Service Officers. We had about seven, eight, nine persons on the staff. That would have been too large for an undersecretary. Especially one that was just developing and they had no idea where it would be taken.

Q: Did it have other responsibilities?

PERNICK: It didn't. Security Assistance was prime. It didn't become science and technology until later.

Q: Did you work on East Asia?

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: Because of your experience in the area?

PERNICK: We had a few people doing regional work. East Asia was the biggest thing and obviously Vietnam. I was pleased that I was able to work on that. It involved a lot of interesting work. We tried to anticipate needs, argued for certain programs, writing testimony for the Assistant Secretary or for the Director and even for the Secretary. The last year we starting doing more congressional stuff when it became clear that we had to provide a lot of the bulk of the testimony that the Secretary would give before the

committees on the Hill.

Q: I was involved in some of the Security Assistance programs a little later and certainly the congressional aspect was very important both in terms of testimony but also in providing information and sometimes even negotiating

PERNICK: Yes. We didn't do too much of that but had to, of course, prepare the T document, the congressional presentation document which was the annual budget document.

Q: Anything else you want to say about that assignment?

PERNICK: No, I can't think of anything.

Q: Okay. Then it looks like you moved over to the Press Office.

PERNICK: Absolutely. One of the best assignments I have ever had. I found when I was with USIA that I had an interest in public affairs.

Q: Public diplomacy.

PERNICK: Yes, public diplomacy, but it wasn't called that yet. I was fortunate to get to know Charlie Brea who was the Spokesman at the time; he was the director of S/Press.

Q: The top person in that would be the State Department Spokesman who would work directly with the Secretary.

PERNICK: He was in my car pool for a couple of months and found out that I was looking for a job and he offered me a position and I said absolutely. Besides I could then get a ride with him home. That was really fascinating and eye opening. Fraught with some peril too. The time was 1973 to 1975. The Watergate stuff was beginning to come out. The White House was battening down. Henry Kissinger was still the National Security Advisor. William Rogers was the Secretary. There was one trip that Secretary Rogers was planning to South America and they put a sign up list for press interest. Very few people were interested because it was Latin America and it was Secretary Rogers and everyone knew that foreign policy was being made in the White House by Kissinger. We had to beg some of the networks and the wire services to get some people to go. Shortly after that there were rumors emanating from the White House that President Nixon was losing confidence in Rogers. We had no doubt as to the source of these rumors, nonetheless they were reported. At a certain point Mr. Rogers quit. He just retired. I think he used this word on a tape, "pissed", at what was going on. Charlie Brea did something very courageous. Rogers resigned. Pretty quickly Nixon nominated Kissinger. The Press Office was not a large operation but it was a busy operation. There was a lot going on and we had a very rowdy press core, to become even rowdier when Kissinger came over and people from the White House came over to cover him. Charlie Brea apparently went to

lunch with some representatives from wire services and said, even though he knew the distinctions between on the record off the record, when asked if he would continue to work for Kissinger, that he couldn't work for someone who didn't believe that loyalty was a two way street. That got reported. It was courageous but also very smart. It made everyone look at Kissinger and then he could not can Charlie as fast as he would have liked. Charlie remained around for a respectable amount of time. Bob McCloskey was asked by Kissinger to do some of the Spokesman jobs.

Q: Did he have a lot of press experience?

PERNICK: Bob was ambassador to Cyprus and boy was he lucky.

Q: All of this was after the 1973 Middle East war. There was a lot of shuttle diplomacy going on by Kissinger?

PERNICK: McCloskey came back to do the direct job. He had made an impression on me ten years before in the A-100 group when he spoke to our group. I found him to be a very strange person but I liked him because he was very knowledgeable and very relaxed. Later we became neighbors. Unfortunately I attended his funeral this past year. I really liked him but he was a pain in the ass to work for directly. At the time of the Yom Kippur War he was the principle Spokesman. We all went into the department that day; it was a Saturday. He was scheduled to give a very important press conference. We had a statement that we were given which we had to assemble in forty or fifty copies. We took it up to the OP center and all of their machines were broken. We were running late and he walked in and saw some of us on the floor trying to assemble various pages of this statement. We finished and went downstairs where he proceeded to lambaste us in front of the world press corps, his "crap ass staff" for not being able to get their act together. We were very upset with him. He was good though. When they appointed George Best to become the Spokesperson, McCloskey, I think, became Counselor or some position, which gave him direct access to Kissinger. George was a wonderful man to work for. He was very polite and very smart. I liken him to Pickering except that Pickering was always moving and George was always looking calm. He couldn't take Kissinger for various reasons. After about six months he stepped down. He felt that Kissinger did not trust us in the Press Office. He wanted to do all of the leaking himself. He felt that there were leaks that he had not approved and that we were there to undermine him. George left and I think got a very good position, maybe as Assistant Secretary. Then Kissinger nominated or the Department gave him Bob Anderson, who was in Morocco at the time. I don't want to say anything nasty about the departed. Bob Funseth who was pretty good became the Deputy and went on to become the Spokesperson. At least we had him. We also had John Trattner, who was Spokesman during part of the Carter Administration.

Q: He was with USIA?

PERNICK: Yes. The two incidents I mentioned about Kissinger may sound very petty on my part. On one occasion, however, we got him to agree to give a briefing to

congressional wives. Every wife was invited to Dean Acheson Auditorium. We had prepared all of the briefing materials including all of the hot issues. Kissinger could speak forever without any notes, however. There was a little screw up. He entered and all of these ladies were there. We had not frisked them and we knew that some of them had machines and that some of them were going to tape this great man. Nobody had asked the question about what the rule was. Was this going to be on the record? Of course because all of these wives would go home and tell their husbands and it would get reported. Or was it going to be off the record? When the press learned about the briefing from the open schedule they asked to attend. We talked to someone on the seventh floor that said they didn't want the entire press. So we nominated a few people and tucked them up in the press booth. Kissinger started a very interesting speech and made a comment about how all of the European governments or almost all were illegitimate. He was thinking historically because they all sprang from someone taking charge when they shouldn't or a coup d'etat. At this point, the briefing, which had been fairly boring, started getting exciting because the press pool started making a lot of noise. Kissinger looked up and saw the press for the first time and thought this was a prime example of how we, the Press Office, were out to screw him.

Another time he had been saying for months that he was going to China so we put up a press list in case he decided to go. Bernie Kalb saw the list and he called Marvin Kalb who asked Kissinger when he was going to China and Kissinger thought that we had leaked the story. There are a lot of stories like that. I think his personality is reflected in his reaction to these situations. While he is a great historical figure, sometimes I don't know about him. I enjoyed that particular period, however. One of the jobs I had every morning was getting on the phone with the National Security press person and the Defense Department Press Office and talking over the mutual issues. That was hard as I hated to get up that early.

Q: You had to work with all of the bureaus and prepare press guides?

PERNICK: Absolutely. Or get the bureaus to prepare press guides. It was amazing how much control we had. We could turn the press guides into almost anything and the Spokesman would nearly always read it directly from the guide.

Q: What about the foreign press? Did they have representatives in the pressroom and were they difficult to deal with?

PERNICK: No. They weren't able to indicate their presence as loudly as the Americans, however. I don't remember them being as insistent as the American press, except the Israelis and the one or two Arabs representatives on the Middle East wars. They were not as difficult at the time to control. The Americans always thought they had extra ability to do things.

Q: Did you liaise at all with USIA?

PERNICK: The impression I got was that USIA was happy to be there to pick up the news but they did not want to deal with us. The USIS overnight press person was there on a regular basis as was the Voice of America. They rarely asked questions.

Q: Anything else about this period of 1973-1975.

PERNICK: It was a wonderful job.

Q: From there you went to Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

PERNICK: After a year of language training, which helped as you can imagine, I was the Deputy Chief of the political section in Belgrade. It was not a very large section and there were of different functions outside of the section that we had some responsibility for. This meant some internal reporting. We kept an eye on USIA. I was beginning to prepare for my role as the embassy liaison to the CSCE (Commission of Security and Cooperation in Europe) delegation. CSCE had taken place in Helsinki the year before, 1975. I got to Belgrade in 1976 and the follow up conference to the Helsinki conference was to take place in Belgrade. I think it began in 1977.

Q: The U.S. representative was Arthur Goldberg.

PERNICK: Arthur Goldberg and his deputy was Eagleburger.

Q: Who was the ambassador to Yugoslavia at that time?

PERNICK: That was interesting. When I arrived Judge Laurence Silberman was the ambassador. Ambassador Silberman has a brilliant mind. He was very interested in what was going on. He was always roaming around the embassy. I only overlapped with him about six months but I liked him. He had turned off a lot of people though. He basically forced his DCM to leave. My predecessor, who left on time, had warned me about him. I found he had a fertile mind. He was lawyer and later a judge. He is now on the DC circuit. I see him once in awhile and he doesn't remember me but he says hello anyway. He wife is a little provocative too, in the sense that she got involved in the American Embassy Ladies Club and then insisted on having briefings from various people. They left after six months.

A year before I arrived the Yugoslavs had arrested a Yugoslav-American in Yugoslavia whom they claimed was not an American citizen. They were holding him on some very serious treason charges. They wouldn't give our Consulate officials access to him because he was born in Yugoslavia and was recognized as a Yugoslav citizen. What was his name? I will think of it. We constantly tried to get access to him, however. Ambassador Silberman tried also but got nowhere. Finally, he saw an opportunity but forgot where he was. He was invited to speak at the US-Yugoslav Chamber of Commerce meeting. He proceeded to tell the people that he could not, as an American Ambassador, guarantee the safety of Americans in the country because he was not being given rightful access to an

American that was being held in this country. That upset the Yugoslavs. They did not do anything for awhile. I had a broken car antenna. People had flat tires. We don't know who did it but the police knew who we were. They finally released this man and we got him out of the country quickly. He was incarcerated for over a year and most of the time we had no access to him.

A major non-aligned conference was going to take place the summer of my arrival. What could be more interesting to the Yugoslav press that an interview with Tito? It was two or three pages verbatim in very small print and right in the middle, very prominent, was a question about the release. He highlighted Ambassador Silberman as someone you could never work with and someone you would expect the American government to do something about because he was not fostering relations between the two countries. He fully expected President Ford and Kissinger to pull him out. Kissinger might have been so disposed but this was before the 1976 elections and you were not going to get a Republican or even a Democrat to pull out an ambassador just because some communist dictator said he was a bad guy. So Silberman lasted until after the election and then he announced his departure. We had chargé d'affairs for six months and then President Carter nominated Larry Eagleburger who had ties with Kissinger and had served in Yugoslavia before. He got an award for some work he did during a serious earthquake in Macedonia and the Yugoslavs were happy to have him.

Q: Your main responsibility was the CSCE conference?

PERNICK: Right.

Q: We sent a large delegation and you arranged things before they got there and liaised with the host government?

PERNICK: Yes. There was a major questionnaire sent out before hand as to what could be expected from the Yugoslavs. We had to do a lengthy analysis of the CSCE agreement and the way each of the signatory nations had carried out the provisions of the agreement. We complemented the Yugoslavs on some issues and hit them over the head on others. I got involved and met a lot of the Yugoslavs. I never felt like I was a true part of the delegation but I useful because I hosted the poker games and I arranged for them to play basketball. I acted as an intermediary when Mr. Goldberg told me that he was not happy with his housing arrangement. I told the ambassador and we worked out an arrangement for the Goldbergs.

Q: How long did that conference last?

PERNICK: About six months.

Q: We had a large delegation that covered human rights. We think of Yugoslavia in 1997 as a failed country, which has split apart. Twenty years earlier it was doing pretty well. It hosted this conference and was active with the non-alignment. Tito played an important

role in the world. Could you see any of this coming on? I am sure at the time you were there that the ambassador and others were discussing what was going to happen after Tito.

PERNICK: Yes. To very little avail, though, because everybody sent to Yugoslavia wanted to be there when Tito passed away. Then you would see what the future of Yugoslavia was going to be like. In retrospect, yes, there were seeds of turmoil. I had some Serb friends who took me to visit relatives in a place of Croatia called Lika, near a national park. It was predominately a Serbian area. I had heard some stuff from Serbs in Belgrade but who believes people who just talk all the time. The Yugoslavs really had the benefit of truly being able to get out as long as they weren't too outrageous and so they were more educated. The chance that you would able to be able speak Italian or French or German or English as much as Serbo-Croatian was high. They traveled like the Western Europeans. The people in Lika wanted to talk about how terribly they were treated by the Croatians in World War II.

I had done some work in graduate school on Yugoslavia so I was very pleased to be assigned there. My thesis was going to be on US-Yugoslav post war relations. I had done a lot of preparation and once had a conversation with Ambassador Unger who had begun life in the Foreign Service as a geographer. He worked in Trieste before the agreements were hammered out. I had some feeling, but I thought, 30 years later, what are they talking about? What can they possibly have in their minds? They are talking about the current government and most likely the next government who were being prepared to be the future government who were all in favor of socialism. There wasn't a Yugoslav who was allowed to say anything nice about the fascists. There wasn't a Yugoslav who was allowed to say anything nice about the Chetniks who were really the Serbian Royalists and they weren't exactly fascist but they were certainly anti-Tito. I figured after 30 years of development and growth that everyone in this system, which Tito created, had a piece of the action. There were three forms of government. There was the Presidency, which was a ruling group with membership from all of the provinces, six republics and two autonomous provinces. Eight people rotated annually as Vice-President with Tito being President. Then there was the party itself which has a similar type of government but within the party the various functions had people designated to those slot which has to represent fairly the whole country, the nations, the ethnic groups and the religions. Finally, there was the real government, the cabinet. I can't remember the details, but you will see there were maybe three Serbs from Serbia, a Serb from Bosnia, two Croatians from Croatia, and three Muslims from Bosnia. It was very mixed. Everyone was to get something. If a Serb dropped out another would be appointed to keep the balance.

Who would have thought that the Albanians would be able to provoke the Serbs and the Serbs would allow themselves to be so provoked that at the end of the 1980's, 10 years after the death of Tito, when the President of Yugoslavia, who was either a Slovene or a Croatian, would have to attend a major event commemorating the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo where the Serbs lost? The Serbs lost to the Turks. At least the Northern Irish are commemorating a victory. The Serbs were commemorating a battle they lost

which caused them to move from their official homeland. Milosevic, President of Serbia was able to use this. He used this event and the whole notion of the Albanian occupation as an excuse to show Serbian strength. In turn this made some of the other republics nervous. The Slovenes first. It couldn't have been better for the Slovenes. They were always looked on as being the Austrians of Yugoslavia. They were the ones who would go along with anything. Therefore when they decided to be independent, the Serbs, who controlled most of the army, did not send a force sufficiently large to subdue the Slovenes. When the Croatians saw the Slovenes doing well against the Serbs, they indicated they were leaving too. They were in a more difficult position because Croatia lies between Serbia and Slovenia. The Serbs found they couldn't resupply their troops in Slovenia so they walked out. The Croatians however, were next door and there were Croatians living in Serbia and Serbians living in Croatia.

The man who was most effective in foretelling events was Ed Derwinski. I was working for him as Secretary of Veterans Affairs at the time Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia were all falling apart. He said that this was nothing and that the most crucial issue would be Bosnia. This was a year or so before anything happened there. Why Bosnia? It was never independent and there were a bunch Muslims living there. A lot of them are Serbs and many Croatians, but so what?

Q: Let's go back to the time that you were there.

PERNICK: I was really taken aback that the Serbs, 30 years after the end of World War II, were still complaining about treatment by the fascist Croatians. Then I heard a little of that in Zagreb, Croatia. The Croatians were not happy with the way the Serbs seemed to lord over the country. It was supposed to be a three-place country after World War I, between the Serbs, Croatians and Slovenes. The Serbs got the capitol, the ruling house and the military. Even though the Croatians had a population advantage over the others they felt that things weren't right. Therefore you can see Croatians joining an independence minded group during World War II to fight the royalist Serbs.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about the relationship between Yugoslavia and the Untied States. We were concerned about human rights issues and this imprisonment of this person of dual nationality.

PERNICK: We tried frequently to begin discussion about how to treat dual nationalities but without success.

Q: How about other areas? Economically Yugoslavia was beginning to have some difficulty.

PERNICK: I must say that the arrival of Larry Eagleburger and the departure of Silberman started the improvement of relations. The Chargé d'Affairs, Charlie York, was ok, but nothing special. The Yugoslavs were delighted when Larry Eagleburger showed up. He could get into see anyone and never abused that courtesy. I can't recall major

problems that we had. I had to attribute that to the fact that the Yugoslavs did not want to mess up the relationship with Eagleburger because they knew they could get a Silberman back.

Q: At that point we still valued the role Yugoslavia in Europe?

PERNICK: Very much. The Cold War was still going on. Yugoslavia was a key, though.

Q: This is an oral history with Irwin Pernick. This is the second session we are having. It is September 26 and it is being conducted at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center with the Association for Diplomatic Training and Studies. Irwin we finished your assignment last session with your assignment to Belgrade to work with the CSCE follow up meeting. At that point you came back to Washington. This would have been about 1978 and what was your assignment at that point?

PERNICK: Initially I was assigned to the Bureau of Political and Military Affairs for the second time. I was in an office called Security Assistance and Sales. I think one of the reasons I got that position was because, a year into the Carter Administration, I had experience from a previous assignment. Les Gelb, who was either the Director of PM or Assistant Secretary, and I knew each other from my time in the Press Office. He was working for the New York Times at the time. He called me out of the blue and asked me if I was interested in this office and I said yes. It wasn't a senior position but it got me back to a place that I was interested in. The Carter Administration had come in with the intention of limiting our military assistance and sales programs. It wanted to focus them on NATO, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan, and to a must lesser extent, Israel. There is a famous policy statement that Carter issued called PD13 that stated that we would be restraining our arms transfers to the rest of the world. We would be making a major effort to enlist the Soviets and other major suppliers in conventional arms transfers. Gelb was very much in favor of this. It made life a little difficult in terms of dealing with our arms manufacturers and military assistance people because they looked at the State Department as cops who were not on the right side of the law even thought the Administration's intent was clear. I enjoyed that give and take because I had more contact with the manufactures than before. I began to see how much influence they had on our defense programs. I also began to appreciate what they did and could do for us in terms of foreign policy. They were trying to sell to everyone and his brother of course, with some concern for the national interest but mostly their economic state.

Q: Was the Defense Department on the same wavelength with the PD13 policy?

PERNICK: Sort of but not really because they knew that their influence and informal alliances with other defense departments in part depended upon their ability to place military assistance programs personnel and the sharing of arms and other military equipment. In addition, the more a manufacturer could sell or make us grant to another country the cheaper the prices for our own military personnel. I think they really had mixed feelings. For the most part Carter would not have wanted a straight yes, no vote,

even in the Pentagon.

Q: How about the Congress?

PERNICK: The Congress was Democratic but they were split. There were some enlightened personnel. You would like with a Democratic President and Congress there would be some cooperation but it wasn't necessarily so. There were a lot of members whose congressional districts would be impinged upon by restrictions on arms transfers.

Q: In this office of Security Assistance and Sales you were primarily involved in the policy and implementation?

PERNICK: Yes. I was monitoring the problem. I especially was a bean counter. There was a limit on transfers over a certain amount. They couldn't be done with countries outside NATO, New Zealand, Australia, and Japan without White House approval. What struck me the first time it happened was that we had to, whenever there was a potential sale, say $11 million worth of trucks to Bahrain, we had to write an official memo from the Secretary of State to the President. This would have to then be approved. In all cases he did. What struck me was that it seemed that the President was personally involved in making the decision. With major items, areas of conflict and sophisticated weapons I can see his interest but not with trucks to Bahrain. I would see pieces of papers and notes with his initials on it and it looked like he was there. I thought he should spend his time on more important issues.

Q: Jimmy Carter has often criticized for micro managing. You were two years in this office and then in a different position in PM?

PERNICK: I think the office was PM/SSP. It was Security Assistance Special Projects. We were involved in both the policy aspect and whatever was going to come with the negotiations with the Soviets on the CATT. This really went nowhere because the Soviets really wanted nothing to do with restraining arms sales to other countries.

Q: You used the acronym, CATT?

PERNICK: Conventional Arms Transfer Talks. Not too many people know that, sorry.

Q: I was thinking about the fact that you were in the Bureau of Political Military Affairs at the end of the Carter Administration and the beginning of the Reagan Administration and I assume the policy changed abruptly and quickly?

PERNICK: It changed both abruptly and dramatically. People in the Pentagon thought for the benefit of the United States. A new arms transfer policy stated was drafted quickly and was approved by the summer of 1981 by the President. The Pentagon and the defense industry were both relieved. It put away the notion of restraint, gently and said that we would use arms transfers as an instrument of American foreign policy.

Q: Before we leave the Carter Administration tell us if there was a degree of restraint and did it really make a difference or were there so many exceptions that when we changed policy it didn't really make that much of a difference?

PERNICK: That is an excellent question. I think that there was a notion of restraint under Carter and that the US government was kicking and screaming in some departments, being forced to limit arms transfers. For example, the defense industry would come in frequently to try to educate the people responsible for specific issues. They could not take us to lunch and they would make fun of that fact. I would go to lunch with them and would insist on splitting the tab because there wasn't supposed to be the notion that we were selling our souls for a mess of pottage so that they could go make a sale. There were some exceptions, but there was always an effort made to see that the exception was approved. The defense items, even in the late 70s and early 80s were expensive and I am sure that an $11 million dollar truck deal for Bahrain would be a nothing deal.

Q: When the policy shifted with the Reagan Administration did we primarily expand the number of recipients or were we just selling more sophisticated equipment or was it that the magnitude of everything increased?

PERNICK: All of those. The Defense Department was not going to give away its most sophisticated equipment to the enemy or to someone whom in turn might transfer to the enemy. I don't have the figures in my mind but I think you would see and exponentially large increase of sales from 1980 to 1981, 1982, 1983.

Q: Les Gelb was gone. You were still there. Bob Mantel was still there, as were others. How did you deal on a personal level with this change?

PERNICK: I welcomed this change. I appreciated the philosophy behind the previous policy but I didn't think it was doing us a great deal of good. We were looking at the benefits of a transfer to our interest even under the new administration. Don't get me wrong, we still looked carefully at every transfer. The Secretary of State is charged with approving all military transfers, not the Secretary of Defense. These transfers, either commercial or military to military had to be sent to State for approval. The Political Military Bureau had a voice in the matter, as did the regional bureau. The Near East and South Asia Bureau would have a voice in sales to that region. The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency had a voice. Frequently the Economic and Business Bureau would have a voice, as would the Agency, the CIA.

Q: A lot of our transfers took place within the context of the Security Assistance Programs. You and this office were quite in involved in coordinating this and making presentations to the Congress?

PERNICK: Yes. By that time we had prime responsibility for putting together the congressional presentation materials.

Q: Did you work with members of Congress and their staffs?

PERNICK: We worked very closely with both the Senate Foreign Relations and the House Foreign Affairs Committees. We also worked with the people on the seventh floor, the leadership, especially the new Undersecretary for Security Assistance.

Q: That position was established when?

PERNICK: 1971, 1972 or 1973. Why was it T? Curtis Tarr was the first head of that office.

Q: You also had to work with other agencies like Defense and the DSAA, Defense Security Assistance Agency.

PERNICK: Yes. In fact the DSAA was created, I believe in response to the legislation that created the Undersecretary for Security Assistance position. They were up and running before we even had a T office in the early 1970s.

Q: At the time you were in PM you must have worked very closely with the T office?

PERNICK: Yes. I think it was Mr. Buckley who was T. I recall writing some speeches for him.

Q: Matthew Nimitz had been there at the end of the Carter Administration?

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: We are really talking about four years and two different assignments here, from 1978 to 1982. The two assignments were closely related. You moved up to become Deputy Director and had broader responsibilities. Where did you go from there in 1982?

PERNICK: I went to the Bureau of Public Affairs.

Q: You had been there before, right?

PERNICK: I had been in the Press Office, but in the 1970s it was part of the S/PRS. This time I was in the Bureau of Public Affairs in the Office of Opinion Analysis and Plans. I was Deputy Director.

Q: Did you conduct polls?

PERNICK: Well, we arranged for polls. We had a broad ranging office. There were two people who were experts in surveys. We contracted with various survey outfits throughout the country, Gallup and a few others, to get their materials. It was very useful

because we had people who did the analysis who could get beyond the superficiality you see in the headlines and really get to where it is we were and were not making an impact with the American people. We also monitored some 100 daily newspapers. There were people on staff who were writing summaries of editorial analysis on specific issues. There were also other ways that we tried to embrace what the American people did and did not know and what was really effective for them.

Q: The idea of course is, by knowing all of this, to develop strategies to influence and shape public opinion in support of our foreign policy.

PERNICK: Right. There were two major funnels of operations which all of the material would go into. One was that we were tasked every year to come up with a list of those issues which the Secretary would then make a public affairs priority. We would look at those issues in terms of using the Department resources to inform and educate the American people.

Q: Including the time of the Secretary?

PERNICK: That was part of the second program. This was something that came out of a very activist role on the part of the White House in those days. There were many important issues like our relations with the Soviets, arms control, problems in Latin America, especially Central America, El Salvador and Nicaragua, the Middle East and our relations with NATO. Our office was drafting a public diplomacy strategy for each of these issues which the White House had blessed. We tried to put together what we knew about the American attitudes on each issue and which way the opinion was drifting. We focused on resources that the entire government could use to educate the people. A lot of people accused us of trying to lobby and influence. I think that there is a fine line between educating and informing and trying to influence.

Q: Of course you were just involved in American public opinion as opposed to public diplomacy in support of our missions overseas. That of course was USIA's role.

PERNICK: We did work with USIA as they had access to some resources, which we did not. They had a lot more money for polls, for instance, and they would send us information and analysis.

Q: They would also be interested in your strategy and priorities?

PERNICK: You recall I had a tour with USIA so I was familiar with many of the players over at the USIA building and their modes of operation.

Q: You were Deputy Director, was that a Foreign Service position?

PERNICK: Yes, it was.

Q: Were you the only Foreign Service person in that office?

PERNICK: Yes, the rest were civil service.

Q: The idea of having a Foreign Service Deputy Director was to bring your overseas and regional experience to the office?

PERNICK: Yes. They wanted some appreciation for what it was the office was doing and for whom. Who are these people they were trying to recruit to make speeches or draft materials and what we can expect from the regional and functional bureaus.

Q: After two years you became the Director in the Office of Public Programs also in the Public Affairs Bureau. This made your time in the Public Affairs Bureau from 1982 until 1986. What were you doing in the second time period?

PERNICK: The person I followed into the Opinion and Analysis Office was also a senior Foreign Service Officer and that was one of our most visible public affairs programs. There were some 30 people in the office, all of whom were planning or responding to requests for speakers on foreign policy issues or the convening of seminars, conferences or briefings. We also had some degree of responsibility to use the limited time the various principals had, the Secretary, the Undersecretary and others.

Q: Who was in Secretary of State at this time?

PERNICK: George Shultz.

Q: Was he interested in doing things like that?

PERNICK: Yes and no. He wasn't the most outgoing speaker but he would do it. He wasn't a great debater either but he was smart and had a clean and honest reputation. It was a pleasure to deal with him and more often than not we could set something up that he would want to do.

Q: The visiting ambassadors coming back from the field would also be programmed to speak?

PERNICK: We would try to do that if the regional bureau would inform us who was coming back. Each regional bureau had a public affairs person and we worked very closely with them. Some were good and wanted to speak and others just wanted to get away from the business when they came back to the United States.

Q: This was about ten years ago, but one hears now that there is a lot of apathy around the country in regards to foreign affairs matters and it is hard to get audiences. Was that a problem at this time?

PERNICK: I think there may have been a bit more interest then, especially on hot issues. Occasionally with student groups I would have to walk around and wake people up. People did not have the kind of access then as they do now to instantaneous news. Now you don't have to be bothered by the State Department. This wasn't the case back then. There is more foreign affairs coverage now in newspapers and magazines. People can pick and choose now. If they are interested in something they can cover it themselves without going out of their way. Ten years ago they probably really appreciated an expert speaker on say Soviet relations.

Q: Did you do any speaking yourself?

PERNICK: I was mainly the organizer but I did some speaking. I kept abreast of the issues and knew what was current. I had a little program where if we had a person who was an expert on an issue but not a very good speaker then we could provide some training. We set up a video camera and gave assistance.

Q: Anything else about your time in PA?

PERNICK: No, it was an exciting time because the White House followed us closely. Ray Sikes was the principal deputy in the Public Affairs Bureau and Bernie Cabot was the Assistant Secretary and the Spokesman. We worked very closely together to make sure they were informed because of the White House.

Q: The expression of interest came through the NSC staff or the Press Office?

PERNICK: The NSC, yes, but not often through the Press Office. Bud McFarland was the NSC director. One of our deputy secretaries went over to the NSC. Judge Clark. He was a good guy. He didn't know a lot about foreign affairs but he had good access over at the White House. He and Shultz worked well together.

Q: He was well connected with the California advisors to Ronald Reagan.

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: After this period you moved in 1986 to the Office of the Undersecretary of State for Security Assistance Science and Technology, T.

PERNICK: Almost, first it was C. The Office of the Counselor.

Q: Who was that?

PERNICK: C was the Honorable Edward J. Derwinski, member of the Congress in Chicago. That is a convoluted story. By this time I had eight years of State Department experience and I should have been out in the field. In 1986 I spoke to my personnel person and we arranged a training program where I would go up to the University of

Toronto Institute for Russian East European Studies and get myself abreast of what was going on and then get myself an East European assignment.

Q: The Department would send you there?

PERNICK: Yes, they would send me there. Then the Department ran into a budget problem and the first thing cut was something called foreign training. I ran down to my advisor. He said there was nothing available in terms of operational assignments but there was a slot available at the University of Maryland. There were opening up a school of public affairs and they wanted a diplomat resident. I went and spoke to the people in Maryland. They were very interested and I was mildly interested. I figured this would give me some time to figure out what my career was coming to. At this point I got a call from the Office of the Counselor and they said they had some openings. I had never worked for a principal of the Department and said certainly. They said that Mr. Derwinski would like to interview me and I said fine. I had seen him in action as a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, especially in regards to his interest in the Middle East and the Turkey/Cyprus issue. I had used him when I was in the Office of Public Programs as a speaker because he was not a shrinking violent. I did not know him, though. When I was ushered into his office he sat me down and told me to start. It was the best interview I ever had for a job. He wanted someone with a public affairs background. Soon we were negotiating with Canada over something called the Northwest Passage. This was 1986 and there were some things going on at the White House and some resignations and when the Undersecretary for Security Assistance left the Department he was nominated to be the new Undersecretary. That was why I jumped from C to T but in both cases I was working for Edward Derwinski.

Q: Did he take some responsibilities along with him when he changed offices?

PERNICK: Yes, the Northwest Passage. He had some interests but he was not highly regarded by some of our colleagues in our Department. When he became Counselor, which is sort of a nebulous job, you have to be used properly by the Secretary. The Secretary has to allow you to get involved in issues or assign you issues so that you then have some responsibility and you should be kept informed and brought in when things are discussed. Secretary Shultz was smart enough to know that maybe we shouldn't make Derwinski chief negotiator in US/Soviet relations, especially since his family comes from part of Poland which used to be Lithuania or part of Poland which used to be Lithuania and he had very strong views about certain communist leaders, he was goods at certain types of negotiations. Early on he became involved in various fishing negotiations. Salmon with the Canadians and tuna with a lot of the countries on the Pacific Rim. He brought various bogged-down discussions to a conclusion. When I joined the staff we were in a bit of a contest with the Canadians over something called the Northwest Passage and whether or not our naval vessels could enter and egress without having to notify the Canadians. They maintained that they were Canadian waters and we maintained that there was a certain international aspect to them. Our Navy and Coast Guard were concerned. The White House was concerned that anytime the Canadians came down to

talk to some official that one of the major issues they brought up was the Northwest Passage. Our guys would never include the Northwest Passage as an issue because we didn't think it was that important. We finally entered into negotiations and they lasted for over a year. We wanted to bring the Navy and Coast Guard along. In the end we didn't have total agreement but nobody would complain if an American nuclear submarine were to transit the waters, submerged.

Q: Did Derwinski actually conduct these negotiations?

PERNICK: He intervened at a point to push them along. He was in charge on the US side. He didn't do much of the work but every once in a while he would pick up the phone and call Mr. Sharp on the Canadian side. Now, the Canadian press didn't particularly like the agreement. They thought that they had given up more that they should have. Our Coast Guard did not like the agreement and there was a general on the Joint Chiefs who almost referred to Derwinski as a traitor. After the meeting he tried to shake Derwinski's hand and he walked away. The leaders agreed though and it hasn't harmed our relations or inhibited our use of those waters.

Q: What other issues did you get involved with in the Counselors Office and the Undersecretary's Office? Derwinski was only Counselor for a few months.

PERNICK: When I cam Derwinski had already been Counselor for two or three years. After he left Congress in 1982 or 1983 he became Counselor.

Q: He resigned, didn't he?

PERNICK: No. He lost because Illinois lost a seat or two in the 1980 census. The White House asked what they could do to help him and he was given the Counselor seat.

Q: What other issues did you get involved with?

PERNICK: A whole variety of things. We had some involvement program assistance to Israel, Jordan and Egypt. We had programs in West Africa. We stayed involved with the salmon and tuna and other boundary issues. I had some minor role in the Israeli and Egypt Security Assistance Program and the West African Naval Assistance Program. That was fun because I had never been to West Africa before.

Q: I served later in West Africa and when I was there we had something called the West African Training Cruise which was basically a visit of port visits by small US Navy vessels. Was there something other than that?

PERNICK: We tried to provide and encourage between the Mauritanians, the Gambians, Guinea-Bissau and Senegal cooperative coastal patrol. We helped provide the training and equipment.

Q: As you said before the Undersecretary coordinated the security assistance among the Regional Bureaus and Political Military Bureaus to try to get the allocation of programs by country.

PERNICK: Yes, this was a major task because it involved alienating a lot of people and pulling your hair.

Q: It has foreign policy implications too. If you give $100 million to one country and nothing to another it makes a big difference.

PERNICK: It has major foreign policy implications. Particularly in the Middle East where we have a large program for Israel and also for Egypt, but for t some of our close friends, the programs sort of fade away. The only trip we took to Israel was when Frank Wizard was invited to go to Egypt. We went to Cairo and went to the Embassy and met with the Egyptians. They seemed to appreciate the fact that some decision-makers were there to talk to them about the size of their program. Then I said why don't we just drive across the Sinai. We did but it happened to be the day after the Intifada began. It was an interesting drive and only later did we realize what was happening.

Q: Where you able to cross?

PERNICK: We did cross and there was a lot more security than I expected.

Q: Did Mr. Derwinski travel a lot and did you do with him?

PERNICK: He did but I didn't go on all of them. He had several special assistants.

Q: You had a chance to visit Cyprus?

PERNICK: I did. I went there with Jim Wilkinson who was the coordinator in the European Bureau and dealt with Cyprus affairs at that time. Much to my delight I was able to deal with all of the principal actors I had read about for years, except Archbishop Makarios who was no longer around. That was really eye opening. We were driven across the green line to the Turkish sector. I found it fascinating. When we got back I suggested we work on it forever. It was a beautiful place with nice people and maybe we could work out a solution.

Q: Forever?

PERNICK: Well, not forever, but we could spend a lot more time on Cyprus. He said they don't like us to interfere. It was clear that Derwinski had a lot of influence with the Greek/ American community. One of my first contacts with Derwinski occurred in 1974 when I was in the Press Office. The Anoka Bay group started its activities in Cyprus and the Turks invaded and the congressional Greek lobby asked for an immediate meeting with the Secretary. I was told that I was in charge of staking the photographers in the

building. The members of Congress in the Greek lobby included Ed Derwinski, Ben Rosenthal and another guy with a non-Greek name. This is the Greek lobby?

Q: Tom Eagleton? He was a Senator.

PERNICK: Yes, he was a Senator. There may have been a Senator. It could have been Eagleton.

Q: Paul Sarbanes?

PERNICK: I don't think Sarbanes was able to make it. It was eye opening to me to see that your name didn't have to be Greek to be a member of the lobby. When I joined his staff I quickly became familiar with his interests, knowledge and his involvement. He has a very profound knowledge of East European history. He is very familiar with the Greek Orthodox Church, all 15 branches. We got to meet lots of Orthodox bishops, not just the Greek Orthodox. I saw that it would be difficult to convince the Turks that this person could be non-partisan with in dealing with their issues. Although I think we would have tried if he had been kept in that position after the change of the Administration from Reagan to Bush.

Q: The situation now is not that different.

PERNICK: No, it has only been ten years.

Q: What else about this time in the Undersecretaries Office?

PERNICK: We had some problems with the number two man in the State Department, John Whitehead, the Deputy Secretary. Whitehead was one of the people that did not think much of Derwinski. Derwinski was a different looking person. He had a crew cut, was very big and dresses outlandish sometimes, especially at Christmas. He told me that he would wear this yellow blazer on the floor of the House of Representatives to let the Members know that the legislation being considered was his. Whitehead did not have a great regard for him. He would try to get Shultz to keep Derwinski off of certain issues and was not happy with his promotion from Councelor to Undersecretary. It was hard because we would have to deal with the Undersecretary Office and there was some animosity. A few people working for the Deputy Secretary that tried to undermine Derwinski's position.

Q: Certainly the position of Counselor, and to some extent the Undersecretary of Security Assistance of Science and Technology had bureaus like PM and OBS that sometimes really need a spokesman on the seventh floor.

PERNICK: He wasn't interested in making all of the issues completely his own. He knew he had to rely on others for support.

Q: You must have had a good personal relationship with him. You were with him on the seventh floor of the State Department for nearly three years.

PERNICK: It was about two and a half years. He liked pizza and so do I. We got along. I am not very good at reading people. Ed Derwinski makes up him mind about people immediately and I could help him deal with these people.

Q: Would he ever change his mind about these people?

PERNICK: Not too often and I think he was usually right in his view.

Q: He came to these opinions quickly?

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: This happened in a positive way too. For example he asked you to start right away.

PERNICK: I am sure he thought for a minute about that one. He knew he had a slot. He had someone who had public affairs experience and he needed some public affairs guidance but of course he never listened to me.

Q: He probably knew more about you that you thought at the time?

PERNICK: Yes, I would guess so. The people in his office must have said some nice things about me.

Q: He left at the end of the Reagan Administration, the beginning of the Bush Administration. He was not asked to stay on but got another position. Did the White House see that as a promotion? He became a cabinet officer.

PERNICK: He, as well as the other major Republican players, were asked to provide to the White House their wish list after the election for ongoing assignments. I know that his list all had foreign affairs implications. None of them were any cabinet position. I sensed that every time someone was selected for one of the positions like US Ambassador to the UN or Special Trade Representative, or head of USIA, that he was disappointed. He was prepared to stay in the State Department as the Undersecretary for Security Assistance Programs. When he was invited to the White House and it was announced he was being nominated for this position he was beside himself. He never thought he would be honored with this type of position. He was a veteran and paid a lot attention to his constituents in regards to veterans' issues so he was not unfamiliar with the Department. He asked me before the election and before he was asked that he expected a job with the V.P. and was I interested. I was planning to retire from the Foreign Service the following year and practice law. I said sure, it was easier than looking for a job. It took a few months to get him confirmed but he got through the confirmation hearing. Some issues were raised because of his involvement in Greek and Korean affairs. Then a job had to be created for

me. He asked me to be his Counselor and I thought that was a great idea.

Q: Were you on detail as a Foreign Service Officer?

PERNICK: No, Reggie Bartholomew was nominated as the new T. I knew Reggie when he succeeded Les Gelb as the Assistant Secretary for Political Military Affairs at the end of the Carter Administration. He knew Derwinski also. Derwinski asked him if I could spend some time everyday over at the VA helping him out but then spend time back in the office.

Q: So you stayed in the Undersecretary's office on a transitional basis while still beginning to help Derwinski?

PERNICK: Yes. I retired from the Foreign Service in May of 1989.

Q: That was when you took the position of Counselor to Undersecretary of Veterans' Affairs?

PERNICK: I started the following day.

Q: We could talk a lot about Veterans' Affairs in terms of a foreign affairs oral interview or maybe we should begin to wrap it up?

PERNICK: Derwinski maintains an interest in foreign affairs. What he tried to do was spark some sort of ties. There are, unbeknownst to most people, ties between a lot of agencies and other countries. They are either created officially through embassies or maybe through some other arrangement. For example, there was a major earthquake about that time in Armenia and we sent some people out there to assist. In Europe when immigrants were coming through for medical help we sent supplies through the VA. We also had mental help professionals available to help people deal with the stress of having lived through an earthquake.

Q: You as his Counselor, with somewhat ill defined duties, were able to help him?

PERNICK: Yes. We set up some assistance programs in various countries Eastern Europe, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. There were several foreign affairs aspects of the job. We had veterans who lived over seas. Our embassies have to act as the VA officers and handle their problems.

Q: They have to make sure they get their benefits.

PERNICK: They have to make sure that if they are eligible for certain types of medical care that their coverage is covered by either VA or State. We have also had a regional benefits office in Manila, Philippines since the end of World War II. There is a large number of Americans who stayed there and a large number of Filipinos who were part of

the American forces during World War II.

Q: They were part of the forces after World War II, also.

PERNICK: Yes, indeed. I totally entered a new career.

Q: You are still there.

PERNICK: I am still there but I think they are trying to get rid of me. I am involved in issues like helping homeless veterans, veterans that are substance abusers, and veterans with AIDS. I was able to represent him on the National Commission on AIDS. It has been very interesting. I miss the State Department but am not totally sorry that I left.

Q: You have been there for about eight years now.

PERNICK: Yes.

Q: The new Secretary designate is soon to have a confirmation hearing. This is your third. Derwinski was the first and the second was who?

PERNICK: Jessie Brown.

Q: You have been there a good while.

PERNICK: A lot of people think that too.

Q: Looking back is there anything else that ought to be included?

PERNICK: I am not sure if you are interested in the personal aspect of a person's career. When I left Yugoslavia in 1978 I never went overseas again. In 1980 I was promoted to three, I am now a one. I requested at that point to go to the National War College for a year of training and then go overseas again in a Political Military position. I had every qualification there was, including a lot of political military experience and the right grade. My personnel advisor told me that all of the slots were filled. I saw the list and knew that I was more qualified than all of them. I went home and had a talk with my wife. My wife by that time had become a professional real estate person and was not keen with the Foreign Service lifestyle. I told her that I wanted to go overseas but I am prepared to think about something else. I had always wanted to go to law school and went at night for four years. She supported me. I didn't tell anybody until I finally graduated. As a consequence of that I no longer had a desire to go. I was turned off by the personnel experience. There was a chance for the Department to stick by its word. That is why I think I am where I am now.

Q: It doesn't make sense to me. I know that 1980 was when the Foreign Service Act was passed but it should not have effected the selection for senior training.

PERNICK: No, I don't think it should have either. There you have it.

Q: I congratulate you on law school. That was done at George Washington?

PERNICK: I went to Catholic University. I think I am still on George Washington's waiting list.

Q: You might still hear from them. Have you passed the bar?

PERNICK: I have been a member of the Maryland bar since I graduated from law school.

Q: You never practiced?

PERNICK: No, I have never practiced.

Q: It is good to talk with you, Irwin, thank you.

End of interview