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LEON PICON

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Lew Schmidt interviewing Leon Picon at his home in Bethesda, Maryland. Leon, I'm going to ask you to start out by giving a bit of your background, where you came from, what your education was, and as much of your pre-Agency activities as you wish to give. Then we'll start with your entry into USIA. From then on we'll just take your career in sequence and cover the important activities..

I'm not going to say any more now. You just go ahead and start as I indicated.

Biographic Statement

Education Undergraduates

PICON: I don't know exactly where to start. Let's start with my having gone to Brooklyn College in Brooklyn, New York, where I first intended to become a French teacher, and so I majored in French. Before a month was out, I became intensely interested in becoming a lawyer instead of a teacher. In order to do so I would have to switch from the Arts curriculum to the Social Sciences curriculum, which I did.

In the Social Sciences Department, Ancient History (History 9 & 10) was a required course, so I found myself being taught by one of the finest teachers I had ever encountered, a Professor Meta Schutz. She brought the ancient world to life for me, and before I knew what was happening, I had fallen deeply in love with ancient Egypt, and wanted to become an Egyptologist. Professor Schutz advised me to get a sound background in languages, particularly Latin and Greek. So I switched back to the Arts curriculum and did in fact major in Latin and Greek. During the years just prior to my graduation from undergraduate school, I learned of a college in Philadelphia with the curious name of Dropsie College, named after one Moses Aaron Dropsie, a wealthy lawyer in Philadelphia who had left a fortune for the establishment of a school devoted to the study of Hebrew and, as they called them, the Cognate Languages, with particular stress on languages of the period of the Old Testament: Assyrian, Arabic, Babylonian, Coptic, Amharic, Egyptian Hieroglyphics -- all those things. And I felt that that was what I wanted to do; I wanted to become an Egyptologist.

So I shaped my college program thereafter to try to meet the requirements for getting into Dropsie College. It was a free school -- no tuition -- and that made it particularly desirable in view of the impoverished state of my family. The catalog stated that in order to get admission one needed to have Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and/or Arabic, and "sufficient modern languages to be able to conduct scholarly research."

It was not very clear as to what they meant by "sufficient modern languages" so I wrote to the college, Dropsie College, and asked about this. And I was told that of course they meant French, Italian and German, which was all right. My French was good, and from French I could read with understanding enough Italian, but I had no German. I made arrangements at Brooklyn College to take what was approximately the equivalent of five years of German in the remaining time that I had there. And I was eventually admitted to Dropsie College.

Development of Braille Library for Blind Students and Teaching at Overbrook College for the Blind

Related to this, during the period that I was at Brooklyn College, I was also beginning to find interest in East Asian languages, particularly Japanese and Chinese, and did quite a bit of reading about those languages. I didn't really learn very much in depth at that time, but at least it was a start. But even more related to my future at that time was another activity. At Brooklyn College we had some eight or ten blind students. And I became

interested in their methods of study, the way they took notes in class with slate and stylus. I had a strong compassion for their problems. Another student -- a fellow by the name of Mirabella -- and I organized a class for teaching college students to be able to read and write Braille. There was a desperate need for college textbooks in Braille script. The Lighthouse, an organization in Kentucky which makes books for the blind, had never gone into college textbooks. The blind students had to have volunteer readers who would read the assignments to them, while they would pass their notes around one to another. But textbooks did not exist.

With a grant from the City of New York and with an additional subsidy from Brooklyn College itself, we bought some Braille machines, Braille typewriters -- a six-key affair -- and went about the task of transcribing college textbooks into Braille. I believe that we had founded the first college textbook library for the blind in the country. The Library of Congress became interested in our project, and we did eventually had an arrangement whereby students in other colleges who were using any of these titles could borrow the books -- through the Library of Congress. The Library of Congress would finance the transportation of the materials, and so forth. And so it was done, provided that a Brooklyn College student wasn't using the particular text at that time.

Both because of this interest in the blind and this book-production activity, I was later able to get a job in Philadelphia that would help support me while I was studying there. I became a teacher at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind in Overbrook, Pennsylvania. My time as a teacher of the blind was a very happy time, except that it ended in a catastrophe. I had been writing my doctoral thesis on the subject of Coptic legal documents from Djeme and had almost completed the first draft of my thesis when one of the maids at Overbrook, by accident, while I was gone for the weekend, took my thesis and threw it out along with the rest of the trash of the school, and I never did manage to recover that thesis. I was naturally very much upset by this. I practically broke relations with Dropsie College. Not really, I still went back, but I did not start a new thesis immediately.

Meantime, the war clouds were gathering, as they say, and during that period, while still at the School for the Blind I became interested in elementary cryptography and cryptanalysis, cryptogram sort of stuff. Through one of the other teachers at Overbrook, I learned of a club that played around with cryptograms and the mechanics of developing and decrypting them. From them I also learned of a home-study course in cryptanalysis given by the Navy, and I applied for it. By the way, I had to have a security clearance to get this course. I was cleared; the lessons started to come in; I completed the course.

WWI: Army Service, Where Previous Study of Languages and Cryptography Put Picon Into Military Intelligence

When war time came, I thought that probably I could be of particular service with the cryptanalytic background and my slight touch of Japanese. I tried to get into the Navy -- without success because of my feet; I failed the physical. But then I received one of those

famous postcards from the President that started with "Greetings" and found myself becoming a member of the United States Army.

My time in the Army started off with training for the infantry at Ft. McClellan, Alabama. At one point, toward the end of my basic training there, I was called in and told that I had falsified my 201 form. The falsification consisted of my having put down the single word "none" in answer to the question of foreign languages that you know. I think at that point I had some fair to good knowledge of about 10 languages, at least in their written form, not necessarily in the spoken form. But the problem that I faced in filling out the 201 was that there was room only for the word "none" on the form. I couldn't just simply put down one language or another language. There was a whole line for date of birth, but only a quarter of an inch for foreign languages.

Anyway, it seemed that for some reason or other -- and I never really learned the reason for all this -- they had found out that I did in fact know some languages and people with those languages were in demand. So I was moved out of the infantry, which by the way I dearly loved, and was sent to Camp Ritchie in Maryland, where I was assigned to the Military Intelligence Training School. I went through the course there and at the end of it I was sent to a place in Virginia where I was assigned to the task of studying Japanese and also had some difficult training in the nature of crypts at that time. So in fact my job then was that of being a cryptanalyst, specifically on Japanese codes and ciphers.

I won't spend any more time on the business of what we did there in that field of work, but rather turn to the end of the war. At the end of the war, having gotten myself a wife and with a child on the way, I set out to find a job, and I looked first, of course, to the educational institutions. I did get two offers, the highest one paying \$3500. This was in 1946 when \$3500 was a lot of money for beginners like me. But the people in the Department of the Army offered me a job which would pay \$3600. So for \$100 I chose to go with the United States Government rather than the educational community.

1949-54 Post-War: After 3 Year Period as Army Civilian
Employee, Transfer to Department of State, Leading to
Completion of Ph.D. and Later to Two Year London Assignment

During the period that I worked as a civilian with the Army, I became involved with other languages, one of which was Albanian. And at one of the meetings of my Army Reserve group, there was a man from the Department of State who was talking about the needs that the Department had at this period, with the problems we were facing in eastern Europe. They were looking for certain specific types of people. One of those categories fitted me. They were looking for someone who knew Albanian but was not of Albanian origin. I went over to the State Department to see what this was all about. They really did need someone and I was hired, transferred to the Department of State and went into an organization known as the IAD, meaning Information (or Intelligence) Acquisition and Distribution Division of the Research Area of the Department of State.

Incidentally, I was never called upon except once to use my Albanian. But I became involved with the type of work that was being done in the process of acquiring and distributing printed materials from abroad to government agencies. During this time also, while working at the Department of State, I went back to Philadelphia, for an entirely different purpose, and there I met with the President of Dropsie College, who urged me to come back and finish my degree. I was able to make special arrangements so that I could work at the Department on Saturdays and have Mondays off. The President of Dropsie made special arrangements for me to be able to take courses all day Mondays in order to be considered active. And in this way I was able to write a new thesis. This one was called "A Linguistic Analysis of the Sinuhe Romance," a story written originally in Egyptian Hieratic. The substance of my thesis had to do with analyzing the nature of the grammar of the ancient Egyptians at the period of time when this work had been written. Not ever going to be a best seller at any book store, I can assure you.

Anyway, in 1952, by the spring of 1952, I had finished my thesis. It had been read by the faculty and accepted. And in May of 1952, I received my doctorate.

At the same time, in 1952, the office that I worked in, IAD, which ran the so-called Publications Procurement Officer Corps, needed someone to go to London. Because of my languages I was the most desirable candidate for that job. Actually there was some relationship between the languages and London. London was a very good acquisition point for much of the material that one wanted from Eastern Europe but which was not available in the United States.

I stayed on as Publications Procurement Officer in London for two years. At the end of 1953 -- early 1954 -- when the great RIF took place, I was low man on the totem pole among the Publications Procurement Officers, and I found myself in the midst of the RIF, and pretty soon on the way back home.

1954: Recruitment Into USIA

Coming back to Washington, I had no job but did receive a contract arrangement with the Library of Congress, with whom the Publications Procurement Officers worked, and the contract was for a three-month period. I did want to get back into a government agency. Everybody was all mixed up by the RIF, there was a freeze on hiring. However, certain things were happening. One of the people in the Research Area of the Department of State, one Harold Glidden, told me that a new agency was going to be formed and somebody who was going to be working with that agency was currently in the Research Area of the Department of State and was doing some recruiting for the new agency. That agency was to be the United States Information Agency. And the person who was doing some of the recruiting was Mr. Lew Olom.

Through Lou Olom, I did become employed by the USIA and that started my USIA career.

Q: In that case, you were recruited by Lou Olom but had his outfit already gone over to USIA or were you still for a short time in the Department? And what did you do when you did move over to USIA in the first instance?

PICON: Lou still had an office in the R Area of the Department of State. Actually the USIA wasn't really organized very much at all. I had been hired to fill a job in the Arabic section of the Research Area that was going to be in USIA, but actually Lou thought that my experience with IAD would be more useful if I were to work with Henry Loomis in trying to organize the R Area of USIA along the lines of that of the Department of State, and also to develop some means of acquiring the types of materials USIA would want.

At first my job in the Agency had no relationship to any of my past experience. But then I was called into the office of Lew Fanget who handled the Book Translations Program, along with other things, and the whole Book Development Program of the Agency. He had taken an interest in me because of my Japanese. At this point, by the way, although my spoken Japanese was practically non-existent, my reading and writing ability in Japanese was fairly extensive. And Lew saw in this something that might be of interest in developing the Book Translations Program in Japan. So that in March of 1955 my family and I went to Tokyo, I as book translations officer for USIA, USIS-Tokyo.

1955: Book Translations Officer, Tokyo

I guess I should make the statement here, though it should be fairly obvious, I did not go to USIA -- I was not attracted to USIA by its mission in the first instance. I came into USIA just by default, so to speak. In other words, I was not setting out to be working in the field of public diplomacy. I became interested in that much later. But my first job abroad with the Agency was Book Translations Officer in Tokyo.

Combating Large Scale Communist Literature in Japanese Translation

Q: When you got to Tokyo, did you have a specific idea of what you were going to do in the Book Translations Program? And did you have particular goals that you were shooting for or did these develop as you went along in the program? If you'll cover that and then sort of give us an idea of some of the activities that you engaged in as a book translations officer.

PICON: The answer to that is definitely that I went to Tokyo with a rather specific instruction from Lew Fanget. It seems that the Book Development Program wanted to compete with the books that were coming out of the Soviet Union and other parts of Eastern Europe, being translated into Japanese and being sold in the Japanese bookstores. There was one book that was quite sensational, surprisingly a best seller on the Japanese best seller list, called Keizaigaku Kyokasho, which means Economic Textbook, which came out of the Soviet Union on Communist theories of economics. It was one of the best

sellers in Japan. There was a lot of other stuff being distributed in Japan, some having been translated into Japanese in the Soviet Union. There was a good campaign going on.

My job was to get the widest possible distribution for books that would combat this sort of leftist output in some way. And working together with Lew Fanget, I developed a low-cost book program through the business of subsidizing Japanese publishers to put into translation and to distribute books that were of specific interest to the United States government. Our books were quite varied in subject matter, not all hard-hitting texts, but these were plenty of hard-hitting texts among them. And Tokyo at that point developed the largest scale USIS Book Translations Program in the world.

Q: I wanted to ask you at this point, Leon, when I first came to the Embassy in Tokyo right at the end of the Occupation, although the Japanese were by that time already producing a lot of books, were they still pretty short of Western-originated books by the time you arrived? Particularly American and British? Or were they pretty well -- were they pretty well along the line of getting an adequate number of books from Europe, the United States, and Great Britain? What was the situation then?

Picon Develops the Low Cost Book Program

PICON: The Japanese were getting foreign language books, which were being sold successfully. But, of course, the selection of those books would have not been the kind of selection that the Agency would have been very happy with. Now, we have to divide the book program into two specific categories here. One relates to the books that were put into translation. Working with a Japanese publisher -- one of the major publishers -- we developed a program whereby the books we wanted to get translated and put into the market would be sold at prices lower than the standard Japanese books: a low-cost book program. And this was becoming a major drive of the Agency when we were working together, the Agency and we in Tokyo, developing the concepts and methods for low-priced books.

There's another aspect of this which is quite interesting. At one time one of the major publishing distributors, who was working with the Agency in the Book Development Program, came to visit us in Tokyo. He had some specific things in mind, but among other things, he mentioned in passing that some of the American publishers were not very happy with what was going on in the "Far East" as it was then called. Many American books were being pirated: photocopied and offset printed, bound, and sold in East Asia with no profit at all to the American publisher. This pirating was becoming an awful nuisance. And I guess it was just as a joke that I said to Mr. Feffer, "Paul, why don't you tell them to pirate their own books." The idea took. And out of that developed an entire part of the book publishing industry in Japan, wherein American books, such as Samuelson's Economics -- and when I left Japan there were then about 150 titles -- no, it was before I left. When I left the book operations, there were 150 titles, American books, printed in Japan by the American publishers under bilateral contract arrangements. And pretty soon those book development programs expanded like mad, as these books were

being reprinted, legally this time, and at low price, and demand for American books increased greatly.

Q: Were those books that were being reproduced -- this 150 titles about which you were speaking -- books that had been translated into Japanese or were they still in the original English?

PICON: Original English. These were in the original English. They were mostly college textbooks. But many of them the Agency would not have subsidized, and the Agency did not subsidize any part of this program at all. Many of them were technical books, medical books and things of that sort. But there was a remarkable expansion of American books in Japan at that time because of this program, developed mainly with the Tuttle Company in Tokyo and also with one of the major printers, because the job was mainly printing. In effect, what was being done here -- and you can see how the economics of it works out -- instead of an American publisher sending 1,000 copies of Samuelson's Economics across the ocean and selling them at the American book price plus transportation costs, converted into Japanese yen, the Japanese could now buy the book, same book, same contents -- though generally it was in soft paperback rather than hardback -- the same book was now available at generally one quarter of the price that they were paying before. And yet the printers and the publishing company were making good money out of the whole thing.

Q: And were they paying royalty to the American authors?

PICON: Yes, yes.

Q: So, however you also started a rather extensive translation of books, as you were talking about I think earlier, of American books through this publisher with whom you had this special arrangement. How did that work out? What was being done there? And what kind of books were you throwing into this translation program?

PICON: It was a very varied program. I believe that by the time I ceased to be the Book Translations Officer, we had about 250 titles going through this method and they were being sold, regardless of size, at 100 yen. Let's see what that would be the equivalent of in those --

Q: At that time, since the yen was 360 to the dollar, the equivalent in dollars would probably have been somewhere around 27 cents.

PICON: Yes, that's right.

The Highly Successful Publication Beisho Daiyori --
A Journal of Reviews of American Books Which Were
Translated Into Japanese

Q: We spoke before we started this actual recording about the publication "Beisho Daiyori," and I had thought that you were the originator of that magazine. As a matter of fact, in my own interview when I spoke of some of the programs that we were doing, I attributed the origin of the magazine to you. You told me that although you did a lot in developing it, the original idea was elsewhere. You might go into that, but I would also like to ask you what does "Beisho Daiyori" mean and what was it doing? What was the subject matter of it and how did it help in promoting the kind of books that you were translating?

PICON: "Beisho" means American book, "Bei" being the symbol for America, and "sho" means book. "Daiyori" is almost like the English word diary. A diary of American books, or more accurately: a Journal of American Books, a Journal [about] American books.

In format, it was a magazine in which my staff, working with some specialists in American literature and specialists on American society, did reviews of books that were current on the American scene. We would review about 25 different books in each of these issues. Now, for this purpose here, I will state that most of the reviews we did were reviews of books that the Agency was pushing. Some of the reviews that we did were based upon other reviews that appeared in American journals, book reviews in other places. The "Beisho Daiyori" was sent out to anybody who was interested in the journal. They were sent to virtually every large book publisher in Japan and book publishers did, we know, translate into Japanese some of these titles. The magazine was very well received by the Japanese. They did not consider it any kind of propaganda as such. It was a very highly respected magazine.

I was not the originator of it. It had been thought of and created: the concept conceived of by Carl Bartz. But I cannot remember specifically whether any of the issues had yet been published. I believe that they had started to work on it when it was time for Bartz to go on home leave, and then he was going to be transferred to another part of USIS Tokyo. I think that -- I'm not positive of this, but I think -- we put out either the first, second, or third issue and then all of them from then on. I say "we" meaning the people who were working with me rather than with Carl. But this was a tool for us to get American books that we wanted published put into Japanese.

Q: Did you write reviews of the books that you had sponsored in translation? American books that you had sponsored in translation through this publisher with whom you were working?

PICON: Generally speaking, no. We would have reviewed those in "Beisho Daiyori" before we worked out the translation of them. It was frequently through "Beisho Daiyori" that the publisher became convinced that a certain book was one that he would like to do, and many of the books that we reviewed were taken from the Agency's lists.

Q: Do you have any idea of the number of copies of those books reviewed in "Beisho Daiyori" that were sold in the bookstores? Do you have any ballpark estimate?

PICON: Well, it varied with the book. But the Japanese custom at that time was generally to publish 3,000 copies to 5,000 copies of a book, have it get into the market and then do further printing according to how the book sold. In our low price book program, we became convinced that it would be much more economical to print 10 or 20,000 copies of the book and get them out, sort of flood the market with them, have them around everywhere. At first the publishers were a little bit reluctant to undertake this, but with a bit of financial help we worked it out. And in the low-priced book program, our general run of a first edition was 10,000 copies as compared with the normal 3,000 for Japanese books.

Now, let me go back on that.

Q: Just let me ask you one thing before you do. Are you convinced that the majority of those 10,000 were sold in each case?

PICON: Absolutely, absolutely. Absolutely. Because we saw them everywhere. We saw these books everywhere. As a matter of fact, the publisher designed a specific type of book rack, a cylindrical thing.

Q: I remember that.

PICON: And we could find these -- well, I'm only talking about Tokyo, of course, but we saw these in many, many bookstores in Tokyo. And when I traveled in other parts of the country, I would see some of these here, there and elsewhere.

I wanted to go back for a moment to explain that 3,000 copies of a book seems pretty, pretty small. But that's about the size of the edition for the kind of books we would be interested in. Of course the kind of book that would become a best seller, a novel or whatever, that sort of thing, was published in greater quantity actually. But thoughtful books were likely to start out with an edition of 3,000 to 5,000. Our objective was to double that at the beginning. The program turned out to be very, very successful. And my successor, Cliff Southard, carried this program to even greater heights.

Q: Did you have any indication as to whether some or a substantial number of these books were being used in university study, or were they mostly books that were bought by, I imagine, students and read on their own but not necessarily in the collegiate curriculum?

PICON: Most of these were not in the collegiate curriculum. In fact, very few were. Our stuff was a bit more hard-hitting than the kind of thing that would get in the ordinary college curriculum. But nevertheless, they were being read. I mean, after all, this was Japan, Japan with a literacy of something like 99.4 percent. I think it's actually higher than the preservation of matter in chemical and physical experiments.

But the titles were very varied. Now one thing that we did develop that was definitely used in the universities was a continuum of the works of specific American writers: Faulkner, Hemingway, etc. The reason that these were so popular and were used in the colleges is that they fit into the pattern of Japanese publishing. You can go into a Japanese bookstore and see volume after volume of the complete works of a Japanese author. When a Japanese author established himself, at some point inevitably his complete works would be published. And these fit right into that pattern and these books became natural ones to be used in the universities when students were studying American literature.

The Nagano Summer Seminar in American Literature

Q: Would you want to say a few words about the so-called summer seminar in Nagano? Because that was at its height at the time you came over. I think it later sort of fizzled out and was transferred to a different kind of program down in Kyoto, which has been covered, by the way, by Walt Nichols in his interview. But would you say a little bit of the purpose and the nature of the summer seminar.

PICON: I had nothing to do, believe me, with the origin of that, though I became very closely connected with it, by default. I believe it was Don Ranard who had come up with the idea, I believe that this is so.

Q: It was Pat Van Delden essentially.

PICON: Oh, all right. I didn't know Pat Van Delden or very much about her at all, but I did know Ranard and he was the one who headed the Exchange of Persons Program when I got to Tokyo. Whoever had the idea for the origin of this thing had had a very, very good idea, the idea being to promote and widen interest in American literature and American writers. I don't know who it was that came up with the idea of getting the individual, but all of that had been decided before I ever got to Tokyo. Someone got the idea of bringing out to the Nagano Seminar -- I'll go into that in just a moment -- an American author by the name of William Faulkner.

The Nagano Seminar, by its name, meant a gathering together of leaders in the field of American literature and American studies to meet at a resort type place, at least away from the city, away from the noise, a quiet place, and contemplate the navel in good Oriental fashion along with some specialist in American studies. It was a great idea. It was like going off to Aspen or some of the other places like that which we have here in the U.S.

William Faulkner Comes to Japan and the Nagano Seminar

I had come to Tokyo in March and had been in Tokyo March, April, May, June, July -- five months -- when I inherited the visiting guest by default. Don Ranard had gone on home leave, many others had gone on home leave. The PAO had either gone on home

leave or was being replaced, and you yourself, Lew, were the person who was handling everything that USIS was doing in Japan at that time.

Q: Just let me interpose here. Willard Hannah had been the PAO and he got into a terrible argument with the Ambassador because of the "Lucky Dragon" incident in which a Japanese fishing vessel was showered with ash from the American atomic energy explosion in the Pacific. When the ship arrived back at its port in Southwestern Japan, all the men were deathly ill and the Ambassador refused to allow any statement to be made about them. Of course Willard told him that he couldn't let this kind of thing go because the whole press was after the story. They got into such a shouting match that they actually shouted obscenities at one another and finally Willard just came back and resigned both from the job of PAO and from USIA completely, and had not been replaced.

PICON: Well, in any case, word was out that the great William Faulkner was going to be coming to Tokyo. I wanted a piece of that action. I didn't want the whole thing, I just wanted a piece of it. I wrote a memorandum at that time asking simply for a chance to host a reception in Mr. Faulkner's honor and to invite leading publishers, writers, critics, American studies people, etc., to the reception to meet Mr. Faulkner.

I'm reminded here of a little story about a man who worked with me in London, a British employee, who went to the United States on one of our orientation programs. He came back and I had lunch with him, along with some other people. I was anxious to find out what he thought about the United States. When I asked him what he thought about the United States he said, "Well, I can summarize that best by telling about getting a newspaper. I arrived on a Saturday night and Sunday morning I got the Times. It was not the Times he was used to, it was the New York Times. And I, smilingly, said to him, "Well, how did you like that?" He said, "Well, frankly, Mr. Picon, I felt as if I had ordered a ham sandwich and they gave me the whole pig."

Now I had asked simply to be able to host a reception for Mr. Faulkner and instead I got the whole pig.

You want me to be more specific about this?

Q: Yes, you go ahead and be specific.

PICON: Okay. Well, we realized very, very slowly but shockingly, and then suddenly, that we had bitten off quite a bit in bringing Mr. Faulkner to Japan. In the first place, when he arrived he had apparently been doing quite a bit of drinking on the plane and his eyes were almost moving independently, but nevertheless he got to Japan and was taken to International House where he was to meet with some Japanese critics. I did not participate in that thing at all, I had nothing to do with it at all. It was handled entirely by somebody else, so I can't speak to that. However, a schedule had been worked out for him and one of the things that he was to do was to address the foreign correspondents press

club in Tokyo at noon the next day. And the Ambassador was going to give a reception for Mr. Faulkner that next evening. This would be the second evening that he would have been in Japan.

I don't remember what day of the week it was, but let's assume for a moment that it was Tuesday that he arrived and this would have been Wednesday. Wednesday morning, because there was a shortage of people, I had the assignment of picking up Mr. Faulkner, bringing him over to meet the Ambassador and then taking him to the Press Club where he would deliver his remarks. Mr. Faulkner was staying at International House in Azabu, Tokyo, and I went there at about 9:00 in the morning. I knocked at his door and there was no answer. I knocked again and again. I went down to see if perhaps he had gone to have breakfast. No, nobody had seen him. I went back up again, tried the door and it was not locked. There was Mr. Faulkner on the floor. And his room reeked of alcohol.

The first thing I thought of doing was to call you, in fact, because you were going to go at the same time and present him to the Ambassador along with me. I did manage to get him dressed, the car came to pick him up, and we met at the Embassy. You holding one arm and I holding the other arm, we escorted him up the steps into the Ambassador's office. The Ambassador greeted us, invited us in. We went and sat on the couch: the Ambassador sat in a chair near his desk, fortunately some distance away, and tried to make conversation. But Mr. Faulkner's mind was elsewhere and I remember very clearly, and I admired you for having the sense to say, "Well, we can't take too much of the Ambassador's time, Mr. Faulkner, we'd better go." And you took one arm and I took the other, and we escorted him toward the door. I remember the Ambassador saying to you, "He isn't very talkative, is he?"

In any case, our next step was to take Mr. Faulkner over to your office. And in that office we were helped greatly by Peggy Schmidt, who had been a nurse.

Actually we went to your office first and then over to Don Ranard's office. And your wife, Peggy Schmidt, was there to help. We tried to bring him to his senses. The clock was moving fast at this time, and it became difficult to see how he was going to make any speech at the Foreign Correspondents Press Club. But we tried to revive him completely. You know, Lew, I don't really know -- it's not clear in my mind at all how much of this was act and how much of this was really intoxication.

Q: I think it was really -- he may have been, he didn't like to talk and he may have been putting on, but believe me, he was so sick that it wasn't a total --.

PICON: No, no. I agree with you. Both of these things were playing together. Perhaps if he hadn't been so shy, so afraid of meeting an audience, he might have done something psychologically that would help him get into a kind of shape whereby he might have been able to carry on. But actually, at one point he opened his eyes and he said, "I'm not going to go there." Just wasn't going to go there.

So, since Mr. Faulkner was not going to go there, and since all these people from the press were waiting, there seemed to be no alternative except to go there and talk about Mr. Faulkner. And there being no one else to do the job, I went and spoke in his stead. I spoke about him, and I read the message that he had written for his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. I apologized and explained that it had been very hot, and he had had a long trip, and he was overcome by the heat. And someone in the audience yelled out, "Was this canned or bottled heat?" No question about it. The press coverage -- whatever there was of it -- on this luncheon address by Mr. Faulkner simply talked about the honored guest who failed to arrive to make his speech.

That evening was the Ambassador's reception. And Mr. Faulkner went. I had given instructions to the help at the Residence to keep his drinks light; in fact, to put practically nothing in them except the soda, or ginger ale, or whatever the drink was to have been. But Mr. Faulkner had his own ideas about that, and he stepped out of the receiving line a couple of times and came back with a drink that he had managed to get somehow himself. I have a photograph of Mr. Faulkner, holding a drink, probably a gin and tonic, tilted at a 45-degree or, worse, a 30-degree angle, and the drink itself coming out of the glass and going all over Mrs. Allison's skirt. The face of Ambassador Allison at that time, as you yourself put it when you saw that picture, "You could see him writing that memo." And I'm sure you won't forget that memo.

Q: Sure won't.

PICON: This was a memo sent to you from the Ambassador instructing you to see to it that Mr. Faulkner was on the next plane back to the United States or to give the Ambassador cause why not. I saw that memorandum when you handed it to me to read, along with your reply to the Ambassador in which you stated quite firmly that Mr. Faulkner would not be on the next plane back; he had come here to do a job; he had come here to do the Nagano seminar; and he was going to do that. And if there were any further recurrence of this, the Ambassador could very well have the resignations of the undersigned. And your name was there, and Don Ranard's name was there, and my name was there?

Do you remember that?

Q: I remember it. Except I got that memorandum about 10:30 in the morning. The poor little girl who brought it over was practically shaking and she didn't want to see me, she wouldn't give it to me, she gave it to my secretary out front. I looked at that paper, and I must have spent two or three hours figuring out how I was going to answer it before I finally put the answer down. But as you say, that was basically the response we made.

And that evening the Ambassador was giving one of his periodic parties for the staff of the Embassy, to get to know his staff. I had to go to the party, of course, and when I got there -- I waited late and the party was fairly well underway, you could tell by the noise. I went up and there was the Ambassador standing over to one side with a drink in his hand

and his aloha shirt on. Finally I went over to him and he said, "Lew, I lost my cool. You're right, we've got to let the guy stay, but I'm making you and USIS responsible for his conduct from here on in and you're going to answer for it if he doesn't work out." Of course you kept him under control pretty well after that.

PICON: Yeah, you passed those instructions on to me.

I hadn't been in Japan very long at this point and I certainly had never had experience with this sort of thing before. But I must say that you came to the rescue. I traveled by train with Mr. Faulkner up to Nagano. But you sent a car up to Nagano. It went separately, and you had a supply of "medicines" there in case they were needed, "medicines" meaning things like gin and scotch. And they were very, very, very helpful.

I did not know how to handle a situation like this because I had never encountered anything like it before. But there was a program all arranged. Mr. Faulkner was not very communicative. But gradually, gradually he warmed up. We would go walking together, and talking, and he really was a great man, absolutely a great man. Yet, when 4:00 was approaching, and he was to have one of these meetings, he would say to me, "Well, got to go on there pretty soon. You know, Leon, I don't think I feel like going today. I don't think I can face those people without a drink. Couldn't we just have a couple of drinks before we went?" Well, I don't know where I got the idea, but thanks to the stuff that you sent up there, I got the idea of keeping glasses soaked in gin ready for such emergencies so that I put in just a little, tiny bit of gin and lots of tonic, and let him have that drink, because he would not go without it. Apparently it gave him enough of a kick, enough of a high, to enable him to go to the seminar meeting and to be magnificent.

Of course, there were some other things that entered in to help. One got the idea pretty soon that he had his eye on a very lovely Japanese teacher, an assistant professor or something of the sort. There was nothing wrong with what went on between them. Faulkner simply found her fascinating to look at and to talk to, with her demure Japanese nature. Discovering this affinity, I saw to it that she sat up close front, which was breaking the tradition of the Japanese and causing a bit of a problem, but we got that straightened out, because he would talk to her, and then he would be magnificent. If she wasn't there, he was far less so.

But I had the task at that time of seeing to it that he remained sober, or nearly so, throughout the course of the seminar. I was with him for 24 days, actually. I think it's taken 24 years off my life. But we had great times in the evenings when the seminar was over, with dinner. He would drink sake at dinnertime and then, after dinner, the Japanese scholars all wanted to cluster around him, but he always begged off saying he was tired. Then he would say to me, "Let's go up and have a nightcap." So it was not a matter of depriving him entirely, by any means, of that which he needed so much, but rather timing it so that he could do his performances. And that worked out.

Q: The seminar was a tremendous success then, wasn't it?

PICON: Yes, it was, absolutely. A rip-roaring success.

Q: Did you have much press coverage at the seminar or did you keep the press away until he got back down to the major cities?

PICON: There was press coverage of the event. There were Japanese reporters who had been assigned up there to cover this. But they never sought an interview with Faulkner himself but covered the activities, what was going on in the seminar.

The Japanese, because of their own nature, didn't see anything wrong with the amount of drink that he had, and they understood when he went off completely, and was not communicable again. This didn't bother them a bit. There was no loss of face or anything of the sort. But I must say that he was fully cooperative. It was blood, sweat and tears, but in the long run he came through. He was not going "to let USIS down!" Those are the words that he used himself.

Q: I think from all that I remember and from the press coverage that I remember, he made a tremendous impression. Of course the Japanese were already prepared to accept him as a great man and he did enough so that he didn't disappoint them.

"Impressions of Japan" -- The Very Successful
USIS Film About Faulkner at the Nagano Seminar

PICON: There is another thing, yeah. You do call to mind another thing which I think is very, very important. All the time that he was there, because of the nature of the Japanese themselves, he was being asked the question, "What are your impressions of Japan?" And he used to say to me when he was asked this question, or after he had been asked, "I don't know what they expect from me, I've just come. I won't have impressions of this place for another three or four weeks. Then if I have any impressions, I'll let them know." But yet when we sat and drank together or when we went and walked together, and he made observations, after he had made them and I could discreetly do it, I would write down into a notebook some of the things that had impressed him. At that time we had a motion picture officer, Harry Keith, who was going to do a film about Faulkner, and I think at the beginning he didn't have any firm idea of what the nature of the film would be. But he came up there and we talked about this and he got the idea of doing a film which would be called "Impressions of Japan." I gave him those notes and others that I had gotten later and he framed the movie that he made around things that Faulkner had said. Then as he developed this idea, he got Faulkner to the places, to the sites, doing the things that had impressed him, and Harry made a wonderful film, "Impressions of Japan" out of this. But the text of it is all based on Faulkner's "Impressions of Japan."

Faulkner's Great Newspaper Piece:
"To The Youth of Japan"

I gave those notes back to Mr. Faulkner afterwards, saying that the Japanese had all wanted him to write something, and he one night penned off a thing which he called "Impressions of Japan." A marvelous piece of writing. It is the basic text of that film which Harry made.

There was one other thing in this connection. Faulkner met with reporters at the Tokyo Cultural Center, a special thing that hadn't been on the program at all. But he wanted to meet with them and to say a few things about the importance of maintaining a democracy in Japan. And he spoke about Democracy and Freedom. I remember particularly that he told his audience that he was not a profound scholar or well-versed specialist in the field of political theory, but of this he was certain: "Democracy, as we know it in the West, may very well have its faults and ingrained problems, but it remains unquestionably the best form of government yet conceived by Man." Hardhitting? No. He meant it.

Then, about the last couple of days, he said to me, "Have we met all the requirements, done all the things we're supposed to do?" I said "Yes, all except one. You yourself talked, Mr. Faulkner, about the importance that you placed on youth and how you saw this thing as something you were giving to youth. How about writing something for the youth of Japan?" And he did that, too. He wrote a message called, simply, "To the Youth of Japan." And again in this piece he hit hard toward the need of maintaining the democracy that we know. Marvelous piece of writing, "To the Youth of Japan." Both of these things, "Impressions of Japan" and the message "To the Youth of Japan" are things that everybody ought to read.

Q: I think that was the highlight of all the Nagano seminars that we put on. We put on three or four of them. And certainly that was the absolute zenith, or not zenith, absolute acme --

PICON: Apex.

Q: The peak of the effectiveness of that whole seminar. I'm sure it helped tremendously in the Japanese educational system.

PICON: Definitely.

Q: I think now Leon we've covered pretty well your work in the Book Translation Program and the Book Program generally in Japan, concluding with an extended discussion of the success of William Faulkner's visit for the purpose of participating in the Nagano seminar and the effect it had in Japan. Shortly after that I think you -- or after at least a couple of years -- you left the Book Translation Program and you went on to other things in the USIA program, some that were not directly in the Translation Program but in one way related to it. So I'd like you to pick up from there now and go on in sequence with what you did with the rest of your years in the country.

Picon Advances to Position of Book Programs

and Exhibits Officer

PICON: All right. I guess this is the nature of bureaucracy. I guess it's the sort of thing that's certainly par for the course in any bureaucracy, but having been the Books Translations Officer, as time went on I had to become something else. So I became the Book Programs Officer, which had to do with not only the book translations but the entire book programs field of the agency, which meant that under my wing came the librarians and the libraries, which was fine. I've never been a librarian, I don't know that much about librarianship, but I did know the program and was very deeply involved in what we were doing with books in any of its phases.

But then, with reorganizations, I found the Exhibits Section under my wing as well, so I was Books and Exhibits Officer. USIS was then housed in the two uppermost stories of what was still called the "Mantetsu Biru" or "Mantetsu Building." And as I developed from Book Translations Officer to Book Programs Officer to Books and Exhibits Officer, our friend Harry of the "Impressions of Japan" fame put a sign outside my office which read "TODAY THE MANTETSU, TOMORROW THE WORLD."

Q: We might just say Mantetsu was short for the Japanese of the Manchurian, the South Manchurian railway, which the Japanese had developed and operated when they controlled the puppet state of Manchukuo. They had of course a functioning office up in Manchukuo, over on the Continent, but their headquarters for the South Manchurian railway was in Tokyo, and the Mantetsu building was their building. Of course, when the Occupation came in our Army took it over and later we used it as the annex of the Embassy. That's where USIS headquarters were.

The "Thinkers and Doers": Reorganization of USIS by PAO George Hellyer

PICON: Yes. Anyway, after my experience as Books Officer, Book Programs Officer, Books and Exhibits Officer, we had a reorganization in Tokyo. George Hellyer, who was then the new PAO -- this was some time later -- had a concept which antedates the concepts that -- what I think I'm trying to say here is that George Hellyer had an idea of functioning that predates the Allan Carter thesis on operations. And he used a very untraditional approach to the operation of USIS. He divided us up into what some people teasingly called the Doers and the Thinkers. There was a Program Division which was supposed to come up with all the ideas for the activities that the organization was going to conduct, and then there was the Production Division, which would do the actual work of producing all of the bits and pieces that went into any of the programs.

And I was in the Programming Office. For a while, I headed the programming office, and Harry Keith -- and then later on Hank Goshko -- headed the Production Office. I don't know really what the reorganization ever accomplished, whether it made us more productive or less productive or what. But that's what happened to me.

Picon Becomes Cultural Programmer for USIS Tokyo

Later on when I returned from home leave there had been some further change and I was no longer the head of the Program Division but was put into a separate corner where I was to deal with "Cultural Programming," as it was called, but my job was mainly one of being in touch with, having contact with, and just conducting a dialogue with leading Japanese writers and intellectuals. I think much of this came from, or stemmed from an article that was written by later Ambassador Edwin Reischauer, in which he spoke about a broken dialogue between the United States and Japan. He was talking about the breakdown of dialogue between intellectuals in both countries, and this made our PAO and the Ambassador feel that we ought to do something about intellectuals. The problem was that nobody seemed to know any of the intellectuals. So my task became one of developing, doing nothing but developing relationships with Japanese intellectuals.

1961: Reischauer Comes to Tokyo as U.S. Ambassador. Picon Becomes His Close Assistant in Dealing With Intellectual Community

Then, as history has its curious ways of behaving, the man who had attacked what the Embassy had been doing in Japan, Reischauer, was appointed by John F. Kennedy as the Ambassador to Japan and my relationships with the Japanese intellectuals served well at that point.

Q: I know that you had earlier developed considerable proficiency in written Japanese. Had you at this stage in the game developed enough proficiency in the conversational Japanese so that you could approach them without utilizing an interpreter, these intellectuals that you were working toward?

PICON: Well, actually Lew, no. As you can see from this, it's not only my age that causes me to stammer, stutter, and hesitate as I speak. It's always been the nature of my talking. I've always been very hesitant, and then in a foreign language it's almost impossible. I do not have any gift for speaking foreign languages. I do have a gift for reading and writing foreign languages. I can't speak the languages. I used an interpreter all the time. But most of the time, actually, the important intellectuals were those who could speak English and our conversations were in English all the time.

I was of use to the new Ambassador because of these connections. By the way, I had known him for a long time. In fact, when I was in the Army studying Japanese, he was one of my teachers. He taught us Japanese. And his Japanese is superb. But he practically never speaks Japanese either. At least I haven't heard him speak Japanese ever, except for a few phrases here and there. He always used an interpreter. But, of course, that would be expected -- what an Ambassador has to say is so important, so much more important that he would want an interpreter's accurate interpretation. But most of the important intellectuals were quite fluent in English.

Q: We spoke a little bit off the record earlier about some of the things that you were doing on behalf of Reischauer in connection with these intellectual contacts, and if you don't mind I'd like to get some of that on tape.

PICON: All right. Well, Reischauer felt that one of the most important parts of his assignment was repairing the dialogue that he had seen broken. Yet, he was a bit handicapped in his current position as Ambassador, and he was advised, I understand, that he could not run the risk of too much association with the gentlemen on the near and far left, as Ambassador. After all, the ruling party was quite conservative and would take exception to his, let me call it pussyfooting around with the gentlemen of the near left, certainly with the far left.

Picon Comes Into Possession of Proposed Constitution
of the About-to-be Right Wing Socialist Party
As It Broke Away From Socialist Party's More
Radical Faction, And Almost By Accident Breaks
the Story at Ambassador's Staff Meeting

Well, Reischauer was not particularly interested in the far left at all, but he was interested in the people on the near left. Let me go off on a little bit of a tangent here and you don't have to do anything with the tape. There was a funny story in this regard. When I first went to Japan -- I say first went to Japan because I was there for a total of 10 years consecutively -- as book translations officer, I was invited to attend a staff meeting of the Ambassador, John Allison at that time, because he was interested in the book translations program, wanted to know how it ran and wanted me to do a presentation on what we were doing in the book translations field. I went to that meeting. It's, by the way, the only Ambassadorial meeting I attended in Japan, ever. But anyway --

When I went to that meeting, I don't think that I became very beloved by the Political Section because of my actions at that meeting, but I think that --

Q: When the last tape ended you were just saying that you had not made yourself beloved of the Political Section too much at the time you appeared to present your case on the Book Translations Program. So will you go on from there?

PICON: Yes. During the course of that meeting, the Ambassador asked the head of the Political Section whether the Japanese Socialist Party was going to split, as had been rumored. And the reply that the Ambassador got was that there certainly was no evidence that there was going to be a split in the Japanese Socialist Party at that time. And I, sitting there, said, "Uh, but there is. There is very definite evidence." I'm sorry that I said that. But the Ambassador [then Allison] looked at me and said, "You have some evidence of this, really?" And I said, "Yes, I do."

Let me give you the background on it. Where we were living during that early period in Tokyo, in a place called Seta, in Tokyo, we lived in an apartment house near a shrine and

next door to a wonderful Japanese family, a father and mother and three girls, who were about the ages of our children. And these children played together. The shrine comes into this story simply because very shortly after we had moved to Seta, the neighborhood was having a festive bon odori, folk dancing, at the shrine, and my family and I went down to see this. At that dance, I was approached by a Japanese gentleman, wearing his yukata, and he told me that he was my neighbor and that he would like to come and visit me and pay his respects. He spoke English very hesitatingly. I told him that anytime that he saw that we were at home, he was welcome to come over.

He was a professor at Tokyo Metropolitan University. His field was the history of political ideas. Besides that, he later became the advisor, on theory, to the Democratic Socialist Party of Japan. He was a Democratic Socialist, what they called in those days the Right Wing of the Socialist Party. But there was only one Socialist Party then. Well, as we became more and more friendly and talked about different things, he wondered if I would help him with something. He had written the Constitution for a new party in Japan which was to be called the Democratic Socialist Party of Japan. He had it in Japanese, and he was translating it into German, and he wanted me to work with him on translating it into English.

When the Constitution was translated, and on the date that the Right Wing of the Party was going to announce its separation, they would have the Constitution of the new Party published in three languages: Japanese, English and German, with the help of Fabian Societies, and Social Democratic Parties in other countries. Would I help him with the English? I said "Sure." He came over from time to time. This was to be the official document of separation of the new Party.

That's for the background. But at this meeting, I said: "I do have evidence; I have a copy of the proposed Constitution for a new Right Wing of the Socialist Party."

Q: You said this at the --?

PICON: At the meeting, yes. "I have a copy of the constitution." Everybody looked at me quizzically: "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I have it in my desk over at the Mantetsu Building." Then one of the officers said, "Can I see it?" I said, "I guess you can, if I can get permission."

But this is the kind of thing that develops when you have this sort of relationship with individuals in Japan. I was trusted not to release this to the press or anybody. It's the kind of thing that you develop person to person. These interpersonal relationships, I believe, are one of the most valuable things that develop in an organization like USIS abroad.

Q: There's no doubt about it. May I ask what was the upshot of that final request? Did you ask the gentleman if you could release it?

PICON: Yes, I did.

Q: And what did he say?

PICON: Yes. But not to the press.

Q: So you gave it to the political section in confidence.

PICON: Yes. That's exactly right. But it's an example of the sort of thing that we don't have time for in large doses, of course not. It's too expensive, it's too impractical. But to the degree that this sort of relationship -- and I'm not trying to throw bouquets backwards, but I'm sure you know what I'm talking about: When this kind of relationship can be developed between an officer of USIS and important intellectuals in a country, it carries our goals farther than a thousand pamphlets, I believe.

Q: I do, too.

Too Often USIA Leadership Downgrades Importance
of Personal Relationships in Favor of Media Activities

PICON: And this leads into a bit of philosophy about the organization, the kind of thing that has made me have quarrels and pick fights and so forth and so on. Too often, it seems to me, people in charge have no recognition of the importance of such interpersonal relationships, too often. It is not, of course, universal. There are many, many people at the head of organizations throughout the world who regard this type of activity as being very precious and very important. But on the other hand, there are unfortunately people who see the activities of USIS as being furthered best by the number of hits you have on a target audience, the number of exposures, as if you were standing there with a camera or stop watch or some kind of machine like that that measures the number of people going through a turnstile and that's your effectiveness, how many people have been touched by or brushed by this particular item of output.

I think that I'm not saying anything that's brand new here. I think that it's been a matter of discussion over and over and over again in the agency. But I also feel very strongly that it has been a failure on the part of the agency not to devote appropriate attention to this type of relationship and its activities.

By the way, a little added note. When the great upheavals of 1960 took place in Japan, the student riots, all the "Yankee, Go Home" stuff, my friend, the Democratic Socialist upbraided his classes, shouted all kinds of things at them, for their behavior, and the most leftist students saw to it that he would have to leave the campus. He did leave the campus. And he took on the job of publishing a magazine on the intellectual thought in Japan. I used to receive each issue when it came out.

Q: What was the name of the magazine, do you recall?

PICON: "Japan's Thought Today." Then he left that job about four years ago because the Democratic Socialist Party wanted him to run for the Upper House. He ran and is now a member of the Upper House in the Diet.

When I met him, he was, shall I say, an insignificant little professor of political thought. But not to those people, he wasn't. He became the advisor in theory to the Democratic Socialist Party.

Q: Just as a matter of curiosity, was he one of the men to whom Reischauer was, with whom Reischauer was dealing in these contacts that you set up for him?

PICON: Oh, very definitely. And others in his group, many others in his group. The arrangements were rather simple. To the degree that he had the time and would inform me that he had the time, my wife and I would arrange dinner at our house, and in consultation with him I would draw up the guest list, from the people that I knew and he knew or knew about, and we would all meet at my house.

One time there was a near catastrophe. It was suggested to me that it might be a good idea one of these times, or on some of these occasions, to invite along somebody from the political section. After all, USIA's responsibility is not one of reporting, but the Department has that responsibility, and other agencies. But it's sometimes well to have this stuff documented. I wasn't writing up any minutes of these meetings or anything of the sort. I thought that would be fine, so somebody from the political section was sent.

Q: Was this an occasion when Reischauer was there?

PICON: Yes, an occasion when Reischauer was there.

Q: And he had known of this and concurred in it?

PICON: Yes. I don't think he even recognized at the time, or maybe still didn't recognize it, but one of the people at this gathering said something that was very interesting to our political officer there, whereupon he whipped out a notebook and started taking notes of what the man had said. I don't think I need to say anything further on that.

Q: What was Reischauer's reaction to that?

PICON: I'm not even sure that Reischauer noticed that. I'm not sure that Reischauer noticed it. But I do know that some of the Japanese did.

Q: I'm sure they would.

PICON: I did say to Reischauer at one point that we can't have the kind of activity whereby an officer at the Embassy, meeting at my house with these people, takes notes on what's being said. And he agreed.

I think that in the long run, when we have a situation or a condition whereby it becomes possible for an officer in USIS, USIA, to develop a relationship with individuals of interest to people of the political section for their purposes, or representatives of any other government agency, that we do our government a service by including them. But there must be a recognition of the sensitivities of the individuals.

The Need for USIA (USIS) To Show High Sensitivity
in its Dealings With the Academic Communities
Both in U.S. and Overseas

Lew, throughout this interview, from time to time, I've said things about certain types of PAOs or certain types of officers, and none of this is out of vindictiveness or anything of the sort, believe me, but there is a matter of sensitivity that I think we have to dwell on just a little bit. And I'm referring mostly to what happens in our relations with the academic community of the United States and the academic community of the country to which we're assigned. There has to be a sensitivity towards the type of thinking that goes on in the mind of educators, of writers, of philosophers, that's rather far removed from the kind of thinking that goes on in the mind of a media representative, a reporter let us say. I have seen develop in the American media, particularly the press, a sort of callousness toward the people they're interviewing, on these programs like "Meet the Press," like any of them. Hard hitting, callous. That is an attitude that does not go over and does not do us good with the sensitivities of the academic community.

I guess I'm saying here that to a degree the nature of the media is diametrically opposite in sensitivity to the nature of the thought that goes on in the minds of academicians that we deal with and that goes on in the minds of those people who are deeply involved in real dialogue with the intellectuals of another country, whether they are employees of the USIS or representatives of American universities. Do I make myself clear?

Q: Yes, you do. And I think this is especially true in Japan because I know there are differences in the thought processes between Americans and Europeans, but not to that extent. The Japanese are something entirely different. Unless you have lived among them you can't understand it. But you can take the same set of facts and put them before an American and a Japanese, whether he's an intellectual or whether he's a press man or anything else, he is very likely to come to a conclusion that's so diametrically opposed to the conclusion the American will come to that you never would have thought it possible that the same set of facts would result in that much of a different concept. The Japanese thinking is very different from ours and therefore it makes a much heavier adverse impact on the Japanese I think than it does in others.

PICON: In this connection, too, though a bit removed -- not too much removed -- I'd like to say a few words also about the whole business of educational exchange. I worked -- after I returned from Japan -- I worked for three years over in CU in the Department with one of the most brilliant men I've ever met, Charles Frankel. Charles Frankel was

appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Cultural and Educational Affairs, I believe, primarily because of his deep involvement with American intellectuals. Some of his books are marvelous, including the one he wrote after he left the Department of State. I don't know if you read that one but it's a lot of fun. He also wrote a book about the Cultural Attaché. He had traveled to various parts of the world and he met with Cultural Attachés, people in the cultural affairs field. And he gathered from them certain of the ideas which influenced his entire outlook on the programs of CU and led, actually, to some very unhappy moments between him and officers of USIA. Much of what I say relates to his philosophy, and it has to do with dialogue and the way dialogue is conducted, and his concepts of what is important to American foreign policy in the field of education.

Oversimplifying what he believed in, let me try to put it this way. The personal contact of two people who are related in academic activities, the personal contact that they have together does more for expanding the horizons of that discipline than maybe five or ten books can do. The exchange of ideas between two people who are experts in a particular field far exceeds the impact that can be gotten out of reading a book by each of these individuals. Therefore, if the United States is in fact to achieve understanding between the people of this country and people abroad, it will come most readily through the relationships and personal contacts of educators talking about their own subjects. We further the horizons of those fields in which they work, we develop them further, we expand the boundaries of the disciplines and that works to the benefit of both countries that are involved.

That is the essence of the importance of educational exchange.

Now I've often heard arguments about whether we should regard educational exchange as a tool for our operations. The answer to that is certainly yes. But in a different sense from the ordinary meaning of "a tool." It's not a tool as a pamphlet is. It's not a tool like a film. It's not a tool like a magazine. It's not even a tool like a book. But it is definitely a tool in developing understanding. But it's fragile, and the people with whom we deal are themselves fragile, because they're very sensitive about being used. I'm not saying we shouldn't use them. Of course we should use them.

Q: But they can't perceive that you are.

PICON: That's right. Exactly right. And they will perceive the genuine interest in the foreign policy ramifications of an exchange program, they'll see this quite clearly. And most clearly when they understand or see evidence that the people running the operation hold what they're doing in high regard.

Very frequently I have heard from American Fulbrighters on their return here -- on their return to the United States, not when I was in Turkey, not when I was in Japan -- very frequently I've heard from Fulbrighters that they went, enjoyed their experience, did a good job in the country to which they were assigned, but during the time that they were

there, they didn't have any contact with the Embassy at all, nobody was interested in seeing them. Or sometimes -- and this was amusing to me -- sometimes they would say things like: "The only people who understood that we were here at all were the junior officers, who would invite us over once in a while."

I think that overall USIS, USIA does a magnificent job in serving the propaganda interests of the United States. I think it does very, very, very well. But I also think that a different insight into the nature of educational exchange would carry the objectives much, much further. We talk about hard stuff. We talk about soft stuff. There need not be this kind of distinction. The two things ought to blend.

Q: Some of the hardest stuff can be expressed and developed in personal contact much better than it can in print.

PICON: Absolutely. But there has to be a recognition of the very limited funds that we have for educational exchange programs. And just because these funds are so limited, they have to be used wisely. Let me take Turkey as an example. I did have some success, but very limited success, in changing something that had gone on before I got there. Turkey is, of course, very interested in developmental academic programs. What I mean by that is studies related to development, the field of engineering, electronics, this, that and the other thing, and would like to see all of the money spent on educating Turkish students in those fields which can help Turkey's economic development. That's all very nice. But that does nothing generally for the intellectual relationship of the two countries.

Put together two professors in any one of these subjects and let them raise the level of their discipline. Under those circumstances, not only the two countries but the whole world benefits.

Our educational exchange programs ought to be geared more toward the development and augmentation of a dialogue amongst the intellectuals than toward the education of specific students in either country.

Q: So rather than so much of a student exchange, you think we would do better to go to the higher levels of academe? Get the professors together and let them battle it out.

PICON: That's right. Absolutely. I would rather put a good chunk of my money into taking a Turkish professor and putting him in an American university and an American professor in a Turkish university --. Or let me put it this way. We have benefits available to us by the exchange of persons, particularly scholars, that USIA and USIS probably never even think of. Let us say that we bring a Turkish professor to the United States. He brings with him the opportunity for our people, particularly his colleagues and his students, to learn something about Turkey as well. That's one of the benefits that we get out of sending American professors abroad. The students and colleagues of the American professor in the host country get to learn more about the United States. This offshoot benefit is something that we seldom, if ever, think of. We don't stop to think that if we

brought -- say, a Peruvian scholar -- to an American campus to teach his specialty, the students and faculty of that institution would likely learn more about Peru than they learn from most textbooks. But we don't see this as an advantage. As a matter of fact, in my day there were -- and there probably still are -- those who would say: "If he's going to talk about Peru, let PERU pay for it."

Whether we face up to it or not, the fact remains that until about two decades ago, our system of education itself caused us to be impoverished with respect to our knowledge of whole geographic areas of the world. From the outset and for more than a century and a half thereafter, our American system of education was unfortunately based upon a concept that Civilization started somewhere in the Near East and then developed in Egypt and Babylon, and then among the Hittites, and then, "Civilization" went to Greece and then from Greece to Rome and from Rome to Western Europe, and then eventually across to here, and that's what we've been exposed to. And to a degree, to the extent that we do learn about the people involved in a particular civilization, we do get to know those people. As for the rest of the world, the whole area of what we now call "Non-Western Studies," we're still impoverished. And it does us good -- it broadens our horizons -- when our students get the gap filled by a foreign teacher teaching here.

Yet, this is a concept that we never take into consideration when we're planning budgets.

Q: I don't believe we think very much about it at all.

Getting back to discussion specifically of your arranging these meetings between Reischauer and the more moderate left, what benefits do you think came out of that from the Japanese understanding of our position and what was the feed-in given to Reischauer doing for American or even, if you want to, just the State Department's concept of what was going on? Do you think there was a feed-back in both directions that was beneficial in any way you could see?

PICON: Very definitely. Let me say tangentially here that Reischauer achieved one of his objectives by establishing something called -- what we used to call -- the Cultural Conferences, the U.S.-Japan Cultural Conferences, CulCon as we referred to them in abbreviated form. This was an exercise in bringing together for exchange of ideas and even for the development of programs, bringing together leading Japanese educators, leading Japanese artists -- the real leaders -- and bringing their American counterparts over to Japan, or bringing the Japanese ones here. This was a series of meetings that took place from time to time. I'm sure you know about them.

Of course they might have done a bit better, but one problem was that they were sponsored by and run by, of course, bureaucracies on both sides. And because they had to have bureaucracies, because they were run by bureaucracies, bureaucracies had to participate. I have no objection to the participation in conferences of this sort by important people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in the Department of State, but those people would have done better, actually, by surrendering their slots to the true leaders in

the discipline or art form that was being discussed. Out of a body of 18 people, if 6 of those 18 are bureaucrats who are only there to represent their organizations, and are generally not making a contribution, what's the purpose?

Nevertheless, nevertheless, the establishment of those meetings did, I believe, a great deal toward enhancing the position of the United States in the intellectual community of Japan. What they have done in this direction, I don't know.

Q: I don't either, and I don't think that much.

PICON: But I'm sure it has had an impact in Japan.

Q: I imagine that -- I don't mean this in an egotistic way -- but the fact that the American Ambassador met with these people was in itself a great plus for the United States.

PICON: Yes, definitely. And particularly among the intellectuals themselves. He had fights with Japanese intellectuals. They felt at times that he had sold out his own interests by becoming an ambassador, some of them thought, that he went further in breaking the dialogue that he spoke about, that it was a breach of the dialogue for him to become the ambassador. And his reply to those people was: "In your case, the dialogue was never even started. There was no broken dialogue."

Q: And I think, you know, the fact that it was a USIS officer who was around to make these contacts and bring the Ambassador together with that intellectual group of Japanese is undoubtedly a great plus for the Agency, but I don't really know whether the Agency is aware of it.

PICON: No. I think actually, Lew, that in some cases my having done that did harm to me personally.

Q: Did harm to you personally?

PICON: Yes.

Q: Why do you say that? It aroused jealousies?

PICON: Maybe in part it aroused jealousies, but to a greater degree I think that that activity was looked upon as something making no contribution at all to what I was sent over to do.

Q: Well. I don't know by whom it's thought that way. It seems to me that whether or not it ever comes to light, it was a great contribution. What are we supposed to do? We're supposed to enhance the understanding of and the appreciation of the thoughts and ideas, concepts of Americans, among the people with whom we are sent to deal. So if that doesn't do it, what does do it.

PICON: Lew, in connection with these meetings that took place at my house, I'd like to get something clear on the record. I would like it to be understood that I never considered myself to be an authority on any of the subjects that were discussed at my home. I didn't need to be an authority and I didn't personally enter into the discussions very much. I was the host and was busy being the host.

On the other hand, it was through the connections that I had had with academicians, American intellectuals, that enabled me to have them over at my house and have Japanese men of letters, academicians, journalists and so forth, at my home to meet with them. Just one example. Ben Schwartz, the author of the great book, Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao, came to Japan. Ben had been one of the students in my Japanese class when Dr. Reischauer was our teacher. And actually Ben came to Japan to see his former teacher, at that time the Ambassador. I worked up a gathering, which did not include the Ambassador in this case, in order to bring Ben together with some of those who were rather hostile to the American scene. Ben could straighten them out about the mainland. And he did.

That sort of activity I really always thought was tremendously important. And I don't know why it doesn't have a clearer format as an activity in the thinking of the Agency. So much for that.

USIS (and Picon's) Role in 1960 Celebration of
100th Anniversary of the Opening of U.S.-Japan
Diplomatic Relations

Now, on Japan, before we leave Japan, I'd like to mention one or two other things that I was involved in, which I believe had a great impact on the Japanese people. Lew, you were in Japan at the time when the Japanese were commemorating the arrival of Commodore Perry in Japan and the advent of Townsend Harris. The Japanese had some sort of celebrations about those at the time when you were there. 1960 rolled around and this marked the opening, the 100th year of the opening of diplomatic relations --

I believe we turned the tape at the point where I was saying the opening of diplomatic relations between Japan and the United States. The Japanese Foreign Ministry and the Embassy were quite interested in having some sort of commemorative exercise to mark this event. Nobody realized, I believe, what a great impact this was going to have nationwide in Japan. I'm not trying to take credit for it by any means, but the relationship that we had with the Foreign Ministry and their earnest desire to make a very important commemorative moment out of this certainly helped. The interesting thing about it was that there were activities every single day in various parts of the country commemorating this event. The Japanese issued postage stamps commemorating the centennial. At my suggestion, a seal was devised, kind of a logo, and it was done with a circle around the ship, the Kanrin-Maru, which was the ship that bore the Japanese Embassy to the United States in the first instance.

That symbol became recognized all over the country. And curiously enough, if you went to some place where an activity was taking place, you would find that there were plates that had been made with that seal on it. Magazines came out with that seal on it. The whole country became sort of saturated with the recognition that this was the 100th year of relations between Japan and the United States. There was a mammoth acceptance of this program, and I think that of the things that I accomplished in Japan, this would have been the largest thing.

Postscript on USIS Book Program in Japan

Before we leave Japan, I'd like to say one more thing in connection with the books programs. The Japanese interest in America has been very great for a long period of time. But the access to American books by the Japanese was not nearly as great as we might expect given their interest. The book programs that we conducted, I am convinced, brought about a greater interest in the American book as a book and a thing that was desirable to have, it was something that intrigued the Japanese and enabled a developing commerce to take place between the two countries, mostly books going from here to there. And that's mainly because of language barrier.

Q: I think the fact that the Japanese weren't reading so many American books in the first place was probably because there weren't very many of them available in Japanese translation. And from what you said in our conversations earlier about the book translations program, when you convinced the book publishers to put out editions of 10,000 and 20,000 and made them available all over and the Japanese suddenly realized what they had, this undoubtedly was a tremendous spur to the Japanese utilization of American literature.

PICON: On that subject, also, Lew, some time in the late '60s, early '70s I believe, I can't put a specific date on it, the book program as we had known it in the past ceased to be in Japanese, at least in the Agency's program. Some people thought that this was an awful thing to have done. It seemed as if the post was not interested in book programs as much anymore. I don't think that that is the case. I think that what had happened was that the normal flow of commerce was taking over and we were not as much needed then in that field. I think that commerce itself replaced us. And I think that the money could be much better used in other places.

Q: It might be a good idea sometime to take some kind of detailed and official survey, authenticated survey, as to how many American books in translation we now have on the Japanese market, compared to the number that you had when you were instituting the translation of American books into Japanese in the first place. What I'm saying is that I wonder if the Japanese, now that they're on their own, have the same interest in translating American books into Japanese, and that's particularly true at this time when a great deal of the admiration for America and the respect for the country has fallen into bad times. There is often now a contempt of America in Japan rather than a point of admiration and really almost love.

PICON: I would agree with you wholeheartedly on that, Lew, and I think the Agency would be well advised to undertake such a survey at this time. It wouldn't be too difficult to do, it would be very worthwhile.

Q: I think it should be done. I think that's enough said on that. We've made the point already. We can now go on to something else.

1965: Departure From Japan -- Assignment to CU
(Cultural Bureau) DepState Just as Charles Frankel
From Columbia University Became Assistant Secretary
of State for Cultural Affairs

You went from Japan in '63, you left Japan?

PICON: I left Japan in '65. I was in Japan for 10 years, left Japan in July of 1965. And I asked for an assignment in CU, which I got. About the time that I arrived in CU, CU got a new Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, Charles Frankel, a professor of Philosophy at Columbia University. I had been walking in the hallway when he was going around to various rooms to meet the staff and he saw me and we greeted each other, because I had met him on a trip that he took to Japan. At the time that he took the trip, he was interested in writing a book on cultural affairs and the activities of CAOs and cultural affairs officers. He interviewed me and he interviewed Frank Tenny and other people who were there at the time. And he did publish this book. In it, he said some things that were rather unkind to the Agency and there were problems between him and the people at the top of the Agency from time to time.

I mentioned Frankel earlier in this interview. Let me say some more. He was someone who did not like, or for that matter, understand the bureaucracy very well. He had difficulty with bureaucrats and the bureaucracy. He did, nevertheless, introduce new concepts of what an educational exchange program should be about. Some of his ideas rubbed off on the staff, on the Leaned Councils, and possibly are still being used in the Agency's exchange programs. I'm not sure of this. In the broader sense, he thought of educational exchange as being something immensely important to American foreign policy, an instrument for raising the level of all of our disciplines by bringing an interchange of ideas, scholar to scholar, academician to academician, artist to artist, to have an exchange program which worked in two directions: something through which we would benefit by learning about some of the countries where our knowledge was pretty poor, and an instrument through which other countries would learn more about us, through the personal relationships developed by people in the academic world.

This was not an entirely new thing, but the important part of it was that he saw this as being completely international. It would involve every country, in varying degrees. Of course this would require a lot of money. But most importantly, he saw it being bidirectional in every case.

Q: I'd like to ask, in that connection, it seems that from what you've said about Frankel's viewpoint he was not so much concerned with the exchange of students, either at the graduate level or the undergraduate level of higher education, and certainly not at the high school level, he was more concerned with an exchange of people who had already largely achieved their full educational stand and had become experts, extremely knowledgeable in their own fields and in the cultures of the country from which they came. Am I correct in that assumption? Did he mean to slight the student exchanges and give more emphasis on those who had already achieved their place in life?

PICON: Yes. He didn't want to slight the students by any means. But he recognized that the private sector could do more for the students than the government sector could do. That he believed in rather strongly. However, he did not try to revamp the program at all. That had an impact on me when I went to Turkey three years later. As Cultural Attaché in Ankara, I was in charge of the Fulbright program, so to speak. We had a Turkish director of the Fulbright program, but I oversaw the program itself.

The program in Turkey I regarded as out of balance. About 80 percent of our funds went into sending Turkish students to the United States. Now that isn't altogether bad. To me what seemed to be bad was that the presence of the Turkish Foreign Ministry in the Fulbright program -- members of the Fulbright directorate came from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education -- they tended to regard the Fulbright program -- wrongly, I believe - as an instrument for building up expertise in the hard sciences and developmental subjects. They put virtually all their weight into sending Turkish students to the United States to study engineering and subjects of that sort.

In terms of our interest in mutual understanding, I'm sure that those things did a bit of good, but they would not match up at all with sending Turkish students to the United States to study American thought, American concepts of democracy, the social sciences in various forms. And that in turn would not make the contribution nearly that sending a Turkish professor in the social science field to an American university would make.

Q: Although you've already begun to discuss Turkey, I think as we turned the machine off for a moment you said there were one or two other things you wanted to comment on concerning your CU experience, so before we go further into the Turkish program, why don't you go ahead on that?

The American Specialist (AMSPEC) Program,
Its Partial Misuse and Congressional Interference

PICON: Yes, thank you. First, I'd like to say some things about a program that was a source of problems and friction between CU and the Agency that I suppose have been, by and large, resolved by the integration of CU with the Agency. Yet, for historical purposes, it would probably be good to allow some time in this interview to treat that program which has variously been called from time to time: the AMERICAN SPECIALISTS

PROGRAM (AMSPEC), the AMERICAN SCHOLARS ABROAD PROGRAM (AA), the SHORT-TERM GRANTEES PROGRAM, and possibly there were other title before and after my time. For our purposes here, Lew, I'd like to use the term AMSPEC to cover this activity regardless of what it was called officially at any point in time.

In essence, this was originally a program under which CU could finance an send academicians abroad outside the broader Fulbright program. I understand that it was highly regarded at the beginning, but with the passage of time, all sorts of troubles entered in. The first of these, I understand, came when someone in a position of authority with a broad and expansive view of the CU operations decided that this program was too good and useful to be restricted to academicians. And as is wont to happen in a bureaucracy, the CU Division that handled the AMSPEC divorced the program from its original goals, and expanded its scope to include labor leaders, civic leaders, leaders in the arts -- not to perform (because that activity belonged to another Division), but rather to lecture about the arts, and conduct workshops. Then the real troubles began, especially when the Department had to defend its appropriations. The Members of Congress saw this activity as having two very interesting aspects. It presented the Hill with the opportunity to demand lists of everyone used in this program and information on why the specific individual had been selected instead of some constituent of the Congressperson who had requested the information. They also questioned the domestic politics of the individual, for obvious reasons. And besides this type of intrusion, Members on the Hill would write letters to the Assistant Secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs, requesting that slots in this program be reserved for individuals who had no recognizable qualifications in any of the fields of interest to the Department and USIA other than a relationship with the Member of Congress. This program, and the Cultural Presentations program were the two parts of CU most subject to attack and minute scrutiny by the Appropriations Committees.

Yet, on the other hand, our USIS posts overseas had the highest regard for this activity when -- and I emphasize that word WHEN -- the Department selected really high-caliber people, which was not nearly always the case. I'd like to get onto the record in this interview what I saw that was particularly faulty in the way the Department selected, or as I just said was forced to select, the AMSPECs. I worked in that Division when I was assigned to CU, at my own request. What I saw there shook me up. At that time I was the only Foreign Service Officer in the Division, and as I learned later, most of the Division's employees had never even been out of the United States! Few of them had the background, educational or other, to be able to recognize or evaluate the caliber of the candidates. Most of the people selected were chosen on the basis of applications (!) which they sent in. When I worked in that Division, I would occasionally get a phone call from someone who asked: "Is this the office that sends people abroad?" I was tempted to say: "Yes -- but we're out of them." I never did, though. I tried to make the point that this program ought to be one of invitation, not one of application. Nevertheless, over the years, we in the field did receive some very distinguished, well-known-top-notch AMSPECs. We had many duds as well. I think it would be safe to say that in many cases,

the more successful and effective AMSPECs were those who were requested by our posts or suggested by USIS officers who were in Washington.

And the Agency was very well aware of this shortcoming in CU, and I suppose that it was between the Director of the Agency and the Assistant Secretary of State for CU that an agreement was struck to have an Agency Officer be stationed in CU, to work through the CU channels, and to get into the AMSPEC stream individuals from the top levels of government, including the legal system, universities, labor, etc. In fact there was, at that time, a specified percentage of the CU AMSPEC budget that was reserved for labor leaders actually selected by the CIO/AFL.

Often, people in the field didn't want to have to do anything with or for these visitors, who largely didn't fit into the posts' annual planning, and this was another source of contention between the two organizations. The posts naturally wanted people of high caliber who fit into one or another element of the Country Plan; instead, they got people of varying caliber, many of whom were related to nothing that was germane to the post's activities.

From my personal point of view, I learned a great deal from that experience, and possibly, even more importantly, I developed many friendships in CU. When Charles Frankel came aboard, he moved me up to his office to be one of his Special Assistants. I'd like also to narrate a rather fascinating incident that took place while I was in CU. The Agency and the Department ran programs for bringing foreign employees -- we used to call them local employees -- of the Mission for an orientation in the United States. Frankel liked to meet with these people to discuss his concepts of educational exchange. When he wasn't able to do this, it was my turn to substitute for him. And I had listened to enough of what he said to translate his thought, not nearly as loquaciously as he nor as glibly -- or anything of the sort -- but it was part of my job. In any case, in trying to get across some of the ideas in the Frankelian philosophy, I mentioned the gap that exists in understanding of the United States because some important words have been usurped by the opposition. And there's a need to get that sort of thing straightened out.

Now maybe the way I phrased this is not clear enough. Let me try to be more specific. Obviously, there was somebody in the audience who understood what I was trying to say. He was from Africa, and he said he had had an example of what I was talking about just the previous night. He had arrived two nights ago and had gone to bed immediately. He had wandered around during the day, and when evening came and he was ready to go to bed, he got out his toothbrush to brush his teeth and found that he didn't have any toothpaste. He was in a hotel and went down and asked where there was a place to buy toothpaste. They had a shop at the hotel but it was closed and he was told to just go around the corner. So he went around the corner, took one look at the drugstore there, and turned around and went back to the hotel. He wouldn't dare to go into that place, it was obviously a Communist outlet! The name of the place was Peoples Drugstore.

To Frankel, an incident like this was very important. It illustrates a kind of battle, dialogue that needs to take place. We can't ever let the opposition steal the good words in our language as they've done so frequently, or distort them. And the best people able to deal with this problem are again the people from the academic world.

1968: Cultural Attaché in Turkey

Turkey was certainly a very different situation from what I had experienced in Japan. However, to a satisfactory degree I was able to develop the same kind of dialogue, again, between American scholars who came to Turkey and Turkish scholars. I always regarded that as probably the most important phase of the operation. On the other hand, I became much more deeply involved with the people in the artistic world in Turkey than I had in Japan, though my involvement in Japan was pretty much. It was sort of a shift in emphasis.

In terms of what was going on in Turkey in the field of the arts, the left as it existed had been making inroads into the field of theater. And this was a matter of discussion between my boss the PAO and me. Some progress had been made before I arrived in Turkey, certainly. The State Theater and the State Opera and Ballet were beginning to look toward some of the American things to produce. My predecessor, not a regular Agency employee but someone who had been brought in, was quite accomplished in the field of opera and he worked with the Turkish opera in putting on "Porgy and Bess."

Shifting Emphasis of USIS Cultural Program to Performing Arts -- The Theater

During my stay, we sort of shifted the emphasis a little bit toward Theater, and during my stay we put on American plays, musicals, with the help of CU who provided us with directors and so forth. We put on such things as "Fiddler on the Roof," "Man of LaMancha," "My Fair Lady," and such. The gentlemen on the left in Turkey took exception to "Fiddler on the Roof" and regarded this as a piece of propaganda in that it was anti-Russian and, they said, needlessly so. And they took exception to the State Theater's putting this thing on. The director of the state theater, a man by the name of Cuneyt Gokcer, was interviewed on television about the criticism that he was facing. I was very pleased with his retort when he was asked about this. He said, "You regard me as a propagandist for the United States because of 'Fiddler on the Roof'? You've seen me do 'Julius Caesar.' Was I then a propagandist for Rome? You've seen me do 'Hamlet.' Was I a propagandist then? And if so, for England or for Denmark?"

For these purposes, I can say that the overall impact of "Fiddler on the Roof" in Turkey was one of deepening distrust for Russia. And there was plenty of distrust there before I got there, but it did deepen it further.

Only Minor Emphasis on Book Programs in Turkey

The arts. Literature. We never did a book translations program in Turkey. On the other hand, we did help, as we did before in Japan, to expand the availability of American books in Turkey.

Q: Before you go on with your discussion of things Turkish, I think I would say that from my experience in Turkey, the Turks are not great readers. There is a small segment of the population represented by students more so than others, but the broad mass of the population in Turkey I don't think has the same interest in books that America has, nor has it the same interest certainly that the Japanese have. They just are not a nation of readers. And that would tend to inhibit the success of a book program in any event. But you did say that you were doing something about expanding their exposure to American publications.

Effort to Neutralize the Marxist Oriented Book:
"Turkey's Future"

PICON: Yes. About the time that I arrived in Turkey -- curious that it was very similar to what had happened in Japan -- there was a very leftist book that had just been published that was written by a man by the name of Dogan Avcioğlu. Its title was Turkiyenin Duzeni, which means "Turkey's future." And it was straight out the Marxist economic approach to the needs of Turkey. Hard hitting, nearly violent in its statements about what was wrong with what was going on. Of course this was a book that the students seized upon.

That obviously was something that we had to do something about. So to the small degree that we did involve ourselves with book programs, we aimed our sights at neutralizing this single book. I agree with you entirely, they were not great readers in Turkey, but this book by Avcioğlu was popular with the students, and we tried to neutralize that by making available books from the American point of view. With some success. But the book program was nothing very much, as was proper, in Turkey.

Some Differences of Opinion Between USIS and
Binational Center Turkish-Dominated Board of Directors

Q: How about the binational center in Turkey? I know we had one in Izmir, I think we had one in Iskenderun, and I know we had a big one in Ankara and I believe one in Istanbul. What was your impression of that program?

PICON: It was interesting in the contrast between the Turkish binational centers and those in Japan. While there were American directors in Ankara and Istanbul and Izmir, the Board of Governors of these Centers, by Turkish law, had to have a majority of Turks, and the President of the Board of Directors had to be a Turk. So, in effect, the Turkish President of the Board of the Turkish-American Library and Center in Ankara had a certain amount of control over the activities of the American Center Director. And

although the Center Director was responsible to me, he was also responsible to the Turkish Board.

Often the American Center Director and I didn't see eye to eye with the President of the Board. And he took quite a bit of exception to some of the things we were doing at times. Even though it was our money, the Turkish members of that Board considered it an important thing to be very active in controlling the activities of the Binational Center. Fortunately, in most cases, the problems were mainly administrative rather than in terms of content.

I was impressed on arrival by the quality of the Librarians, the Turkish nationals who ran the libraries. They certainly were hard working, very well informed, very bright and they kept our libraries in very good shape. I was impressed that when they made recommendations for me to order books -- I went over their orders -- I was very impressed that they included a lot of hard hitting stuff and they really wanted that in the library. I have seen occasions where librarians did not feel comfortable with having certain hard hitting material in the USIS library. I'm sure you're aware of that problem. But in Turkey it was quite different.

One of the major activities, worth it or not, in the binational centers was the conduct of the English language program. We had an English Language Officer there at all times and she, Barbara Peterson -- now deceased, unfortunately -- got together a staff of people, both Americans and Turks, who were very competent in the teaching of the English language. Those programs attracted many more people than we could actually handle. Everybody wanted to learn English. I think the English language teaching program is a very worthwhile activity of USIA and I think it always has been.

Q: I gather that now you think you've pretty well covered the subjects of importance in the three main assignments that you've had. I'd like to ask you if you have any general comments in retrospect about your career, any reminiscences that you want to put on tape. And I'd like to ask you to speak briefly to one thing which we've talked about off tape, which was your opinion about the advisability of separation or continued coordination or continued joining of the cultural and informational sides of the program.

1971: Chief, Speakers Division USIA

PICON: Very good. But just before doing that, I'd like to bring into this picture my last job in the Agency. I was Chief of the Speakers Division, an organization that was created just on my return from Turkey. Some of the things that happened then might shed some light on the overall picture. At that juncture in the Agency's history, the Carter experiment in Japan was taking place. And in Washington, another sensible and worthwhile experiment was under way. Under the direction of Hal Schneidman, there was linked with the Books, Libraries, Exhibit, English Teaching services a new service, a program development group whose function it was to conceive, devise, and develop a total, well-rounded, and practical program that could be dispatched to the field and used -- in whole

or in part -- to fit into one or more of the posts' themes. I'm not going to go into any sort of evaluation of those programs. Others could speak with more authority on that, and they probably will.

Friction With CU Over Election and Funding of Speakers to Send Abroad

One of the essential elements in this type of packaging was an authority on the subject or theme. And quality was particularly essential in this segment of the package. And USIA did not have the "authority" to fund the transportation, per diem, and other expenses of what was obviously an AMSPEC; this "authority" lay clearly with CU. The Program Development people in USIA tried valiantly to get the cooperation of CU for the programs, with very inconsistent results. To a degree, the success in getting that cooperation rested with the personal relationship of the program manager and the CU Area Director and/or his staff. And in those cases where the relationship was either not good or non-existent, frictions developed when the USIA officer became demanding. As these frictions developed, some curious legalistic interpretations of the Congressional mandates establishing the two organizations took place. They undoubtedly still exist somewhere in the Agency's or State's files.

CU maintained that while the two organizations should and can work together, it must be recognized that the authority for selecting and transporting people between the United States and other countries rested with the Department of State. It was certainly "legal" for the Agency to learn about specialists in any subject who might be going overseas on their own and to notify posts in those areas that the specialist was available, if the post desired his services. ("After all, we're all working for the same Government.")

One Solution to the Friction: USIA Develops "American Speakers Program"

Out of this interpretation had come the rationale and justification for setting up in the Agency a "Volunteer Speakers Program," -- a one-man operation, well managed by a Mr. Chipchin. "Chip" had all sorts of tentacles out and he became known fairly widely in the field and in this country. He would identify an individual who was going abroad, get the credentials of the individual, and notify the relevant posts. The evaluations of Chip's people were, by and large, good. But this mechanism was rarely out of any use to the Program Developers, for obvious reasons.

Picon Succeeds in Quieting Much of USIA-CU Friction

When I arrived back home from Turkey, some Agency people regarded me as particularly suited to do something about the need for acquiring American experts who could put the finishing -- call it, if you will, personal -- touch on the programs that the Developers had produced. It was my task to develop a crew of people, who, under my direction, could augment the Volunteer Speakers Program; relate to the Program Developers in their

respective program areas; organize a "Speakers Data Bank" with "track records" on the individual speaker's performance, as evaluated by the posts; and other things along these lines. Meantime, I set to work reestablishing my former relationships with CU personnel from the days of Charles Frankel, making myself known to those in CU's Area Offices who had arrived after I left for Turkey, and working out agreements with each of the CU Area Directors which would allow us (USIA) to tap into a portion of the allotments for the AMSPEC program. I was fortunate. We satisfied some of the needs of the Program Development people. But the demands for AMSPECs exceeded CU's ability to finance all that were needed.

Then, harking back to the earlier understanding that while we could not send people out of the United States, we could transport them anywhere they were needed -- once they were out of the U.S. All of this may sound like self-defeating, bureaucratic hair-splitting, and it was. Our field posts were delighted with the results, and the quality of our speakers took a giant step upward. Here, also, it is perhaps well to narrate an incident.

Using PL 480 Funds Available Through India,
USIA Able to Fund Multiple Visits to Asia of
Moynihan's "Star Speakers"

Now-Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan had been appointed the American Ambassador to India. He wanted desperately to engage Indian intellectuals in dialogue with their American counterparts in order to neutralize some of the fuzzy thinking about America that pervaded India's intellectual thought. He was unhappy with CU's selection of people and he had a very fine list of distinguished personal friends who were known to the Indians, at least by reputation. When CU "let him down," he lambasted the Department of State publicly, not only in India but with some of the American press. Of course, CU was not very happy, and did nothing to change his view. At this time, there was in India a young USIS officer who had headed one of the USIA Program Development sections, Ed Schulick, unfortunately now deceased. He had known about some of our difficulties with CU and the measures that we had to take to get the speakers we wanted. With "PL 480 Funds" available to the degree they were in India, asked Schulick, couldn't the arrangements we had with CU be stretched "to help Ambassador Moynihan bring out these top-flight Americans?" He wrote to me; we in the Speakers Division went to work. Moynihan sent me a list of his desiderata, through Schulick. I discussed this whole thing with my small staff, and each, in turn, discussed it with the Program Development person in charge of the subject area into which Moynihan's "Star Speakers" (as they came to be called) fit. This inaugurated a trek to Canada or Mexico -- whichever was closer -- with transportation paid for out of the "Star's" pocket across the respective border and an allotment from the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi covering the rest. All posts on the way to and from New Delhi were given the opportunity to buy into this arrangement so long as they would provide the per diem and the individual "Star" was interested and had the time. This off-shoot of the Speakers Division was one of the more highly successful programs. Lew, this activity -- call it AMSPEC or call it Speakers Bureau -- really always belonged in USIA, and I'm glad that it's there now. I believe it to be a vital segment of an

Information Program. One of the problems that our off-tape discussion pointed out is that because we -- all of us, and I include myself -- use the terms "cultural," "educational," "intellectual," "scholarly," "academic," too loosely, our dialogue and understanding tend to break down. Earlier in the interview, and now in reflection I know that I have used and will undoubtedly continue to use any of those words, from habit now, when I am meaning specifically academia, the academic programs that deal with students, teachers, professors, researchers, scholars in the context of "educational exchange," the furtherance of academic knowledge. Even the term "Educational Exchange" is a misnomer as it was, and perhaps still is, used. The expression "educational exchange" implies a two-way street, a flow in two or more directions. It has more generally been used in our programs to mean sending Americans overseas to teach and bringing foreigners here to learn.

Value of Keeping Educational Exchange Per Se
Somewhat Separated From Other Exchanges
and More Directly Informational USIA Activities

I really believe, moreover, and I believe this rather strongly, that there is a degree of harm that comes to the educational exchange program by its association with the propaganda efforts of the Agency. When they're put together in such a way that an audience is aware that the cultural program is being used as a kind of vehicle for propaganda, it does us a bit of harm. Now there has been this separation, CU has moved out of the State Department and joined with the information side, as it used to be regarded, of USIA. There's been this marriage. And I don't think that it really matters very much who does the administration of these program, whether it's the Department of State or USIA. I believe along with Frankel that the best use of the educational program, as we think of it -- and the cultural program -- the best use would be accomplished by a foundation independent of the Department of State and independent of USIA. There's always the bit of danger that people who regard propaganda as something dirty and distasteful -- people who so regard what USIA does -- will allow that to rub off on this program of the exchange of ideas by scholars. To some degree I think scholars have been reluctant to enter the program because of the marriage of the information activities and the cultural/educational activities.

But even though this is nowhere near universal, I can illustrate what I'm talking about by referring to one or more instances without being specific. Being in a cultural center, running the operation, having a distinguished American scholar addressing an audience or meeting with them, meeting with individuals or small groups for the highly desirable exchange of ideas, to have that event colored by someone's desire to get across some of the pamphlets and other information materials which we produce -- well, they just don't go together.

Q: Are you referring to pamphlets in general? Or are you referring to those that are carrying some kind of a message not related to the subject matter being discussed by the intellectual or prominent individual at the time?

PICON: Of course I'm referring to the latter. Of course I'm referring to the latter.

The Agency, about the time that I left, was on its way to a good method, I believe, of programming. They were working toward being a service agency to the field --

And in being that sort of service agency for the field, the Agency was providing materials such as books, in some cases audio visual material, and so forth, that would go along with and fit into the subject matter of the presence of a visiting American scholar.

Now, let's take a situation where the subject is in the field of, one of the political fields, governmental fields -- whatever it might be -- foreign policy field. And we have a distinguished scholar, an expert on a particular aspect of our policy visiting a country and meeting for dialogue with important intellectuals of that country. In the Agency's method, which was being devised at that time, there would be made available, let us say, a bibliography on that field of foreign policy, directly related, useful and important. There might be besides a bibliography, some articles reproduced, again on the subject of the authority. All of that produces a good effect, carries the message further, is important and worthwhile.

But in those cases wherein they place the latest publication of the USIS in that country, having no bearing whatsoever to the subject matter, but just to get further distribution of USIS output -- that type of handling of an American scholar -- can do nothing more than brand him as an out-and-out propagandist. I don't know if that put it clearly enough.

Q: Yes, I understand clearly what you mean. And I agree with you. But I have some reservations about the --

PICON: Degree (inaudible).

Q: (Inaudible) position that you have taken, but I have expressed them elsewhere and I'm not going to put them on tape here. I wanted to get your attitude on tape because I think we ought to get all aspects of opinion of the people we're interviewing indicated. So I'm glad that you put them on tape.

PICON: I have seen some horrendous examples of what I referred to just a moment ago. And I saw them often when I was in Japan. We were proud of the output there in Japan, but we often put together very irrelevant materials for the occasion.

Q: I would agree with you that you shouldn't try to put an unrelated subject matter field of obviously direct advocacy of a special point of view that isn't related to the subject matter being discussed, I would agree thoroughly with you on that. And we have, of course, made mistakes of that nature. It's just that I feel somewhat differently on the general subject of whether or not there ought to be a separate background, separate administrative organization taking care of the cultural side and the informational side. I hope that in later years we have become more sophisticated about that and are not doing

the kind of things that can lead to criticism of the type that you've just mentioned. But I've been away from it so long I don't know personally.

PICON: So have I. I, too, hope they will have changed. Thank you very much.

Q: Well, thank you. I'm very pleased to get this interview and I thank you for all your time.

End of interview