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

# ABRAHAM M. SIRKIN

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*
*Initial interview date: May 29, 1997*


## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTERVIEW**

[Edited by Mr. Sirkin and Susannah Sirkin]

*Q: Today is the 29th of May, 1997. This is an interview with Abraham M. Sirkin. This is being done on behalf of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Abe and I are old friends. We served together in Greece in the '70s. Abe could you tell me a bit about when and where you were born and something about your family?*

SIRKIN: I was born in 1914 in Barre, Vermont, which still prides itself as "the granite center of the world." My father came from Poland. He started out as a rabbinical student and ended up owning a small textile-dyeing factory in Moscow. During one of the periodic purges of Moscow Jews by the Czarist regime, he lost his business and emigrated to America. In New York, family members told him there were too many people looking for jobs there and suggested he go on to where he had friends and relatives in Burlington, Vermont. When he got there he was told it was getting a bit overcrowded there, too, and he was urged to go down to the Barre-Montpelier area. That's how we ended up in Barre, Vermont. A few years later after he had gone from house to house peddling cloth, he got a horse and buggy and ultimately a little store. Then he sent for his wife and three daughters.

*Q: Were they back in Moscow?*

SIRKIN: Not Moscow. They were in a town in Poland where my father's sister lived. Shortly after they joined him, I was born in Barre, Vermont.

*Q: And World War I occurred at the same time?*

SIRKIN: That's right.

*Q: No connection…Did you grow up in Barre?*

SIRKIN: I went to elementary school in Barre and part of one year of high school.

*Q: What was life like in Barre in those days?*

SIRKIN: Well, for me Barre was a big city. Motor vehicles were just beginning to proliferate. The local alderman who lived across the street from us had a big lawn and a barn with two horses and a nice carriage. Before long, the horses were gone and he had bought one of these new fangled cars. The kids, in addition to playing ball in the street, would sit the curb at the corner of Main Street and our street with a pencil and paper and look at the license plates, and jot down the different states the cars came from. That was seen as a big achievement. Some of the kids could even tell the makes of the different cars.

*Q: Did the granite industry have any*, I mean as a kid were you aware of the granite industry?

SIRKIN: Oh, yes, all the people in our neighborhood were stonecutters or related to the granite industry in some way. It was the main business in the city and a lot of the stonecutters died young from what we used to call TB but later had its own special name of silicosis. My father's eye doctor, Dr. Jarvis, (at that time they were eye, ear, nose and throat doctors) was concerned about what his patients were breathing in and he devised some kind of a mask that he hoped quarrymen and stonecutters who were getting silicosis would wear while they worked. He agitated for improvement of the air pollution in the stone sheds. Years later I discovered he was the same Dr. Jarvis who had written the book, which became a best seller on “folk medicine”. Anyway, Barre was a cosmopolitan city, full of Italians and Scots. The first music I ever heard was a bagpipe band. Every Memorial Day or Fourth of July parade had the Clan Gordon band. John Gordon was a local Scottish citizen and he became very popular. He ran for governor on the Socialist ticket. He didn't get very far but I think he got quite a few votes in 1920 when Eugene Debs ran for President on the Socialist ticket.

*Q: I know my mother voted for Eugene Debs.*

SIRKIN: Our local barber was Italian, around the corner of our house. I think he was a philosophical anarchist. I grew up hearing about Garibaldi.

*Q: Obviously in New York in the Jewish community there was a lot of foment and playing around with ideas and all that but was your father sort of a Jewish representative in Barre?*

SIRKIN: There were about eight or nine other Jewish families in Barre. My father was a very observant orthodox Jew. He closed the store on Friday evening and didn't open it until Saturday evening. Saturday was the big shopping day so he did open it at night, but only according to the Jewish law. You don't decide the Sabbath is over until you can spot three stars in the sky. Sundown isn't sharp enough. This was so widely known that, on Saturday evening, a lot of the farmers would be sitting waiting on the porch of the store. (The store was converted out of an old tenement house on Cottage Street just below Goddard Seminary, which later became Goddard College.) Some of these farmer kids, in for the day shopping, would come over and say "Hey, Mr. Sirkin, there are three stars in the sky."

My sisters went to Spaulding high school where they learned English very quickly. The students would have a summer hayride on Saturday before the vacation started but my father wouldn't let my sisters go before sundown. Once, the entire high school class with three hay wagons was lined up on our little street waiting for my sisters to be able to join them.

*Q: You say you went to high school there one year and then where?*

SIRKIN: Well, my father died just after my bar mitzvah, which took place in the Burlington synagogue. So I was shipped off to New York so I could attend synagogue

services for the year of mourning. In Barre, we had an occasional holiday service for the few Jewish people who lived there. Small services were held in our house. So I was shipped off to Brooklyn, to Williamsburg. I didn't know much about that community.

*Q: For the person who will be listening to this at some other point, this is now a center for Hasidic Judaism, isn't it?*

SIRKIN: Yes.

*Q: Was it then too?*

SIRKIN: Well, it was to some extent. Not as much as now because there was much more of a mixture. People who are not of that persuasion moved out of Brooklyn and went off to other parts of the city or country. As far as I understand it the people that are left there are largely of a very observant ascetic group. My father was of a different persuasion, more rationalistic, although also orthodox.

*Q: While you were at high school in Williamsburg what did you find?*

SIRKIN: I was there only one year.

*Q: So this was only for the religious side in a way?*

SIRKIN: Yes.

Q: *As the family representative? You were the only male?*

SIRKIN: I was the only male. Then I returned to Barre for about half a year and went to Spaulding High School in Barre, which has one of the most beautiful statues of Robert Burns.

*Q: Is this Mr. Gordon's influence?*

SIRKIN: No, the whole Scottish community. There were skilled sculptors among the stonecutters. In addition to a figure of Burns in a cape on a pedestal, the base has four different scenes from his poetry in *bas-relief*. Every time I go back to Barre I insist on taking a look at the statue.

*Q: By this time you were getting ready to be a senior or pretty close?*

SIRKIN: No, no, I was just a sophomore and then my mother and sisters sold the store and we moved to New York. Since I was getting behind in school a brother-in-law of mine knew there was a three year high school in New York; so if I could get in, I would end up not losing a year. I managed to get into a test for entrance to Townsend Harris Hall High School, which was an elite school on the campus of the City College of New York.

*Q, Townsend Harris was one of my heroes. Would you explain who he was?*

SIRKIN: After Admiral Perry sailed to Japan, Townsend Harris was the first man sent to represent the U. S. officially. I think he was just a Consul or Consul General.

*Q: He was a Consul. He was left on the Shimoda Peninsula for 18 months all by himself. There was a woman who was a Dutch interpreter and no support. He got us the treaty that opened up Japan. It was a singular work of diplomacy by a man who was very unpromising before. He was just a sort of remittance man out in the Far East.*

SIRKIN: I didn't do much research on Townsend Harris, but the school was very unusual. One of my classmates was Jonas Salk.

*Q: Oh, the discoverer of polio vaccine?*

SIRKIN: Yes. But, these were intellectually alive students. Not long after I left, Mayor LaGuardia closed the school because he said it was too elitist. Then later New York City backtracked and opened the Bronx High School of Science and the School of the Arts that sort of took the place of Townsend Harris.

*Q: While you are at Townsend Harris, in regards to the arts and foreign policy, were you getting much of that at that time? What years are we talking about now?*

SIRKIN: I was graduated in 1931, but I started reading The New York Times back in Vermont. My sisters had gone to New York to work and they introduced me to The New York Times, so at least on Sundays we got The New York Times. Later, being in New York I was reading it everyday. Things were brewing in Europe that were of great interest to me. As a student at Townsend Harris I would have had automatic entrance to the City College but I had a cousin who had gone to Columbia College. For whatever reason, I decided I would like to go somewhere other than City College and I applied to various schools. I think I was admitted to Rutgers as well as Columbia and I went to Columbia.

*Q: So you went to Columbia in 1931. What type of courses did you take at Columbia?*

SIRKIN: In the first place, I think the best thing I ever did, as far as education is concerned, was to go to Columbia and to take the first two years of the core curriculum of contemporary civilization. My teacher was a man named Charles Cole who later became President of Amherst and even later, Ambassador to Chile.

*Q: Yes, I've run across reference to him. Was Nicholas Murray Butler the President of Columbia at that time?*

SIRKIN: Yes. Most of my formal education came from the contemporary civilization courses and a three-year survey of English literature starting with the Bible. The first year

was devoted to Greek and Latin classics in English translation. My real education was on the newspaper The Columbia Spectator. Coming in from Townsend Harris with me was a batch of kids who were on the newspaper. One was Jimmy Wechsler, who later was the Editor of The New York Post.

*Q: Well known figure, yes.*

SIRKIN: I was in his class and worked on the Spectator and got to know a number of people who later ended up on The New York Times, including Jim Haggerty. He later became President Eisenhower's Press Officer. I remember when he was just the New York Times campus correspondent. He was a very jovial type and liked to talk sitting on the edge of the table where all our typewriters were, and I would be working on a story and he would be sitting there on the edge talking to me.

*Q: You were in a way in New York and particularly at Columbia as a part...*

SIRKIN: Nazism was starting in Europe and a lot of political activity on the campus.

*Q: There were a lot of ideologies out there at that time. Did you get involved with any of these?*

SIRKIN: I saw a lot of it, but I only got involved as an observer. As a matter of fact, I didn't realize it but some of the people that I was working with had joined the Young Communist League, including Wechsler and some of the editors. I was asked to join and I said "No, I may agree with some of what you say, but I don't want to join anything where I can't think for myself." As a matter of fact, Jimmy Wechsler wrote a book about his college days and it had a paragraph about me. I didn't realize it until a reporter for Radio Free Europe in London said, "Did you know that this book mentions you?" and I said, "No." He had the book and showed it to me. There was a paragraph in which Wechsler said something like "One of the people who never really got involved in this, always kept his commonsense., was Abe Sirkin."

*Q: Well, were you, by the time you were at Columbia, pointing yourself as a newspaperman?*

SIRKIN: No, originally I was very much interested in newspapers and I actually worked on the paper and spent most of my time on the paper. I took a course with Mark Van Doren and was supposed to read a book a week and several times he got me to admit that I hadn't read the book. I remember to this day he gave me a lesson in honesty in terms of use of words. He asked me a question and I used the word fulsome. He said, "Why did you say fulsome?" "Well, I meant full." He said, "Do you know what fulsome means?" I said, "Very full." He said, "Look it up in the dictionary." I never used it again. We had student strikes; the Spectator went on strike at one point. They kicked out our editor, Reed Harris, because he had attacked the food in the dining hall and the manager of the dining hall was an aunt or so of the dean of the college. Harris was very much against

over-emphasis of football and sports. Later Senator McCarthy went after him when he was a publisher and raked over his college days. He was accused of being against football. I was glad to be at Columbia when Columbia went to the Rose Bowl and beat Stanford.

*Q: It is hard to think today that Columbia was sort of the mighty might, a real football club. Who was the coach then?*

SIRKIN: Lou, an Italian fellow with a famous hook nose.

*Q: Lou Little?*

SIRKIN: Yes, I played on a basketball team with him. He had a weekly column in the Spectator during the football season, writing about the next game. So he qualified as a member of the staff on the intramural team of the Spectator. I couldn't shoot worth a damn. I gave the ball to somebody else to shoot, but there I was on a team with Lou Little.

*Q: Well, did the Roosevelt regime have much impact? What was the feeling you were getting from that? You got there during the beginning of the New Deal?*

SIRKIN: When Roosevelt was Governor of New York he had a brain trust, largely of Columbia professors. I took courses with some of them. I took a lecture course that was astonishing, one point just for listening. They didn't even keep track of who was there and who wasn't. James Shotwell, Parker Moon; Joe McGoldrick, who later became Controller of New York City under LaGuardia; and Raymond Moley, who was head of Governor Roosevelt's brain trust. When we were getting close to a Presidential campaign and press people were trying to get all kinds of leads, something appeared in a paper that a lecturer had said in a class and students started looking around and pointing at me because I worked on The Spectator. I had nothing to do with it but I was under suspicion that I was the one who leaked something that probably shouldn't have been said about some issue that was up in Albany relating to the Governor.

*Q: You were saying that newspapers weren't your ultimate goal?*

SIRKIN: I took pre-law and I was admitted to Columbia Law School. At the last minute I just decided I 'm really not that interested in hitting the books for three more years and missing out on all the things that are happening, so I switched to journalism at the last minute and got into Columbia Journalism School. Relating to foreign affairs at the time, one of the things I covered was a lecture series for The Columbia Spectator. Besides academics, they included prominent journalists and officials. The New York Times Moscow correspondent, Walter Duranty, showed up as one of the lecturers. Frederick T. Birchall and their correspondents who were in Berlin lectured on the rise of Hitler, so I got very much immersed in this subject. Covering some of these foreign affairs specialists, government officials and newspapermen heated up my interest in foreign

affairs.

*Q: You graduated from Columbia as an undergraduate in 1935.*

SIRKIN: 1935

*Q: Did you find influence, everything was so political in those days?*

SIRKIN: As journalists, we were having a great time. During that period there was the whole Oxford pledge movement against the war. The young communists and the young socialists were always going at each other. More of that was going on at City College that I just read about. Then there were the student strikes, some about the war.

*Q: This moves us to 1936 or so and in those days probably the Spanish Civil War was beginning?*

SIRKIN: That's right. There was a lot of student activity related to the future, the peace, the Spanish War. Diego Rivera, the muralist, showed up at Campus rallies with his little artist wife (Freda Kahlo) who is now more famous than he is.

*Q: The McCarthy period was way in the future but you were in a real minefield at that time weren't you, maybe not knowing it as far as political affiliation and all?*

SIRKIN: I didn't know it was a minefield, but the communists tried to recruit people for the Lincoln Brigade in Spain. I became a campus correspondent for The New York Post so for a couple of years while I was in journalism school and a year or two after, before I got some kind of a job, I hung around the campus and reported for The Post. A fellow student of mine was a reporter for The Herald Tribune so I'd fill in for him as well. I had to cover the Sunday sermons rushing from Riverside Church to the Anglican Cathedral, St. John the Divine on 110th Street and go backstage to get the text of the sermon because in those days The New York Times and The Herald Tribune would have a page on Monday morning on the interesting sermons in the city's churches.

*Q: Having a string or working on the campus too. These things, it's a different era. I doubt if they have any now?*

SIRKIN: They probably do now, why not*?*

*Q: Maybe they do.*

SIRKIN: That's an easy way to cover the campus. When I was in journalism school for 20 minutes, I reported for the Hearst Evening Journal. My story made a big front page headline. The call came from the Journal City Desk to the Journalism School saying, "Do you have somebody who can go and cover Governor Hoffman of New Jersey? He's coming to the physics laboratory to test the ladder in the Hauptmann case."

*Q: The Lindbergh kidnapping trial?*

SIRKIN: That's right. Somebody said, "Are you covering for the Post*?"* and I said, "Sure", so I rushed over and found myself in the same elevator with Governor Hoffman and the New Jersey Police Chief, the father of General Schwarzkopf.

*Q: He was the Chief for the New Jersey police. He went later to Iran to set up...*

SIRKIN: I was just a student, but I wasn't a physics student. I rushed to a phone and sure enough The Journal had big bold headlines and my little paragraph was the lead story.

*Q: This was the case of the decade. When did you get out of the school of journalism, 1937 or so?*

SIRKIN: 1936. One of the teachers of the school was Douglas Southall Freeman. He flew up from Richmond early Friday mornings. He had already digested the papers. He was a slow moving man with a southern drawl. He was sitting in the room at 9:00 a.m. He spent the whole day teaching what he thought was going to be a big new thing in journalism, a review of the week. Each of us had to participate in a bull session about the week's news for one hour to an hour and a half and then sit down at a typewriter to bang out a review of the week.

After lunch Dr. Freeman would pick one or two of the papers and discuss them. This was usually about the Nazis and Germany and Europe. The lead was almost always about foreign affairs.

*Q: Did you feel there were any Fascist, Italian, German sympathizers involved in your orbit?*

SIRKIN: The only radical stuff was on the Left, I didn't notice anything on the Right. There was no Nazi sympathy that I could see among the people. Maybe some people were a little bit more neutral.

*Q: The silver shirts, but they were out in the hinterlands.*

SIRKIN: Nothing much in the New York City area.

Another professor was George Gallup. He was just beginning his political polling. This was the year that the Literary Digest poll predicted Landon was going to win.

*Q: This was in 1936?*

SIRKIN: That's right. Dr. Gallup was testing out his system in the political sphere. He was teaching at Columbia because he had started in media research and had done a

readership poll for the Des Moines Register about what people read in the newspaper. He found very important results, let editors know what is read and what is not read in the newspapers and, of course, the main thing people read was weather and sports. The very bottom of the list was the editorial page. He didn't know how his experiment in applying his media survey techniques to politics was going to work out. He did this scientific polling with samples similar to the audience makeup by age, income, whatever. The Literary Digest used the telephone book, but a lot of people didn't have telephones.

*Q: Particularly during the depression, the telephone was not that widely thought of but that's the lesson to every pollster from now on, never depend on your instrument.*

SIRKIN: So we were ahead of our times with that little episode.

*Q: What were you doing that year, was it a full time reporter?*

SIRKIN: No, no. I was a stringer. You made a string of what you got published. You clipped off all the pieces you had written in the newspaper and you tied them together in a string and somebody in the office got a ruler and measured how many column inches you contributed on your string and that's how you got paid at the end of the week.

*Q: I didn't realize that. Well, how were you making a living?*

SIRKIN: I'd get a few odd jobs and one of them the Journalism school office me sent for I didn't take. The father of the man who runs Wall Street Week on public television now, Louis Rukeyser (his father was Merrill Stanley Rukeyser, financial editor of the Hearst newspapers), needed an assistant. He was a graduate of the Columbia School of Journalism and always took his assistants from there. So they sent me over to the little office he had in his apartment on Riverside Drive. I told him I knew nothing about finance or Wall Street. I lived through the Wall Street crash and knew about people jumping out of windows, but I didn't know the mechanics. He said, “That's all right, I'll teach you.” He offered me $15.00 a week. I was stupid. If I had taken it I'd probably be a millionaire now. I didn't take it. Instead I fiddled around with a few small jobs. I got another job which paid me a good deal more and it was to do some of the editorial work and press release work for an organization called The Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds which was like the Community Chests but for the Jewish community. I got a fairly decent pay, $35.00 - $40.00 a week. So I took that. The Council had these annual meetings, gathering fund raisers from all over the country, and in 1938 - 1939 right after Munich, the speaker was Jan Masaryk.

*Q: He was the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia?*

SIRKIN: Foreign Minister of Czechoslovakia. The meeting was in Baltimore. To get some press attention, I arranged for a young reporter from *The Baltimore Sun* to interview him in his hotel room. That gave me a chance to talk to him about the Czech views of Munich.

One of my close friends from the Columbia School of Journalism was a year ahead of me. He was there covering the campus for the World Telegraph. His name was Matthew Gordon. He later got a job with CBS. These were the days when Ed Murrow in London was collecting all these people in Europe for a network of correspondents, Shirer and others. So I used to spend a lot of time with Gordon before we went out to dinner, at the CBS news office where Elmer Davis was doing a nightly essay, and Major George Fielding Eliott was the military expert. So I got to see these people and talk to them and we'd listen to the monitor with Ed Murrow's voice coming in with the pre-program discussion about who is going to do what and when and sometimes Gordon was on this end of the hookup. So I got to know some of the people running that program, including some of the correspondents in Europe. I felt in the midst of it all, but I had no role in it except as a friend. That's one of the memories I have of getting deeply involved in foreign affairs.

*Q: You mentioned Jan Masaryk.*

SIRKIN: I talked to Masaryk. I'd been following the Munich thing and there were a lot of mysteries about why certain people acted the way they did. For France and the British the issue was whether they were going into Czechoslovakia to stop Hitler. I asked the question: Was George Bidault, the Foreign Minister of France at that time involved in the Munich discussions, prepared to march into Czechoslovakia? Mr. Masaryk got all excited and pointing to the bathroom, said Mr. Bidault was prepared to march in there!
(End of tape)

Until then, I'd never taken a vacation or gone anywhere much. Matt Gordon and I took one of these Caribbean cruises for two weeks. This was in '39, the end of summer. Events were moving fast in Europe. We were supposed to go to Panama, Havana, Costa Rica, back to Havana and back to New York. While we were on board the war started and we were in a hotel in San Jose, Costa Rica, when church bells started ringing and we learned Britain and France had entered the war. We sailed to Panama but, because of the War, we couldn't go through the Canal.

*Q: We're into 1939, France and England are at war. The United States is not at war with Germany. In the first place, were you still sort of following campus politics?*

SIRKIN: Not much.

*Q: I was wondering about any in your group, which was obviously very interested in what was happening... All of a sudden you have the Soviet Union pulling this about face and having this attack from the Nazis. Did this cause any conflict within the group you were dealing with?*

SIRKIN: I was in an office that had social workers in it. Some were fund raising people and some social worker people. This organization dealt with hospitals, social agencies

and what not. Some of the staff were members of the union and the union was a communist-led union. They were against the draft and when this Nazi-Soviet pact happened the communists had a hell of a job trying to explain this thing and some of them actually quit the Party.

*Q: Particularly being a Jewish organization.*

SIRKIN: A couple of them, I didn't realize how deeply emotional they were. They were all tied up with youthful idealism, I guess. I remember I went to one of the meetings of the union. I was virtually an outsider because the draft was coming up and I had a low number in the draft and was about to be drafted; as far as I was concerned, I wanted to be drafted. I remember getting up at one of these meetings from the back row in the union chapter of which I was briefly a member and somebody was yelling about the war-like American government and against the draft. I stood up and said I was for the draft and I was going to be drafted shortly. I quit the union and I told them that when I got drafted I wanted to be off their mailing list.

*Q: When did you get drafted?*

SIRKIN: In April, 1941.

*Q: So how long were you in the military?*

SIRKIN: Until the time I retired in Tokyo as a Major in '46 or '47, it was about six years.

*Q: So you were drafted, where did you go?*

SIRKIN: I was drafted and sent off to Fort Dix. After a week of this very busy mind-numbing time, I was sent off to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where I was put in with a lot of other big city guys into a New Jersey National Guard Cavalry Unit to fill up the empty space of the regular members. This National Guard outfit was composed of rich fellows who used this thing as an easy and cheap way of getting weekend horsemanship.

*Q: A classic military man?*

SIRKIN: Of course, by then it was already changed from just being pure cavalry so it was called Half Horse - Half Mechanized and they had three troops of single scout cars and motorcycles and three or four troops of horses. I had never driven a car, I had never been on a motorcycle and I had never been on a horse so that was an interesting …….

*Q: How did they mount you, on what?*

SIRKIN: They tried to, you know just like you throw kids into the water to swim, to put me on a motorcycle and almost killed me. They said, "You turn this to start, you turn this to stop..." I had never even driven a car. They put me on a motorcycle and the engine

started going and I froze. There were people yelling at me and finally some daredevil ran in and grabbed the thing to stop it and I could get off without breaking my neck. So they took me out of the mechanized part and never dreamed of putting me on a horse, so I ended up in an office job.

*Q: You sound like an ideal candidate for company clerk.*

SIRKIN: Well, I worked in the Clerk's Office for a while. I thought some of the things they did weren't so smart and I ended up helping the Classification Officer. He was a nice guy and I gave him some suggestions. He told me to look over the enlisted men's cards and write down suggestions.

During my training, I tried to use my writing skills whenever I could. I was very impressed with Norman Corwin's wartime radio dramas. So I drafted one and an acquaintance who was Washington Bureau Chief of the New York Post, said, "Why don't you sent it to Eleanor Roosevelt?" He said she sometimes helps individuals get over bureaucratic problems." So I put it in an envelope with a note saying this might be of interest to somebody in the war effort in Washington. Shortly thereafter I got a note from her saying she had sent it over to Archibald MacLeish, Head of the Office of Facts and Figures.

*Q: He was later at the Office of War Information and later was the Librarian of Congress.*

SIRKIN: So I got a little note from him saying thank you very much; it was interesting. I don't know if I had some other correspondence with her or not, but when I came to Washington on leave during Christmas-New Year's time this fellow on the Post said "Well, why don't you give her a ring? She likes to see all kinds of people in whom she takes an interest." So I called her office and they said, come to tea. This was December 31, three weeks after the war started.

*Q: You were at that point a Private?*

SIRKIN: Yes. I was at Fort Jackson, SC before I was in Officer's School. So I went and had tea. She had three other people there. One was Morris Ernst, a well-known lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union. One was an African-American lady who was a very prominent social worker. I didn't say very much. I listened to all these interesting people. She may have asked me a question, I don't remember. Then we broke up and I was about to go back to my hotel, which was nearby, the Roger Smith Hotel. She asked me where I was going and could she give me a lift in her car. En route, she said, "What are you doing New Year's Eve?" I said, "Nothing," and she said, "Well, why don't you come over after dinner to the White House?" So about 10:00 o'clock, I showed up at the gate.

*Q: Were you in uniform?*

SIRKIN: I think I was in civvies. On leave you didn't have to wear your uniform. I went into the room that was filled with people and Mrs. Roosevelt greeted me and I was goggled eyed. I saw the President in his chair, I think it was a wheelchair, and I recognized Harry Hopkins and Secretary of the Treasury, Morgenthau, and a fellow I knew in my college days. He was at City College, Joe Lash. He later became her biographer. He was the only person I knew there. One other young person there was the daughter of Secretary and Mrs. Morgenthau,. As I came in I was gawking at the scene. Mrs. Roosevelt was trying to introduce me to a couple of other guests, two elderly Unitarian clergymen from Massachusetts (Endicott Peabody?) but I was just staring at everybody and she elbowed me in the ribs to pay attention. Recently, when I went to see the statue of her at the Memorial, I could still feel her elbow in my ribs, saying pay attention. I remember I spent most of the evening hanging around with Joe Lash and I asked a few questions of Harry Hopkins.

I realized later, I didn't know it at the time, that in another part of the White House Churchill was there, and he had been at dinner, but he was with his own people for New Year's Eve. So I didn't see any of those people. I just heard about it later. But, as midnight approached I happened to find myself standing alone next to the President. He was sitting in a chair twiddling the dials on the radio and listening to the noise in Times Square of the crowd waiting for the lighted ball to come down. He turned to me. I had been introduced to him but he didn't have the faintest idea who I was, just one of Eleanor's friends, Since no one else was around, he just expressed himself to me with a frown.

*Q: Manila was falling at the time. It wasn't a good mood in the White House.*

SIRKIN: No. This was just three weeks after Pearl Harbor, the Philippines were going under and I suppose he was getting periodic reports that weren't very good. We were abandoning Manila and here were all these people screaming and yelling in Times Square. He turned to me as I happened to be standing nearby and expressed his displeasure. "Why do these people have to make all this noise just because it's a new year?" I got the impression he felt that way about any new year but especially at this time. He was deploring the fact that people make all this screaming noise when there are obviously very serious things going on. Lately, I was reading complaints about this new statue of a serious looking President in the Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, but that is the way I remember him that evening. Some people want his statue with a cigarette and triumphant grin. There was no triumphant grin on his face that night.

*Q: This was not a good time. Hong Kong had just fallen. The Japanese were beating the hell out of us and the British at that time.*

SIRKIN: Well, the sequel to this is she mentioned my name in her "My Day" column as a guest. I don't think she mentioned this as being the evening. I think she was talking about the people she had for tea. She mentioned Morris Ernst and some others.

*Q: Oh yes, the civil liberties man.*

SIRKIN: So when I got back to my Army post, I found that to the people running this New Jersey Cavalry outfit, Roosevelt was a dirty word and Eleanor was even dirtier. I was put on k.p. and some of my barracks' mates were sure it was because the New Jersey officers were putting me down a peg.

*Q: Yes, when you are in the military you don't want to stand out at all.*

SIRKIN: There is another sequel to that. I was later stationed in New Caledonia. By then I was a Lieutenant. Mrs. Roosevelt came out to visit the troops and came to the Red Cross canteen and I approached her. She said, "I finally get to see you and why don't you come to tea or just for a visit?" She was staying in Admiral Halsey's quarters in New Caledonia. So I came and we had a little chat. She told me where Joe Lash was stationed, I wasn't that close to him, but she told me anyway. She gave me his APO address and I think we exchanged V-mails once. I told her I had a little problem because she mentioned my name. So next time in her column, a day later, she referred to me as a young Lieutenant but she left my name out.

*Q: Well, I think it's interesting because I'm trying to capture, as long as we are doing these things I think people should be interested in who these people are but also we are grabbing the spirit of the times and this is very much so. You were involved in an area that I think was real fermented where you were. What did they do with you when you went to Camp Lee?*

SIRKIN: My superior, the classification official at Fort Jackson, said I ought to go to Officer's School and he arranged for me to fill out the necessary forms. So I went me off to Quartermaster School in Camp Lee, Virginia, where I had three months of training. At the end of the three months, I saw my orders were to Camp Butner, North Carolina, to a truck company. So I went to the office there and said I can't go to a truck company and be an officer. I don't even drive. They showed me their records that said I had driver's training. I told them that was a mistake; I didn't have driver's training; somebody made an error. The answer was: That's what it says and that's where you are going. They said they couldn't correct the error. The clearly didn't want to bother. So I went to Camp Butner. At that time the officers in some truck outfits were white and the troops were black. The classification system had worked perfectly for the enlisted men. Every one of them was a transcontinental trucker. So here was a white officer, me, somebody who didn't even have a driver's license and couldn't drive a car. So I went to this old black Master Sergeant, who had been in the service many years, and told him my dilemma. He took me out at midnight in a Jeep to teach me how to drive. He didn't want to embarrass me in front of the troops and I learned how to drive. I learned first how to drive a jeep and a command car and before a few weeks I was at the head of a convoy going up to Omaha. We camped overnight in the big public park in Omaha and we were on the way to get some of the material to be shipped overseas. But I was by then able to be the lead car of the convoy or the car following up but I had learned enough with the help of the Sergeant and a few others to master the basics of driving a car. I was supposed to teach them... But somebody

else had to teach mechanics and repairs.

*Q: Well, it was a segregated military in those days wasn't it? What were relations like between black enlisted and white officers?*

SIRKIN: I didn't have much to do with it since this very savvy old non-com knew how to maneuver this. He knew what would happen, I suppose, if he let everybody know that I couldn't even drive, etc. He shielded me at least in that relationship, I remember very well.

*Q: Then where did you go? We're talking well into '42?*

SIRKIN: Yes and early '43 I guess. I was sent off by the Commanding Officer, Captain, I forget who it was, of the company I was in, to San Francisco to do inventory of all the stuff that had to be shipped aboard to take with us from ammunition to toilet paper. I spent two or three weeks at the St. Francis Hotel at government expense enjoying San Francisco in the evening but in the day working out at the Presidio and some warehouses checking over material that was to go aboard the ship with us to an unknown destination in the Pacific. I didn't know where we were going. Ended up in New Caledonia in this truck company. By then I'd been shifted to a white truck company in Fort Smith, Arkansas. That's the company I went overseas with to New Caledonia.

*Q: You were in New Caledonia from when to when?*

SIRKIN: '43 to '45.

*Q: What was its position in the war effort?*

SIRKIN: It was under Halsey's over all command. I was in an Army Unit under a Navy command and we serviced the Navy's needs. I was involved on the docks, both personnel and cargo, taking off wounded from Guadalcanal onto ambulances and trying to make the loading activities more efficient so the ships could get off on time. It was an interesting place in those two years at Halsey's headquarters. One of the people around there was Commander Harold Stassen. The fellow who worked as the Navy Press Officer later wrote a book called, "Tales of the South Pacific," James Michener. I didn't know him well, but I got to know some of the correspondents that hung around there. It was an easy life as a matter of fact. Sometimes I felt a bit guilty because people I was dealing with were coming back wounded and I had to deal with mortuary shipments, too.

*Q: You were there when the war ended?*

SIRKIN: When the Transportation Corps of the Army decided it wanted a history written of its work, somebody discovered that I had this journalism background, so the finger pointed to me. I was put in the Office of the Transportation Corps Headquarters Office on the island and set to work. I had to do histories of the ports of that area. So obviously the

first job was the Port of Noumea on New Caledonia itself. I was going to save Australia and New Zealand for last and do all the little ones first. I went to Fiji, wrote about Suva and Lavetoka and then to the New Hebrides. I wrote pieces just from reports, without going there myself, about Bora Bora and Tonga Tabu. By the time I was ready to go to Brisbane and Auckland, the whole unit was going to the Philippines, I never got to Australia and New Zealand.

By then I was part of another organization in the Army called South Pacific Base Command. This started in New Caledonia, then shifted to the Philippines to get ready for the invasion of Japan. My unit camped near Clark Field. I had learned how to drive a scout car and every chance I got I scooted down to Manila, visited the press headquarters and got to know a lot of the correspondents. Some of them I have kept in touch with ever since. I was in the Philippines when the war ended. I was in a foxhole as a matter of fact, preparing for the invasion of Southern Japan when we heard about the atomic bomb and shortly thereafter the end of the war. Soon thereafter the whole unit was picked up and we went to Manila. I was at the airport when the Japanese Army Officers arrived to sign the arrangements for the surrender ceremony on the Missouri. I watched as the Japanese came down from their plane and MacArthur's Intelligence Chief standing on the tarmac to greet them. The big issue was, were they going to shake hands or not? To this day I don't remember whether they did or not.

When we landed in Nagoya, I was by then doing public relations for this small command. I immediately phoned the press office of the Army headquarters of Southern Japan in Kyoto and I said there was nothing much to do in Nagoya, was there something I could do up there in Kyoto? By then people were preparing to leave. "Yes, sure we are losing our this, we are losing our that, going home." So I went immediately to Kyoto where I became a Public Information Officer, number two to the press officer for the Southern Command of General Krueger. After chaperoning bunches of correspondents around Southern Japan, I found that the Tokyo people were leaving and I was asked if I was willing to hang around. My job was still waiting for me in New York, but I was finding this so much more interesting. I didn't go home, I didn't have a family, a wife so I accepted. So I went up to Tokyo and became the Chief of the News Division in MacArthur's Headquarters.

*Q: I'd like to stop at this point I think, and we will pick it up next time where you have just become Chief of the News Division in Mac Arthur's Headquarters. How's that?*

***

*Today is the 18th of June, 1997. When did you become this, what year are we talking about?*

SIRKIN: I guess it's 1946.

*Q: In the first place, you were going to say before you got to this there was something*

*about a photographer.*

SIRKIN: When I was working in the Southern Headquarters of General Krueger, groups of foreign correspondents would come down South in Kyoto to cover things in that area that the occupation officials tried to interest the correspondents in covering like the blowing up of Japanese armaments and ammunition. One group that came down had about seven or eight correspondents, including a Life editor and photographer Eisenstein.

*Q: A major figure in photography?*

SIRKIN: He had a big retrospective exhibit not so long ago in New York. Anyway, they were all set to go first to Hiroshima and then to Nagasaki. After they had been to Hiroshima they all wanted to go to Nagasaki because that was the other place they knew about. I started urging, especially the Life editor (I think his name was Dick Lauterbach) who was controlling Eisenstein's assignments. I said I think Nagasaki is just another version, somewhat rather smaller than Hiroshima. But I argued there was something that nobody had covered yet, which would be very photogenic, which was the enforced return and processing of the Japanese conquerors of Manchuria and Northern China with the packs on their back. I couldn't persuade any of the other correspondents; they all insisted on going on to Nagasaki. We were on the Island of Kyushu. I did persuade Lauterbach, who got Eisenstein to go with me and just a few of the other correspondents to Sasabu where there was a processing center for returning Japanese. Eisenstein went and took these pictures and ended up with a cover story for Life. The picture was right on the cover and inside, I don't know how many pages, showing all these former conquerors. Some of them actually with big packs on their back of their belongings, returning from their country's defeat where they had been lording it over Northern China. So, I thought it was an educational thing for the American public to see one of the activities of the occupation. It turned out to be a good thing for Eisenstein even if he had been grumbling about missing Nagasaki.

*Q: You moved into the MacArthur Headquarters in '45, to be head of the News Division was it?*

SIRKIN: This was in '46. I had been doing the news work for the Southern Command, General Krueger. I offered to go up to Tokyo to fill in when Colonel Reid was leaving and they said sure come on up. This was the News Division of the Public Information, I forget the titles now, but it was the Public Information Office of General MacArthur's Headquarters run by a former National Guard General from one of the Dakotas. He had been with MacArthur all the way up from Australia and knew his entire group of Generals. All the time I was there I myself never exchanged a word with MacArthur. I saw him numerous times because one of my jobs was to be the person representing the press, in a sense, at the meetings of the Allied Council for Japan, where the press was not permitted, usually. I was there to write any press releases. Most of the time MacArthur himself was not in the chair. The other three were a Russian General, a Chinese General and an Australian political science professor, who represented the whole British

Commonwealth, a four-power group representing all nine allied powers. Some of the others didn't have a seat on the Council. The Dutch and the French and the others were not in the Council.

I'm trying to remember where, whether I was in Tokyo or still in Kyoto, I guess I was in Tokyo by then, but on the basis of my experience taking people to Hiroshima, people like Roy Howard and Spike Cannon, editor of Christian Science Monitor, groups like that and knowing how it worked in Hiroshima, John Hersey came through for The New Yorker, and he just stopped by my office to tell me what he was going to do. He was going to do something in Hiroshima, trying to do The New Yorker version of it. I was able to give him the names of a few doctors and others who we had had contact with when I had been bringing groups down to Hiroshima.

*Q: Can you describe a bit the atmosphere in the News Division particularly? The MacArthur rule was almost imperial. Wasn't it?*

SIRKIN: He was the Emperor of Japan.

*Q: What were your observations being down in an element which was still of interest because if nothing else General MacArthur's staff and all had a pretty good eye about public relations and publicity, particularly for the General.*

SIRKIN: They were concerned about getting favorable publicity. Officially my job was to write press releases and respond to press inquiries about the activities of the Headquarters. The Headquarters was SCAP, Supreme Command of the Allied Powers, in Japan. The press office was in the Radio Tokyo Building. It was the building where Radio Tokyo used to operate and was taken over by the occupation and run by the military for a while, before it was turned back to the Japanese civilians. On the second floor of the Radio Tokyo Building was this fairly big newsroom of desks with typewriters, and correspondents from all over the world. Mainly the news agencies, AP, UP, INS, Agence France Presse, and Tass. All these people had desks there, plus, of course, The New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Chicago Daily News and outfits that had foreign correspondents. I had an office of six or seven reporters who covered the different departments of the occupation, such as agriculture, industry, education, religion, and labor. The official dealing with the Japanese press, I think it was called CI and E, Information and Education. I forget what the C stood for, but it was about the domestic situation because they were determined to change the mentality that led to the war, including getting involved in religion, the Shinto religion, to demilitarize it to a certain extent, and in education, school and women's affairs; presumably women's roles were not as equal as they were in the western countries. My office became a factory of press releases; reporters who worked for me would come and tell me what was going on and anything that they considered newsworthy in their section. Depending on what the story was, I would have to check the press release for both content and style and policy.

*Q: Was there an effort to make sure that every story that came out of Japan had a*

*General MacArthur in the first sentence?*

SIRKIN: No. I don't think Emperor worship reached that far. There was concern with some of the Officers around MacArthur about anything that might turn out to be derogatory. One of the Bureau Chiefs was Miles Vaughn of UP who had come up with MacArthur from way back in the war. He was an extreme admirer of MacArthur. As a matter of fact, I guess it was '47 or '48, he had written a whole series in UP about the achievements of MacArthur. That was just before the election year in the U.S. when MacArthur was put forth as a candidate. It was something of an amusement to some of the other UP people including the Bureau Chief in Washington, Lyle Wilson. One of Miles' assistants told me at one point, after MacArthur had been trounced in the Wisconsin primary, about a one-sentence cable, I guess it was from Lyle Wilson in the Washington Bureau of UP to Miles Vaughn, "UNPACK".

There was a lot of interesting by-play especially political in the international sense. I frequently had a lot of problems with the grumbles from The Chicago Tribune correspondent about the too-liberal behavior of MacArthur's occupation. I know he came in once and pounded the desk complaining, "What is MacArthur doing, letting all these Communist labor leaders out of jail?" Some had been in jail since the Japanese imperial time. (End of tape)

*Q: You are saying labor leaders had been let go?*

SIRKIN: Some of the labor leaders had been released, the Socialist as well as the Communist ones, and some of the more conservative writers, particularly the Chicago Tribune correspondent, was exercised as to why. The Communists were going to take over the labor movement. For a while the Japanese labor movement was I think heavily communist controlled. But MacArthur did a number of other interesting things some of the biographers there who were writing about him didn't expect. He invited Roger Baldwin to come over to Japan to teach.

*Q: Head of the Civil Liberties Union?*

SIRKIN: Founder and then Chief of the American Civil Liberties Union. He came over to teach the Japanese or advise how to teach the Japanese to understand civil liberties as understood in the United States. That surprised again some of these more conservative correspondents. They didn't expect that. Also, MacArthur was breaking up the zaibatsu. Some of his staff had been recruited from academia, Washington bureaucracy, New Dealers whatever and they were trustbusters at home. They were going to trust bust.

*Q: Would you explain what a zaibatsu was?*

SIRKIN: A zaibatsu was a big Japanese trust, Mitsui, Mitsubishi, etc. There were four big ones and there was an effort by the occupation, the Industry Department of MacArthur's occupation, to break them up and the assumption was as in Germany where people were

assuming that one of the forces behind Hitler was big steel... and that a similar thing was going on in Japan and one way to do it was to apply trust busting techniques, including introduction of American-Western taxation norms and tax collection procedures. I always remember The New York Times correspondent who specialized particularly in the economics side, Burton Crane, once told me that he was given an explanation from a Japanese person of how the Japanese operate when the occupation comes in and tells them "We know you keep two sets of books, one that you really keep for yourself so you know how the business is doing and the other to show the tax collector. Now your American tax reforms are forcing us to keep three sets of books, one to see our books, a second when they tell us we know you keep two sets of books, and we say okay, we'll show you the other set, and a third set for us so we'll know what's really going on in our business".

*Q: Did you run across any effort by General Willoughby, who was General MacArthur's sort of hatchet man? Did he ever try to interfere, was there discomfort with the news bureau?*

SIRKIN: There were several situations that arose. The correspondent for the Christian Science Monitor was among four or five others liked to play on the investigative side and was a little bit more liberal than the rest, thinking MacArthur wasn't doing enough to destroy the Japanese industrial establishment. They occasionally would write a piece that wasn't 100% supportive of what, let's say, the SCAP the government section wanted to see published. So when the Monitor Editor in Chief, Erwin Canham, came through on one of the group visits organized by the Pentagon, I sat next to him on the plane from Tokyo to the Philippines. (The group was en route to the Philippines, Shanghai and Nanking, where they were to visit Chiang Kai-Shek and I was escort officer for this whole trip.) Mr. Canham asked me if I thought his correspondent was leftist or communist as General Whitney was apparently telling him.

*Q: Courtney Whitney?*

SIRKIN: Courtney Whitney who was Chief of the Government Section and whose office wrote this very liberal constitution for Japan. I told him I didn't think so. He was just writing what he found and what he saw. Some of it was not to the mind of the correspondent entirely favorable to the occupation authorities, but many of the articles were favorable. They were very touchy. MacArthur was a very tough personality and commander and they didn't like anything that might irritate him; he was very sensitive to what appeared in the press, I gather. So I was at least able to reassure him. He didn't pull him out. Another time, Willoughby or somebody else got very annoyed with two correspondents, Tilton of The London Daily Herald, the labor paper in London, and Bill Costello of CBS. Some of MacArthur's staff wanted to get rid of these two. They weren't going to kick them out, but if they went home on leave they wouldn't be allowed back in. When I heard about this, I wrote a very strong memo to my boss, General Baker, which he apparently passed up to his guru, General Whitney. Apparently Whitney and Willoughby were at cross-purposes on many issues. My boss, luckily for me, was

working for General Whitney and the end result was they weren't kicked out. I had tried to explain purely in terms of defense of General MacArthur's reputation that if something like this happened it would arouse the entire press against the General. What these two correspondents now say may be a bit negative on CBS and certainly in The London Daily Herald, not one of the biggest papers in London. This would be much less critical of MacArthur than what would arise if they were expelled. I trust other people said the same thing. To this day I think Mrs. Costello thinks I was one of the people pushing to get Costello excluded, but that was not the case.

Another case involving General Willoughby: Vice President Wallace made an anti-colonial speech somewhat critical of the British and French, but especially the British. All of this was going on right after the war. But the occupation had rules for the Japanese press: they were not to criticize any of the Allied powers. So here is the Vice President of the United States making a speech. General Willoughby's department was the censor of the Japanese press, and they were told at some point that evening after Wallace had made this speech, that they were not to use it. This was a year or two into the occupation and the American correspondents were very close to a lot of the Japanese press and used some of them as their legmen for stories. They had arrangements and would have copies of what they wrote. A couple of the correspondents knew Japanese well and the Associated Press man was Russell Grimes. I think he had actually been in Japan and knew Japanese, and I think he was one of the prisoners who were finally locked up later in the Philippines. So that evening I was in the office alone and the only one in the newsroom was Russ Grimes. He was busily picking out the story that the U.S. government was telling the Japanese press they mustn't print the speech by the American Vice President. And he had taken it up with the Colonel who worked for Willoughby, who was in charge of the press and he was writing what this man Colonel Stratton, I believe, had said. So he was writing this story, I gathered. I didn't look over his shoulder but he was telling me briefly, “Oh, have I got a good story”. I answered the phone myself and when it rang, General Willoughby was on the other end and he asked if Russ Grimes was working on this story, and wondered if he had gotten a statement from Colonel Stratton. I said I didn’t know, but I thought he was there working, that he’d been writing stuff, sending it out. Russ Grimes, I think, gathered what the conversation was and who it was, so he immediately waved his hands to tell him it was too late to stop. So I told Willoughby I didn’t know what I could do about it, but I would go and find out. I came back to the phone and told Willoughby, “Yes, Russ Grimes says he has written the story and has a statement from the Colonel that it is already on the wires; it's gone off”. To this day, I'm not sure if it was already on the wire or if it was about to go on the wire. But I was in no position to get in the same box with this. I heard Willoughby curse; I don't know if he was cursing me, obviously very unhappy because this put him in the box. This was an ambiguous thing. He had two rules. One was the American Vice President should be able to be quoted by the Japanese press and he shouldn't be censored. On the other hand he had ruled that nothing was to be said against the British or the French. So partly because I was working for a General on Whitney's side, and maybe because of developments like this, I was not in Willoughby's good books. Ultimately it came back a year or two later when at some point Willoughby convinced MacArthur to put the press people under one

of his guys and not under General Baker who was a friend of General Whitney. I was immediately packed off because I was the Chief. That was two years after I was doing this and I had had a pretty good run.

*Q: What was your impression of the early days of the Japanese press?*

SIRKIN: I was not a Japanese speaker or reader and I personally did not have direct contact. I had some contact with the Japanese press in Kyoto because we didn't have that division. So for a few months I got to know well the Kyoto correspondent of Mainichi and a couple of the other correspondents covering South India for the Tokyo press and the economic papers. One of the fellows I dealt with a lot from Mainichi had studied in California and spoke very good English and was a very good journalist as far as I could tell. I have no personal opinion about their enterprise. They were quite professional, they knew the system of Western reportage but, of course, unlike the American press they had very few pages in the Western press. I guess like the British post-war press they were very thin in the amount of space they had. I don't think I can give you any thoughtful response on that one.

*Q: When did you leave MacArthur's command?*

SIRKIN: In '48. I was a Major. I think when I started this job I was a Captain. I was promoted to Major and then I found that a lot of people took off their uniform and put on a suit. They did exactly the same job at twice the salary. Since I wasn't going to stay on in the regular Army I did the same thing and for the last year or so, I was just a civilian working for the War Department.

*Q: This would '47 - '48?*

SIRKIN: Yes, '47, because I left in '48. This was in '47 though.

*Q: Was there any change in sort of the MacArthur hold on things? I mean did you feel it was phasing itself out at all?*

SIRKIN: Oh, no. I used to have breakfast in the Dai Ichi Hotel and got to know a lawyer who was one of the main people working for Whitney drafting the new Japanese constitution. He was a Japanese speaker. The phase-out hadn't happened by the time I left; it hadn't yet transpired.

I was there for the beginning of the War Crimes Trials and played a tiny, but interesting role in one little side-light of it. The indictment for the War Crimes Trials was drawn up by another section of MacArthur's staff. It was actually a New York political lawyer type producing the indictment. The indictment was not just Tojo and his people, but it was for generals involved in Chinese atrocities and the Philippines and everywhere. So it was a big tome they had been working on, collecting material. I was getting evidence from military and others, and one of my reporters was a WAC Captain, I think her name was

Captain Smith. She would keep me informed about dates and what was going to happen, how it was going to be handled. Close to the first day of the trial the question was, "How do we publicize the indictment?" This related to the crimes of Yamamoto and Tojo, and all the diplomats and military and Navy people, etc. As the date approached, I was still puzzling about how to deal with it. I think it was my boss who told me that Sir William Weir wanted to see me in his quarters. Sir William Weir was the Chief Justice of Australia and he was the Chief Justice of the War Crimes Trial, so I don't know why he didn't talk to my boss. I guess he apparently found out who ran the press show and he wanted to see me. He asked me how I planned to handle the issuance of the indictment, so I said, "Well, the usual procedure is as we go through the indictment, they put a release date on it, hold for release so the press of the world can read it and be aware of what's in it ahead of time. Then the indictment comes to them. They'll be prepared and maybe even write their stories in advance." So he said, "Yes, I know that's the way the press works and that is why I am calling. I'm trying to tell you, paraphrase me - if one word about what's in the indictment appears anywhere in the world in any newspaper or on any radio (there wasn't any TV then), anywhere in the world and I find out about it, I will declare a mistrial.

So I knew it was up to me to decide. I told him, “If I don’t put something out in advance, reporters from all over the world will be coming in with photographers and they will be in your courtroom, and they will not have heard a single word about the trial, When the indictment is handed up to your desk, there won't be any copies, there won't be anything.

So he said, "Well, I understand that all I'm telling you is as a result of the way I handle the issuance to the press of the text and what is in the indictment that if anything happens that appears anywhere in the world, I will declare a mistrial.” So my solution was not to put out anything in advance. I got hold of the indictment just the day before it was to be presented. I sat up a good part of the night reading it and then sitting up at the typewriter. We didn't have Xerox then, so we mimeographed. I mobilized all the stenographers from my staff and borrowed some others. I had the guards, the soldiers who generally guarded outdoors, come in to be around my office while this operation was going on the night before so that nobody could give out this information to anybody before the indictment was issued. But in order to avoid the mad scramble in the courtroom I just announced that the indictment would be delivered to the press outside my office in the Radio Tokyo Building, about two miles away from where the trial was. A couple of the press people showed up there; the AP had three or four guys to cover the procedures. All the press was in the pressroom. I had all these things ready with complete copies of the indictment and a press release that I wrote summarizing it. It was three or four pages. I instructed Captain Smith to be in the courtroom and see when the indictment was handed to Chief Justice Sir William Weir, and to get immediately to a phone and tell me that the indictment was on his desk. As soon as I got that call, I distributed the indictment to all the press. In those days right after the war there was a lot of press competition. Editors and publishers used to run ads saying for instance, “UP beat AP by 5 ½ minutes in announcing the end of the war. So a day later I had the satisfaction of Russ Grimes coming to tell me he beat everybody, UP, INS, Reuters and the French press only because he just took my press

release and handed it to the copy boy to put it on the wire “as is”. Then he sat down and wrote his own version. So at least my press release was good enough to win him his five or six-minute advantage over UP, INS and Reuters for covering the trial the first day of the indictment.

*Q: What was the general feeling about the trial? Later there was considerable unease, you might say, in American circles about the trial of General Yamashita for war crimes in the Philippines.*

SIRKIN: I'm afraid I didn't follow it that closely. I know there were some people who were cynical as they were in Germany about the war crimes trials. These were just the victors exacting their revenge or whatever, in some illegal form or appearance of form. But, there were all kinds of stories about mitigating circumstances that somebody wasn't quite as bad as others were, and in some cases it wasn't necessarily the commander who was responsible for what some of the troops did. There were reports of some sort of benevolent or good things some of these people had done, too, during the war. So some were sort of a mixed bag and Yamashita was a very prominent figure who had stories on both sides of the ledger, but I had no personal experience about it. I wasn't able to then, and am not able now either to express any view on that.

*Q: When you left there in 1948 as a civilian, what did you do?*

SIRKIN: One of the correspondents, an NBC fellow, George Fullester, had due bills from Pan Am. He did some work for Pan Am, and instead of paying cash or check they gave what they call due bills, which meant he could have a claim on tickets and he could sell them if he wanted. He said, "Have you ever been to Europe?" I said "No," So he said, “Why don't you go back via Europe and I will sell you half price due bills for Pan Am so you can stop at various places before you get back to New York?” So that's what I did. The correspondents gave me little notes to look up their colleagues in Shanghai and Delhi and Istanbul. General MacArthur's Chief of Staff, who later turned out to be a big wheel in the John Birch Society in Massachusetts, had studied at Harvard. He told me when I went through Istanbul to give this long letter to his former Art History and Archeology Professor at Harvard who was restoring Santa Sophia and taking off the Muslim things to expose the original Christian murals. So I had a very interesting talk in Istanbul with this professor. He was a great lover of flat Eastern Byzantine lack of perspective. I was arguing because I still liked the French and Italian styles. Anyway it was a fascinating interview, courtesy of General MacArthur's Chief of Staff, and I ended up in London as the Marshall Plan got going. So I got interested in doing presswork for the Marshall Plan and ended up getting hired as an assistant to the information guy to the Marshall Plan mission to the United Kingdom.

*Q: You picked this job up, you didn't get all the way home then? So in '48 you got into the Marshall Plan*? *You did it from when to when?*

SIRKIN: I ended up in London for nine years. The Marshall Plan ended up in '52 or

'53, and all the people who were doing information work for the Marshall Plan were absorbed into the new U.S. Information Agency which had been created. Dulles insisted he didn't want the propaganda people in the State Department so he let them have their own organization.

*Q: Let's talk first about the Marshall Plan. In '48 what was the status when you arrived there? Can you talk a little bit about how you saw both the UK and the beginning of the whole Marshall Plan business?*

SIRKIN: I got to the UK in '48 when there was still rationing, even potatoes and certainly meats and much of London looked like Tokyo. Downtown, the financial district of London, the so called City was just as flat as most of the City of Tokyo or Yokohama and they were just getting back on their feet and I began to make my contacts with the financial and labor and industrial correspondents and economic writers of the London Press. They were glad to have American help and also resentful that they had to take American help but our job was to rub it in that we were the ones giving it, because it was actually in the legislation. First of all, every bag of wheat or can of orange juice or whatever had the Marshall Plan insignia on it, paid for by the Marshall Plan. There was a plaque at the Vienna State Opera House, this was rebuilt with Marshall Plan money. In this case, it wasn't the dollars, it was just the counterpart fund, but it was under the control of the U.S. and there was to be an information program to make sure that the people in Europe knew what we were doing. So it was a fairly sizable information effort all over Europe run from Paris.

*Q: So you were from about '48 to '52 period, you were working on the British side of things?*

SIRKIN: I continued on when and USIA took over I became sort of the Deputy Public Affairs Officer until I left in 1957.

*Q: What type of things would you be doing?*

SIRKIN: I wrote press releases and distributed them to papers, British press not just the London press, about what shipments were coming in, millions of tons of wheat and cotton, and orange juice and machine tools. We would write about those. I remember there was an investment guarantee program. The Cabot family of Massachusetts had Cabot Carbon and they put some money into some British firm and that had a dollar guarantee so a press release on that. I made contact with the British financial and industrial correspondents, and with the BBC, which was very important, not only the BBC domestic but also the BBC world service. I had a lot of good contacts. The easiest ways to entertain these people was to invite them to the Embassy for lunch where we had meat from Denmark or New Zealand, which we couldn't get on the market for the first couple of years in restaurants in London. Fed them ideas, stories and BBC did a number of...

*Q: I would think that it would be rather difficult, I mean, obviously these people are, as with any country, would be proud of what they had done during the war, the fact that you had to publicize I mean you could feed the information, but they didn't have to publish it. I would think that there would be a desire not to do this. A lot of stuff was coming in and what was in it for the British press to say...?*

SIRKIN: This was news, this was encouraging for big imports were coming in that they weren't able to pay for because of the dollar gap. I refreshed my mind about all these things last week at Harvard [at the Marshall Plan 50th anniversary conference] because there was an orgy of reminiscence there about what went on. As a matter of fact, one of the people there was Sir Eric Roll; they kept calling him Lord Roll. But anyway at that time he was the British representative at these Marshall Plan meetings in Paris to set the whole thing up from a European point of view. It was interesting to get the flavor of the extent to which these British officials were grateful because they didn't know how, especially in the sterling area. Also the Mission head in Britain was Thomas Finletter, who later was Secretary of the Air Force, a big Democratic politician. My wife had known Finletter when she was on the board of United World Federalists with him in New York. She came over to work in the Mission and ended up in the economic research unit Finletter created to produce the quintessential study of the Sterling Area, the loss of whose resources to the UK was not well understood at the end of the war.

Their foreign exchange had been utilized to buy war supplies and they were down to nothing. But it wasn't just Britain, The sterling area had in a sense a common pool of money and so he authorized a little research section to analyze what had happened to the sterling area. They ended up with a huge staff and when this came out it made a big splash in the British press. They themselves had not done such a study. They all knew it anyway, but this was the foreigners, the Americans coming in. Commodity by commodity, I know my wife was working on cocoa from Africa, what had happened in terms of imports, of sales, exports and how that affected the British financial situation. And, how that contributed to the dollar debt.

*Q: You know this struck me and I'm not an economist but for some reason I come away with the impression that the results of the war rationing and all that lasted longer in Britain than they did say in Germany and yet in Germany everything had been devastated. I've never quite understood that.*

SIRKIN: My wife had gone over to visit the winter of 1948 and a couple of her friends were organizing and running The Friends' Service Committee Community Center in Berlin. Coming from London where there was still rationing and you couldn't get, let's say, clotted cream from Devon because it was all for export. She was astonished when she ordered coffee and kuchen in a café on the Kurfurstendam and was asked if she wanted her kuchen "mit schlag"; the whipped cream came out as big as the cake! And there were real sausages, which the Brits didn't see for another two years.

*Q: With clotted cream! I never quite understood why this happened this way?*

SIRKIN: Partly because the British were determined to restore their foreign exchange and were very insistent that everything go for export that could go for export to pay for loans from the U.S., whereas the Germans were a little bit more lenient about this. Of course, the big thing that I realized at the meeting of the national plan veterans as we were called, was that the crucial thing wasn't that the U.S. taxpayer was putting in 13 billion dollars or that kind of money in those years. Most of it stayed in the United States; but it was the taxpayers, American farmers, cotton people and fruit growers and a few machine tool people who got it. But the money came out of the taxpayers. They also had a research guy from LSE (London School of Economics) at this thing who had written a book going over all the same things we used to hear from the communists in 1949, 1950 about it's all a capitalist idea of dominating the European economies and it's all for the benefit of the people back in the States; "It really didn't do any good, Europe would have recovered anyway without this". It was beginning to recover, but recovery would obviously have been much slower.

I have to go back to your question about resentment. My wife made a little speech at Harvard about this because it struck her. I got involved early, as part of my work with the Marshall Plan, with something that Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Paul Hoffman, the Head of the Marshall Plan, set up: the Anglo American Council on Productivity. At the end of the war American industry had shoved ahead and the British were stuck with bombed out factories. The British sent teams of owners, managers, and workers to the equivalent industry in the U.S. for three to four weeks. They came back and wrote a report and maybe introduced some of these things to speed up Britain's productivity. When this was first announced, and my wife remembers reading it in the Daily Express, a very chauvinistic national press. "Grandchild to teach the grandmother how to suck eggs." But I did a lot of work to publicize these teams in the first instance and the man I worked with in the British Treasury was a man with a very impressive beard named Commander Whitehead who later went out on the private economy and became the Chief Salesman for Schweppes for a few years.

*Q: Oh, yes, he was the Schweppes man when gin and tonic first became a drink and it was a hard sell. The stuff really was pretty bitter.*

SIRKIN: This was in '48-'49 and he was a very efficient, very lively, very bright guy, very articulate and we worked out a common strategy of how to get the British press interested in covering these stories. He gave me some suggestions and advice and I worked with the British Office of the Anglo American Council on Productivity and helped them publicize and get press and radio attention to the first early reports.

*Q: What about the magazine The Economist? I would think that would have been a natural target for you.*

SIRKIN: I got to know some of the people there. One of the editors became a good friend. I forget this was a bit later, but I think when Senator Humphrey after he left as Vice

President, became Senator again. I guess this was in the ‘50s.

*Q: The ‘60s*

SIRKIN: Was it that late?

*Q: Yes, Senator Humphrey had become Vice President under Johnson. Johnson left, then he came back to be a Senator again in the early ‘70s. He died around then, too.*

SIRKIN: While I was in London he came through in the '50s. This was before he was Vice President. London like Paris and Rome was full of constant American top notch visitors from Congress and what not and it so happened all the bigwigs in the Embassy were busy that evening so on short notice they asked me to entertain, and get a few people together for dinner with Humphrey. So I quickly was able to get the Deputy Editor of the Economist to dinner plus the Economic Counselor of the Embassy and a few others.

Years later I met him at some disarmament thing in Geneva and I introduced myself, "Remember, you had dinner with me in our house in 1950, '60, '55 whatever." He says, "No, it was '56." He had had it with these British guys who talk very royal, economic people that are very clever. The American Editor of the Economist who had three or four pages in each issue, was Nancy Balfour, at that time. She became a very close friend of ours and had a great art interest and was able to get us to have tea with the sculptor, Henry Moore. He gave us tea at his place and showed us around his open-air sculptor garden and all the things he was working on. All this as a result of being introduced by Nancy Balfour, the Editor of the American Section. We still used to go visit her every time we came through London.

*Q: Most of this time I think the Labor Government was in?*

SIRKIN: At the end of my time there it was Churchill and Eden. Churchill for a while and then Eden. I watched Churchill give his farewell speech at the House of Commons.

*Q: Particularly during the early years, but this goes from '48 to '57. Did you run across a problem, with what I would call the far left wing of the Labor Party, the left wing intellectuals both in the press and all and trying to deal with them?*

SIRKIN: I don't know that I had any direct confrontations with people like that. I had a few situations in which I was able to address that issue in some respects, but I read their stuff from the left wing publications, such as Tribune that was on the left wing of the Labor Party; it wasn't communist but it was critical of America and took a strong, very socialist position. We knew there was a vocal group of that sort. One thing I managed to do in relation to that issue wasn't an economic thing, it was in the field of art. We were in cultural affairs, too, later. The American Museum of Modern Art in New York lent an exhibit to the British, I think it was the Tate Gallery, of some of the more interesting developments of American abstract art. Jackson Pollack and all these big names and

several others. So I thought this would be a good opportunity since this was the kind of art at the time where the left was listening a little bit to the Soviet argument against abstract art.

*Q: They wanted tractor drivers and realistic art.*

SIRKIN: The fellow traveling crowd was against abstract art. So I managed to get USIA to pay for a visit from somebody I knew who could describe, explain abstract art to the British. There was this professor Meyer Shapiro from Columbia who had a worldwide reputation. He is an explainer of what the value is of some of these lines and curves and whatnot. I had to argue a lot just for one country but apparently Germany heard about this, and agreed they would like to have him, too. But we brought him over and got the third program of the BBC, at that time the intellectual program of the BBC and they immediately wanted him for a lecture about modern art in relation to the exhibit opening at the Tate. He gave the lecture. The BBC puts out a magazine called The Listener, which at that time had about 8,000,000 circulation. It was a cheap magazine, as it was just text. The week he was there they put him on the front page of The Listener and ran the text of his speech. Then we fixed to have him give a few lectures right in the hotbed of this more or less leftist crowd at Hampstead Art Society and he was willing to lecture. In a sense, he was a Trotskyite. He was obviously very knowledgeable about how to needle in style.

So I went to that lecture and sure enough some of this fellow traveling crowd started to make fun of abstract art. He started shooting back with his very sophisticated retorts and kept the crowd almost with him. They met their match because he knew all the answers, all the questions and I thought in that respect he managed to do a little bit of a nick in that approach to things. But that wasn't on the main issue, it wasn't on the economic issue. It was in the art field.

*Q: Did you find a growing rift between the outlook of the United States and the outlook of the British intellectuals or not?*

SIRKIN: I really don't think so. If there was one, this was also the period when I guess it was the CIA invention, but there was a magazine called Encounter, edited theoretically by Steven Spender and Irving Kristol. I got to know Irving Kristol through various contacts pretty well. I didn't realize until it appeared in the Senate Hearings that some of the money came from the CIA, but it was a very good operation. This was sort of the liberal answer to the communist attraction for the intellectuals and they did pretty well. We got a lot of the intellectuals to come to some of our things. Robert Frost came over. We had a big reception inviting all these intellectuals, some of whom were a little bit on the left, far on the left, but they came to the American Embassy. They weren't immune from our invitations and attractions. So I don't think it was very sharp in England, not as it was on the continent.

*Q: Particularly in France. In the first place in '56, we had the Suez Crisis and there was a time when the, I won't say the British people, but the British Government under Eden*

*moved ahead to attack Egypt and the United States under Eisenhower would not support him.*

SIRKIN: Not only that but he either did or threatened to put the Sixth Fleet in between.

*Q: What did that do?*

SIRKIN: I used to have a little card identifying me as a member of the U.S. Delegation to SCUA, the Suez Canal Users Association.

*Q: This was Dulles'?*

SIRKIN: Yes, and as the Press Officer at that time, I sat right behind Dulles representing the U.S. The week he came to London to attend a meeting of this cooked up organization, the Suez Canal Users Association, under the leadership of the Dutch or some continental foreign minister, was a bit of a trying time. I went along with the Ambassador several times to Macmillan's Office. I was sitting outside Macmillan's Office when our Ambassador was delivering.

*Q: Who was our Ambassador?*

SIRKIN: Winthrop Aldrich, who had been head of probably the richest bank in the city, Chase. Also his mother was a Rockefeller so that was a bit of a strain between the U.S. and the British. I had no insights into it any more than what you read in the papers at the time.

*Q: Did you get any of the feeling about watching Dulles and Eden and all about the antipathy between these two?*

SIRKIN: I was never in the same room with Eden and, the only time I was with Dulles was sitting behind him at the formal meeting with a room full of people, and Eden wasn't there. One little thing about Dulles that is of interest to some people. My boss at the time, the PAO (I was just a Deputy), was fellow named Brad Connors who a little bit before that had run into a windmill of Joe McCarthyism. He had been a leading official of USIA and was really sort of harassed by McCarthy. When he was in Washington he had done a lot of work with Dulles in connection with various publicities. He was a very strong minded and knowledgeable guy. He was a chain smoker, rather heavyset with a cigar ash falling down on his vest. At one point when Dulles was in London they gathered all the Ambassadors from Western Europe to have a meeting. At some reception at the Ambassador's house, where a lot of the Ambassadors were gathering, Dulles came in. Dulles and Brad Connors had a meeting in the anteroom of the Ambassador's residence and I don't know what the issue was, but Brad Connors raised his voice to Dulles and said, "Mr. Secretary, you can't do that." All the Ambassadors looked around thinking, who the hell is that? Dulles had great trust in the judgment and knowledge of this guy and he did what he was told by Brad Connors. Mrs. Aldrich apparently raised the question to

Dulles about whether this guy with the cigarette ash is really the best person to have as the main spokesman for the U.S. in London. Dulles immediately said this guy is the smartest guy there is. You have a jewel here.

*Q: Dealing with other cultures during this nine year period with the British, particularly dealing with the press there, did you find that there was indeed a special relationship as compared with other countries or not? What was your impression?*

SIRKIN: Yes, the record is full of this discussion of how the Americans and the British are divided by a common language and things of that sort. One interesting example, I don't know if it relates exactly to your question or not, but twice while I was there the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors was Arthur Burns, Professor of Economics at Columbia. I gathered my friends, the City Editors- the City in England means the financial district- for a brief session with Professor Burns and they asked him as an advisor how he kept up-to-date. He told them about his own personal method which was to call departments of the U.S. Government which keep economic and population and other statistics, so that every Monday morning or afternoon he would get phone calls with the latest figures, and not wait until official reports which could be a week or two later, and thus to advise the President on economic activity. I don't know to what extent he had dealings with the Federal Reserve., but at least for the Council of Economic Advisors, up-to-the-minute information was also useful if it was a week or two ahead of the official reports. These British financial writers were sitting there with their mouths open and then they said, "Can you imagine our Treasury doing anything like this?" So the next time he came through, a year or two later, they asked me to ask Mr. Burns to describe that system that he had of getting way ahead just by making informal phone calls. Would you please invite so and so from the British Treasury to attend? They thought this was a magnificent example of Americans informality and efficiency and of not being stuffy.

*Q: In 1957, I take it by this time you were married?*

SIRKIN: Yes, we were married and had three children.

*Q: Okay, so that's what you are doing during those nine years?*

SIRKIN: She worked in a different area so I hardly ever saw her during work, but I got to see her the first time when we were playing softball behind what is now the residence for the American Ambassador, but at that time was the home of Barbara Hutton. We were playing softball, I guess the U.S. Marine team against the British Treasury. So that's where we first met and we enjoyed London together and got married and had three children.

*Q: 1957 you left?*

SIRKIN: 1957 I left. I returned home. The story I tell isn't exactly true, but I had been

there nine years all together. The first four years of the Marshall Plan and five years with USIA and at one point one of my bosses from Washington came by and we were talking about something going on in California. I said something about the University of California at Barkley. (Laughter) He said, "It's time to go home." Our bank was in Barkley Square that was right next to Grosvenor Square.

*Q: So you went back to USIA in 1957? How long were you there?*

SIRKIN: Yes, I was in Washington with USIA from 1957-1963. The year just before I left I was in the Senior Seminar.

*Q: Well, 1957 to about 1962 with USIA what was your job?*

SIRKIN: I was in the Policy Office. I came back and one of the Deputy Directors who was Head of Policy asked me what I wanted to do. I said "I'd like to be in Policy." He said, "Okay what do you want to do?" Sort of long-range planning. So I just called myself Long Range Planning Officer. I did whatever I thought was useful. For instance when it looked as if Khrushchev and Eisenhower would agree that the U.S. would be allowed to have an exhibit in Moscow I just assigned myself the job of collecting all the possible ideas of what should be shown in the American exhibit in Moscow.

I planned meetings, called different groups together within USIA and elsewhere, and came up with a long, long list. Remember the Kitchen Debate? A year or two before, the kitchen was very prominent in our discussions. The question was, "Do we show the most up-to-date kitchen which only a few people will have, to show the best we could possibly do? Or do we show an average class, good kitchen, not with all the latest frills, so we can say this is the kitchen which is in so many million homes and not just the best of the best?" That was a big issue. The reason I called it long range was because I felt if we were going to make an impact on people that we were trying to influence such as the Russian populace, but maybe Russian leadership as well, we have to try to figure out what they know and what they don't know and what's in their minds and try to fill in that level and so that's why I felt this was a very important breakthrough even though it was only in Moscow and didn't reach the whole population. I think to some extent this is still true, that you try to reach the opinion makers and the policy makers more than you try to reach every last individual. This would be people in Moscow, including the bureaucracy, who would be affected by this.

*Q: By the way, how did it come out? Did you decide to have a middle class kitchen*?

SIRKIN: I decided on a sort of slightly better than average kitchen rather than the fanciest of all because that would be easy for journalists to say that very few Americans have this.

One of my most serious involvements was in the art exhibit. Khrushchev had something to say about the ugly things he saw in our art exhibit. But before that we had to fight off Dwight Eisenhower who was merely President of the United States. For the art exhibit

they picked a jury. The art people didn't give a damn about politics and one of the pictures they picked was by a left wing cartoonist sort of artist, Jack Levine, who had a picture of the Generals making them look foolish. Somebody who didn't like that kind of stuff brought this to the attention of the White House and asked, "General Eisenhower, are you going to put up a picture like this about Generals?" So Eisenhower immediately called to find out what the hell was going on and this got into the papers. I don't know who leaked it but it got into the papers that this thing was going on and that Eisenhower was going to maybe wipe out this exhibit or at least censor it and have a few pictures. At that point I got involved and said I thought this was a freedom of expression and information issue. We should show that we have people who are critical or whatever. I think that one of the women, there were two people who were going to be curators, one for three weeks and one for three other weeks, and one of them was a New York Gallery woman. She was immediately quoted by the press as saying, "What the hell does President Eisenhower know about art?" She stayed on.

First I wrote a strong memo of why we should keep the exhibit to one of my bosses, Deputy Director Abbot Washburn, and he turned it over to a guy he knew on his side of the street who I knew very well because he was one of my bosses in Paris on the Marshall Plan, Roscoe Drummond. So Roscoe Drummond read this memo I wrote and virtually turned it into a column. That sort of helped swing the content of the exhibit. In order to appease the right wing on this including the President, they agreed to have a few additional pictures of I think Stuart, Washington and a few other Presidents and Generals... But, they added some more pictures to add to what the artists had picked. Again I was pleased with the result of this because at the press opening at Moscow this woman from the New York Gallery was on hand and the Russian press was interested in all this hoopla they knew about in the American Press and they asked this woman, "What happened to the lady who criticized the President?" She said, "That's me."

*Q: You know as soon as you talk about a government agency, and you add long range planning, that's almost an oxymoron. What was your impression of that?*

SIRKIN: A few test things had been done by people before me, but I decided that The Voice of America should have an academic-intellectual program directed primarily at the intellectuals, the English-speaking and reading and hearing intellectuals in the Soviet Union and other Bloc countries at that time. To know what they are denied at that time because there is not a free press; or to have academic lectures in different fields of American science and social science and political science, a series of 13 this is the way the country's TV and radio systems are operated in quarters, 13, 13, 13, and 13, adding up to 52. There would be 13 lectures in a series on American literature. A 13 lecture series on psychiatry and all the latest things that are going on in the American academic world including social sciences and the physical sciences to appeal to the minds of intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain. That was finally started and they actually published in a series of books on each field and were very popular. I followed it up for several years to read the fan mail that they received mainly from Iron Curtain countries. These were academic people writing how hopeful it was, how useful it was to know what was going on. At one

point I was told that at some meeting where Americans were meeting with Soviet experts in a certain field, including one of their top psychologists, the guy mentioned something about what was going on in some American thing and the American said, "Where did you hear about that?" I heard it in your VOA program. So it was reaching that audience.

*Q: Well, did you notice any difference in early 1961 when the Kennedy Administration came in about USIA operations and what you were doing? Was there any change in emphasis or style?*

SIRKIN: Not really. USIA had a certain charter of what it did. There were people within the agency fussing around using certain findings in the social sciences field, but multimedia is sometimes single media. We had one proponent in all this who ended up issuing instructions to all USIA, "Never put out a single thing; even a book isn't good enough, you have to have some visuals or a pamphlet or radio program to go along with it." I got into an argument with this fellow at one point. He was a big shot and he said a book alone never changed anybody. I didn't quite agree with all that. I thought some of it was carried to an extreme.

I forgot that in between, for almost a whole year after I got out of the Senior Seminar I spent a year with the AID program in New York and Washington. Later in Geneva there was a UN conference on science and technology for aid to the less developed areas. We had a delegation of 100 and the top members of the delegation went along with them and President Kennedy in the Oval Office, including Margaret Mead for one, entertained us.

*Q: Famous anthropologist.*

SIRKIN: Isadore Rabi, our physicist from Columbia University, Nobel Laureate; the President of MIT who was a science advisor to the President, Jerome Wiesner. So this was high-level stuff, a fascinating time. I was put in charge before I got there of putting together I guess a hundred or more papers which had been prepared by the American Delegation and other people and it was entire books and papers on industry, agriculture, population, the issues that were going to be coming up there. I was Editor in Chief.

A set of volumes still exist somewhere, I had one once. I had many numbers printed and delivered to the other delegations and to the press in Geneva where the meeting was; three or four USIA people from various places in Europe were assigned to me during the course of this. We put the press releases out on many of these papers and individual books and speeches by the leading U.S. spokesman. So we mounted quite a press operation that people from other countries resented a bit for sort of taking over the press side of the meeting, but resulted in some interesting stories about the U.S. interest in helping out.

*Q: Just to get the chronology straight, what year were you doing the senior seminar?*

SIRKIN: It was the fourth seminar. When was the election? 1960. I was assigned

1961-1962.

*Q: 1961-'62 Then you went back to USIA for about one year?*

SIRKIN: Yes, then '62-'63 I was engaged in this UN conference. Then I was finally assigned to Madras, South India.

*Q: Next time we will pick up being in Madras, India, in '63, but for now I'd just like to get a quick look at the senior seminar. You were in the fourth seminar, which was quite early on. I know I was in '74-'75, in the 17th seminar. What was your impression, what were you doing in the seminar? How did it work?*

SIRKIN: Have you seen the book from the seminar, The First Thirty Years?

*Q: No.*

SIRKIN: I wrote most of it. That's about the first thirty years of the seminar. So a lot of what I put in there was not my own experience but what was contributed to me by a few people who were asked to work on it. I may be a little confused about what I remember from that one year and what I picked up later about the other years. It was a fascinating year. I learned a great deal that helped me in my later work. They had lectures by various professors like somebody named Henry A. Kissinger who came up from Harvard. It was a fascinating time which was a time of the Berlin airlift and the American planes and Russian planes maybe not too far from tangling and Kissinger just came to our classroom from the White House where he raised the issue, "If you're going to threaten the Russians" as we had just been doing the day before or something.

*Q: We aren't talking about the Berlin airlift, we are talking about the Berlin wall, I think. The airlift was in '48 so we're talking about the erection of the Berlin wall. The airlift was a '48 thing. Tensions were building up over Berlin.*

SIRKIN: But there was also a business, maybe it wasn't the airlift but their was a possibility of a clash.

*Q: Oh, yes. Khrushchev threatened Kennedy with signing the peace treaty with East Germany and saying then you can't stay in Berlin. It was a very difficult time.*

SIRKIN: I guess there was no connection of an airlift as such, but it was a very difficult time when there was tension and I remember Kissinger, who was saying, "And I was telling them at the White House, if you're going to say or do something which is the first step you've got to have a second step in mind of how you are going to respond to what you are going to do when they respond to this." He was appalled that they hadn't thought that far.

But we've had others, Hans Bethe for instance, the nuclear physicist, was speaking to us

at that time about the terrible danger of nuclear war. He'd already then been one of the big pushers for severe nuclear arms control and destroying all or at least most weapons. So these visiting speakers in many cases were sort of on the edge of things, ahead of what you read about in the papers of what was going to happen. An MIT biology professor told us that the IBM people are standing over the backs of some of the brain researchers because they were studying all the latest brain research in order to see how much they can duplicate in putting up all these new fangled machines they were working on.

But also the trips around the country were enlightening and eye opening. We went to Puerto Rico and got to talk to the Governor. It was a terrific leg up for anybody who had that experience in their future careers.

*Q: Particularly those people who were going to go out and represent the United States. They were calling that Barclay rather than Berkeley, California.*

SIRKIN: I wrote a paper for the senior seminar and I could have taken a trip abroad as many of them did. I think I was the only one maybe that didn't. I stayed in the United States because I was interested in how we can use something like the Voice of America as a weapon in deterrence so I decided I wouldn't find out much about that in Russia but I would find out maybe a lot more if I went to all the Soviet experts in the U. S., in the course of which I got in to Brzezinski at Columbia, Fred Hickley of the Rand Corporation, and a whole bunch of other people who later became officials in later governments and gave me a little bit of their thinking. I wrote a hundred-page paper on issues that I think are still alive including a slight reference to dealing with China in a similar situation.

*Q: So you are off to Madras in '63 and you were there how many years?.*

SIRKIN: Three years.

*Q: So '63 to '66. What were you doing in Madras?*

SIRKIN: I was Public Affairs Officer for South India. At that time, we had three sub posts and one sort of little library in different parts of South India.

*Q: Well, what was the status of our relations '63 to '66 with the Indian Government from the perspective of Madras?*

SIRKIN: Well, the Ambassador was Chester Bowles on his second tour. The main issue between the U.S. and India was relations with Pakistan, at least at that time, and there was still a kind of a love affair from the Nehru days with the Soviet Union, at least at a national level. So it was a kind of respect for the democracy on the part of the U.S. but unhappiness with the orientation with the wrong side of the cold war. But very little of that carried over into our activities. That was for Delhi people more or less, but for Madras most of the relations in terms of the United States were very cordial, very

friendly. It was a place to go to for education so struggling to get visas to get to the United States aroused very great interest in all kinds of American things.

*Q: One of the states you dealt with was Kerala. Was that the one that had a Communist government in it?*

SIRKIN: Yes, at one stage there was a Communist government, but a Communist government at the local level doesn't mean very much. They take over, just run the local state government in some ways a little differently than the Congress party and were probably at some point likely to be somewhat cleaner than the congress party that was beginning to get pretty corrupt back then after many years of sole control of the country and the state.

*Q: Did you have any problems, demonstrations against our libraries or information places or anything like that?*

SIRKIN: Not that I recall while I was there. I knew about them later but, no, there weren't any. We used to run American weeks at local universities where we brought in a bunch of American professors to give a few lectures and even courses, and just generally be on the university campus and they were very popular. As a matter of fact, the only demonstration I remember is when one of our people, the Cultural Officer, was at one of these universities at one of the provincial towns of Madras State the night Kennedy was killed. Kennedy was so popular there a lot of people had pictures of Kennedy along side Gandhi in their houses. There was a kind of a silent demonstration outside the room where this American officer was staying. People would come to empathize him on the occasion of the death of their hero.

*Q: Were the Tamils a problem at that time?*

SIRKIN: The Tamils were a problem in Sri Lanka not in Tamilnadu. The Tamils ran the state. The State of Madras is now called Tamilnadu and there were a lot of local political battles between the Congress party and the native kind of separatist Tamil party. The Congress party was presumably run by locals who way back when came from the North and the Tamils were the more indigenous people.

*Q: Did we have to do some fancy footwork to keep from getting identified as too much a friend of one or the other?*

SIRKIN: I think there was a suspicion that all the foreign people are much closer to the better-educated and more English speaking Indians of the ruling party. But, our Consulate developed pretty good relations as I recall. I wasn't in on the other side of the work but just the information side. We scrambled and managed to get some of the Tamil Party people on VIP tours to the States. They had no problem. They were very happy to get the offer. I remember talking to one these guys through an interpreter as he spoke very little English. I don't know how he made out in the States. He was very interested. The South

was more relaxed in every way, including politically, than North India. They don't have these Bengali screamers. It's not like Calcutta. Madras is much the quietest of the four cities. It's not like all the rest of them, full of terrible traffic jams.

The biggest issue in the South, where the riots were, was after my time when Indira Gandhi came in and tried to make Hindi the national language. There were actually murderous riots in South India because of the Tamils and the other South Indian languages that were related to Tamil as opposed to the North Indian languages related to Hindi. Knowing the language at an early stage means government jobs. If the national language was going to be Hindi, the South Indians preferred English because then they were on more of an even level with the North Indians. But if it becomes Hindi then it becomes their third language, their second language being English. So Tamil people rose up, students especially, and there were language riots and Indira finally backtracked and it didn't become formally the national language.

*Q: Were there any major developments from your perspective during the time you were there?*

SIRKIN: Between the U.S. and India?

*Q: Yes.*

SIRKIN: There were a couple of Pakistani War scares. They even had the air raid sirens once or twice and they grumbled that the U.S. seemed to be closer to Pakistan than to India because of India's relationship with the Soviet Union. It didn't impinge much on our work in the South, nothing like in Delhi, or Bombay or Calcutta.

*Q: In 1966, where did you go?*

SIRKIN: '66 I came back to FSI to study Greek.

*Q: You studied Greek for one year? '66-67 and then you went to Greece? You were in Athens from '67-72? That's where we overlapped.*

SIRKIN: I got there just a few months after the junta came in.

*Q: April 22, 1967.*

SIRKIN: I came in July almost on the same plane as the new DCM.

*Q: This new junta had taken over. Did USIA or State tell you what we ought to be doing?*

SIRKIN: No, nobody gave me any instruction on that basis. When I was taking the language course there was also a cultural course alongside it for orientation and toward the end this whole thing was happening and we were just given the latest information that

they had about what was going on. I didn't even realize until I got there the extent to which most of the people, opposition people especially, opposition to the junta assumed that the U.S. had made the coup. That was one of the things that plagued my whole five years there, trying to get out from under that accusation. That conspiracy theory.

*Q: Did you find that the Greeks sort of subscribe to conspiracy theories. They seem to always think somebody is picking on them, don't they?*

SIRKIN: I think that's probably true all through the Balkans wherever the Turks were in charge, and especially with the Greeks. Their main enemy is Turkey for everything, including the live issue with Cyprus, but it was also the whole history of antagonism to people that took over their country in 1400 something and didn't leave until they had several regional revolutions and got rid of them in the 19th century. A lot of it had to do with Dulles' policy of trying to develop CENTO, which included tying up Turkey and Pakistan. So we were thought to be pro-Turkish. It still rankles that somebody who says nice things about Turkey doesn't agree the Turks committed genocide against the Armenians. It is anti-Greek to say something good about Islam or the Turkish century or whatever.

*Q: Did you find the Embassy when you arrived in '67 at all divided about what to do about the junta? I didn't arrive until 1970, but one does have the feeling that this was an issue in which not everybody in the American Embassy saw eye to eye.*

SIRKIN: I sure didn't. I wasn't in Delhi so I don't know about the Embassy, but I was in the Consulate in Madras. The CIA guys had all kinds of differences of opinion and differences of memory and recollection about who did what at the time of the junta coming in a few months before I got there. But, by the time I got there, the CIA and the Defense, the MAAG Chief and people like that had made peace with the junta. The CIA people were in bed with the junta intelligence people as were some of the people in the Political Section of the Embassy. When I got there the Political Counselor was Miss Bracken. Most of the Political Section was very much anti junta whereas the CIA people and some of the military were very close to the junta. I had no instructions one way or the other, but just on the basis I guess of my own ideological preferences I believed my job was to be on the side of democracy, human rights and all those things. Anyway, all my customers, the USIA/USIS customers, were by the very nature of the people involved, students, intellectuals, academic people, writers, artists, the press, journalists, so most of my contacts were, of course, very ambivalent.

But the U.S. Government in Washington was so ambivalent I assume the people in the Embassy were, too. They must have had the same ambivalence as in the Consulate. The staff meetings at certain stages, especially toward the end of my time, often amounted to a tug of war between the Political Section and me on one side and the CIA and the military on the other side. At one point it came to a point that I reported at a staff meeting about some student riot against the junta and I was told to draft a message. I drafted it and wanted it to go out as a telegram. We got it from our student contacts. The message had

to be cleared through the CIA Station Chief, at one point there was a little session between the Political Counselor, (I don't know if the DCM was involved or not) and myself and the Station Chief and he said "If we send this thing off as a telegram that will just get them upset in Washington. It didn't amount to much, you know." What he decided was an air gram that was going to one desk in State. He said, "It's not that important." To me that was the extreme shocker, that the organization that is supposed to keep the government informed had such an ideological set that they did not want to send unpleasant news to Washington for fear of getting them upset.

*Q: Certainly speaks to what the reporting must have been like.*

SIRKIN: When I got back, I had a lot of contacts in the press not just at the reporter level who covered the Embassy and Consulate, but I made it my business, as I think previous predecessors of mine had done, to keep in touch with the publishers. Every six months or so I'd take some of the publishers who spoke enough English and I would pick up a certain amount of information from them. I went also to a couple of newspapers, which were very pro junta, and they would sort of badger me about our policy. Why is the U.S. saying nasty things about the junta in Washington, and I would try to defend it and on the other hand ask them when they thought the junta was going to relax and move out and restore democracy. They kept saying they would. Some of these people provided information, including one publisher who was very close to the military and also to the King and to Karamanlis, the former Prime Minister, who was also a conservative and royalist I guess. When I would come to visit him every few months he would give me his understanding of what the gossip was in the military circles that he was close to and I would come back to the Embassy and report this. The military itself was divided, because the coup involved the second or third level of Colonels kicking out the Generals and this guy was close to some of the General level. So he would tell me about all kinds of ruckus going on within the military and I would come back and report it at the meetings with the CIA and the military guys. One of the military people was anti junta because he was close to the Generals, and he actually came back later and testified in Congress in a sense against the junta. There was this division and as I say many times the meetings would degenerate into a tug of war between the pro junta guys and the Political Section and myself on the other side. But, when I came back I was told by a Desk Officer that he never got very much good information about what was going on in Greece except from me. Because the CIA wasn't reporting the things they didn't like and I reported what I picked up during my visits to these publishers, including this publisher of *a Vrathini,* a paper. About two or three years after I left the publisher was killed in the street presumably by some of the people he had antagonized in the junta days.

*Q: When you arrived there who was the Ambassador?*

SIRKIN: Talbot

*Q: Did you figure out where he was coming from, or how did he manage the Embassy on this divisive issue?*

SIRKIN: He was obviously personally anti-junta. This was '67. During that whole period it was fairly straight we were generally against the junta, although some maybe in the early days even the CIA may have been telling what was going on. It was only later that they became very close to them.

*Q: I'm just wondering was Talbot riding herd on his reporting now?*

SIRKIN: He was very clearly anti junta. Of course, by the time we got there people were in opposition and the junta people were so at odds that the Embassy was accused by the anti-junta people of not doing enough, especially a lady who was the publisher of the most popular newspaper in the country. She was still around and she wanted Talbot, I'm not sure exactly what she wanted him to do, but she was unhappy that he was not anti junta enough. Maybe in connection with her own case trying to get out of the country before they got after her.

On the whole it was pretty clear that he was anti junta. His term was coming to a close and there was a lot of agitation, especially in Washington, that the U.S. should not send a replacement for him. A fellow in Washington who used to be a newspaper man in Greece, who was there the first month that I was there, managed to get out of the country by saying he was going to attend a journalist meeting in Copenhagen or something. He arrived here and decided he was the chief of the Greek opposition in Washington, Elias Dimitricopoulos.

But his main point in that first year was to agitate I think that they should not have an Ambassador to these military traitors in Athens and he was ready to shoot at whoever was going to be named Ambassador. The person who was nominated was Henry Tasca, who was a close friend of Averill Harriman, and had been involved in the Marshall Plan and generally thought of himself as a liberal. I think he was told or at least I understand he was told not to arrive and start immediately to blast the junta but see what he could do in terms of talking to them or hearing them, pushing them to do as they had promised that they were there only temporarily. He immediately became the target of all the people opposed to the junta just for taking the job really. And, as Dimitricopoulos later said to somebody, he wasn't anti Tasca he was just anti-Ambassador to Greece and he found every possible argument why there shouldn't be an Ambassador. When Tasca arrived he didn't immediately get in touch with the opposition, and that was held against him by Dimitricopoulos' favorite outlet, the newspapers. This was kind of a reversal of roles. Evans and Novak had column after column about Tasca not meeting with the opposition and making good friends with the Colonels and so on. Tasca felt very much defensive. At that time one of the people in the opposition was a leading conservative politician, Averoff, who later was Defense Minister.

He would call me over to his office to harangue me about these Colonels who would try to move the whole country to the right and were terrible people. The whole country would become anti-American if you don't watch out, and I should get that message to the

Ambassador. I would dutifully report these things. That happened with the campaign against Tasca by Evans and Novak, when both of them that first year or two of the junta showed up in Athens; they'd been writing so much garbage on the basis of the Dimitricopoulos connection. Evans and his wife showed up and I immediately invited them to come along with me to a party given by one of the most popular artists in Greece, who gave an annual party at his place on the island of Evia. Since he was an artist most of the people there were opposition people. So I got an invitation for Mr. and Mrs. Evans to join me and I took them up there just to show them that at least I and one or two other Embassy Officers who were there were very much in touch with the opposition. This was a thoroughly opposition party, politicians as well as intellectuals.

Shortly thereafter Novak showed up; I had never met him before, and I didn't hear from him. I knew he was in town but he made his own appointments. At one point my secretary came in and said "Mr. Novak wants to see you right away, this minute." So I stopped what I was doing, got off the phone or whatever, and he comes in huffing and puffing. He had just had an interview with the number two guy in the junta, General Patakos, sort of a rude kind of guy, and he says "This has never happened to me before in my life." I say, "What happened?" "I just talked to Patakos, and do you know what he said? He called me a Communist." Evans and Novak, who are as far to the right columnists as we probably have in the United States! I'm afraid I used this a couple of years ago when correspondents in Washington were giving a roast and I had a neighbor, journalist Jack Germond, who told me he was going to the party, so I told him this story that he could use on Novak, that he had been called a Communist one time in his life.

*Q: Did you find that the press was receptive to what the United States had to say about matters?*

SIRKIN: We put out our daily bulletin, which carried statements by the U.S., especially anytime anybody said something about Greece. Of course, it was a censored press, practically self censored, but also really censored. There were several liberal papers still publishing and I was in pretty good touch with them, and there were a few pro junta papers and I was in touch with all of them. The liberal anti junta papers went as far as they thought they could go, but it wasn't free so they couldn't print what ever they wanted to. I had especially interesting sessions with the paper, which had just started, and was called, Eleftherios Kosmos, the Free World. They used all these phrases of the liberal vocabulary to describe their system and I knew that the Editor of that was close to the junta and we had long, long sessions in which I tried to explain why the U.S. still pushes for democracy and turned to elections and so forth and they would give me their arguments but I trust that these were things that got back to the junta people.

Twice during my time there in the course of my five years, I was told by Ambassador Tasca that the Prime Minister asked him to send me home. He didn't say he was going to PNG me. I was doing my job. I would have parties. As a matter of fact, a couple of times in order to entertain all our contacts I had to have two parties. One with the opposition people who refused to attend anything where the junta people were going to be present

and one where I'd have Government people and professors and so forth who mixed and a few of the anti-junta people who were sort of moderate, like Mr. Averoff among others. There was also at that time a Greek fellow, one of the people who had been snatched by the Communists in Northern Greece at one time and taken when he was a child and grew up in a sense under the Communists and became something of a media type broadcaster and for a while was broadcasting Communist stuff against Greece in those days. He showed up in Egypt and became anti-communist and came back to Greece and became a propagandist for the junta. I got to know him, he would invite me over to his house along with other Press Attaches and present would be the wife of the Prime Minister, Mrs. Papadopoulos, an ex-nightclub lady, and other junta types like the head of the military police. An interesting episode in one of those parties was that, well let me finish first about our own party. At one of these parties was Mr. Averoff, although when we first arrived he was in jail for having more than five people at his house. It was very tight at the beginning. It was against the law to have a meeting of more than four people at a party. This broadcaster was at the party and he spied Mr. Averoff at the other end of the room and he said, "I would like to meet Mr. Averoff, would you introduce me, I've never met him." So I went over to Averoff and said, " Mr. x ( I forget the guy's name), wants to meet you." He said, "I won't shake his hand; he attacked Greece way, way back when we were in trouble and I wouldn't have anything to do with him." He looked to his wife and got his hat and coat and wanted to leave the party. The other guy saw he was about to leave and managed to move over to him and sort of grab his hand and saw the sour look on his face and he disappeared. Years later I came to visit Greece and looked up a few of my contacts. One was a reporter for one of the conservative papers and also a radio or TV figure at the time. He said, "I'm glad to see you; I mentioned you the other night on my program." "Why I haven't been here for some years, why me?" He says, "I was talking about Mr. Averoff and I was at that party and I saw that whole little episode so I said at one of Mr. Sirkin's parties Mr. Averoff went to great lengths to avoid shaking my hand." In other words it was a piece about Averoff to describe he was pro Averoff who wanted to be Prime Minister. He later ended up as Defense Minister and that's about all. This still stuck in his mind about ten years later as an example of Averoff's patriotism; even at that late stage he wouldn't shake the hand of this denouncer of the Greek nation.

*Q: You mentioned you went to another party, not yours.*

SIRKIN: The party of this same broadcaster where he had Mrs. Papadopoulos and he introduced Mrs. Papadopoulos to me. He said "This is Mr. Sirkin of the American Embassy, he is not a friend of ours." She said, "Oh, I don't care, this a party tonight." She went around trying to behave in a nightclub fashion.

At that party I had a chance to use the Greek I studied at FSI more than at any other time because there was this General Ioannidis. At one point toward the end of the junta he kicked out Papadopoulos so for a few months he was the Prime Minister or whatever he called himself. But before then, when I was at this party, Ioannidis had been involved in hauling off one of the people who worked for the Embassy. She worked for the Exchange of Persons Department in our Cultural Office and had some liaison with one of the Greek

Generals who had been exiled by the junta. She was also a friend of the U.S. Military Attaché. Anyway she was sent off to internal exile on an island somewhere and I used the occasion to try and argue with Ioannidis that she should be let go because she was not a leftist, if anything she was pro-royalist. Ioannidis started haranguing me about the Communists. I said, "She is not a Communist." I said, "She's not a Communist, if anything she a rightist." That didn't bother him. It was later that I discovered that the house the party was in belonged to that woman. It had been requisitioned by the military and this was in the military complex and this was her house and I had been arguing with Mr. Ioannidis about letting her go. (End of tape)

*Q: You say there was sort of an increasing closeness between the CIA and junta as time went on? What was your feeling about why this happened?*

SIRKIN: All I knew was the contacts I had with various CIA elements in different countries. In some countries I found their people very knowledgeable, very useful obviously to the U.S. Government, and in some situations we had to do some coordination; Greece was a peculiar situation. In the first place, I gather the CIA's headquarters for the Middle East was there. Secondly, a whole bunch of CIA people either were Greek Americans themselves or were Americans married to Greek wives and they were very much into the community. The CIA's job was to ferret out information and this I gather they'd done in a few other countries. In the first place they at one point helped to set up the Secret Service of Greece; I think this is true in South Korea and a few other places. The result was that they had very close touch with the Greek CIA; Colonel Papadopoulos came from that element of the military so they were in very close contact with him even though the CIA itself and the CIA's Station Chief at the beginning when the junta came in was very close to the monarchy, the Queen, I gather. People would tell me your CIA Chief, Mr. Maury, would actually push the Queen's shopping cart in the U.S. commissary.

There was so many of them and I guess some of them weren't working on Greece but on stuff in the Middle East. They were so open that everybody knew who was a CIA person because when I came there some of the Greek newspapermen said, "Don't you know him? He's a CIA man." They had a big outfit and that lets some light on the later incident when some Greek shot and killed the CIA Station Chief in front of his house. Apparently everybody knew that this was the CIA Station Chief's house. Not everybody, but at least the people interested in politics, the press people, political people. I had an unfortunate problem, which I gather exists in France also, that the Greek word for intelligence and information is the same. They don't have a separate word for intelligence. They use the same word. I remember sitting at a dinner party at a Greek professor's house next to Mr. Zolato, who was the head of the Bank of Greece and a big wheel in the International Monetary Fund and I told him who I was so he started asking me if I knew so and so and I said I don't know those people. He thought I was CIA. He didn't know much about USIA. I explained to him but I'm not sure he believed me that I'm not in that organization, I don't know those people.

*Q: Did you see a change in the Political Section in the time you were there?*

SIRKIN: No, the Political Section was all the time I was there very much on the side of what they were getting from the State Department. I think an important point that should emerge from my oral history is a little bit of light on what seemed to happen at least in some places, certainly in Greece. During those days Henry Kissinger was in the White House and the State Department was run by Rogers, who didn't cut apparently too much ice in the White House. The Assistant Secretary for the Near East (at that time Greece was in the Near East Bureau before it was later pulled into Europe in the State Department's regional set up), was a very articulate person. The CIA Station Chief and I were leaving Athens at almost the same time and there were parties for him, parties for me, joint parties at certain times. Ambassador Tasca complained to me a number of times, that he was getting one message from the Assistant Secretary in the State Department and then the Station Chief would come and tell him of a back channel from the White House with Kissinger saying almost the opposite. He was sort of the yo-yo between the State Department's policy and Kissinger's policy.

*Q: It seems like Greece appealed to you might say the darker side of both Nixon and Kissinger. They could be very good on some points, but they were anti communist.*

SIRKIN: At a certain point when I was in Greece my top boss in USIA was a fellow named Frank Shakespeare and he was 100%-150% anti-communist. He was a very loyal, Jesuit-trained Catholic. Somebody told me he used to think of Pope John XXIII as a communist for changing Mass procedures. He became my boss in Washington and he was a great admirer of the Greek junta because they were anti-communist so I had little backing for the policy I was trying to follow. I was trying to carry out policy from the State Department, which was to some extent critical of the junta. At one point my boss said he was going to show up in Athens and wanted an appointment with the Prime Minister. I think he had a couple of weeks off as a Reserve Officer in the Navy. He was doing something on a boat on the Near East Fleet and he wanted to take advantage of being nearby to get the thinking of Colonel Papadopoulos about the whole Near East situation. I had to set it up and I went along. I had to take notes and send a long telegram back about the whole conversation. It was at some points very difficult to keep from laughing but I had to do what I was told.

We had a thing called the Hellenic American Union, and wanted it to be a place where opposition people could be comfortable and not feel this was a junta place. So my big job was to keep the junta out of the Hellenic American Union, the HAU, and my most difficult time came when we were offered to have a showing of a moon rock, a little piece of the moon that they sent around the world to show off our expertise in space. In most countries we set up a big thing with the Government, the Prime Minister and I said "damned if I'm going to do that in Greece. I'm going to get rid of that moon rock and give it to the Greeks or give it to the University and have Papadopoulos come to the University." The logical place would have been at the HAU and I made damn sure this wouldn't be a place where the Prime Minister showed up. I was very conscious of

pictures, just as we still are with the President of China or whoever, and I succeeded in getting that whole moon rock thing done. We had an astronaut who came along and we did the whole thing at the University of Athens in the Physics Department or whatever and I rode with Papadopoulos. They had their pictures taken at the University, but I wasn't going to have it at the HAU.

*Q: How about Turkey? In many ways Greece had some interesting real estate that we needed for communications and all, but it was really military wise, it was sort of a back water as opposed to Turkey which was much more important as far as our Southern flank in NATO. Was this a problem for you?*

SIRKIN: It never really surfaced. There were people that knew about it, knew about the U.S. involvement at some kind of military installation. I myself probably didn't know to what extent we had anything in Greek bases. We had a listening station out at Marathon a Navy listening station. Some installations up North. There were people who wanted to get American bases out of Greece.

One of the problems I had which again is something that Officers in the field have to be aware of is the so-called misuse of the term White House. When I was there the Vice President of the United States for a while was a Greek American, Spiro Agnew, and he came from some village out in the West of the Peloponnesus, a very small town. I got word the White House, I discovered later it was Agnew or some guy working for Agnew, wants to set up a scholarship to be named Anagnostopoulos (his Greek name before he became Agnew), in Agnew's father's name and it should be for a student from this village to get a Fulbright to the United States to an American college. I was horrified to use the Fulbright money for this kind of a personal thing especially from the White House so I got on the phone and said, "You can't do this, who's doing this?" I called my own people, my own Assistant Director for the Middle East at that time and said, "This would be terrible, if this gets out, this would be a shocker." They said the White House wants it. So for a while I didn't do anything about it and then I was nagged by the Embassy saying, "We are getting complaints from the White House that you're not doing what they asked you to do about setting up a Fulbright in the name of Mr. Anagnostopoulos for a Greek guy from this village." So I said, "I think it is a horrible thing to do and if it becomes public it would be a disaster, but let me go and at least look into the details." I sent out one our Greek Cultural Officers, a lady who went to that village. She said it was a tiny town, where nobody speaks a word of English. It's impossible that anybody from this town could ever even get to the point where he would be acceptable. None of them go to any university, they hardly finish high school. So I started sending that kind of message back; but people say the White House, the White House, the White House.. So if Mr. Agnew wants to do something for someone from his village maybe we can get them to go to school and get to Athens University. Or at least some decent high school. So for a while I didn't hear much except for some grumbling that I wasn't doing what the White House wanted me to do, but finally we got a message that the Hellenic American something or other from Chicago was going to finance a scholarship for a kid from that village to go to Athens University. The people at least who work in Washington ought to

know how many people use the word "White House". This wasn't the President, it was the Vice President, and I don't know how much it was the Vice President or some guy who used to work for USIA who became the Foreign Affairs Advisor to the Vice President and probably told him, "Oh, I can get you a Fulbright." There was an Anagnostopoulos scholarship and we found a kid, I think he lasted one year at Athens University, and the thing just got smoothed over and nobody ever heard about it but that would have been a terrible scandal if we had followed just because this was the White House saying, "Do this, do that". Some people thought I was a fool and others thought I was a hero in bucking this thing. I didn't make any friends in my office back in Washington for digging in my heels on this one.

*Q: In 1972 when you left, where did you go?*

SIRKIN: I came back to Washington. Yes, I came back to Washington and I was offered a job of doing something for this Helsinki thing on Human Rights. Somebody else suggested there is a spot on the Policy Planning Staff of State where a USIA person had sort of pioneered it for a year and it seemed to be satisfactory to the State people and would I be interested in that, and I said, "Sure, much more interested in policy than just in information work in my last assignment." I had to resist a good deal of pressure because Henry Loomis, Deputy Director of USIA at that time, took me to lunch at the Metropolitan Club to try to talk me into taking the Helsinki thing, and I said, "No, this is my last job and if I have a choice and State wanted me, I'd like this thing at State." So it ended up he let me do what I wanted, so I...

*Q: You were at State from '72 until when?*

SIRKIN: Well, I technically retired in '74. But I stayed on as a Consultant the first few years acting as if I was still a full member of the Policy Planning Staff until the inauguration of Ronald Reagan.

*Q: So until '81?*

SIRKIN: Yes, about '81, but the last couple of years I hadn't been doing much.

*Q: Particularly during the early years, '72 to '74-'75 period, Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State, how did he use the Policy Planning?*

SIRKIN: I came in just as a USIA person. The first thing they shoved at me was a vote at the UN a month or two before in which the vote was 102, I think, to one. We were the one and the issue was direct broadcast satellites. Satellites that could broadcast directly into a set without going through relays of any sort. The people who wanted to control it were not just the Africans and the South Americans and some Asians and Russia, but also France and Canada and Sweden and countries that were scared of U.S. advertising or U.S. destroying their culture by going right into those countries. Some of these countries have no independent television, only Government television. They all voted against the United

States on that issue. So there was a fellow on the Policy Planning Staff who was normally a disarmament specialist. I was asked to work with him to see what we could do on that issue. I hadn't followed it much before but I became deeply interested and came up with a suggestion. The mass of people who are involved in this said this is so far off there was no point even worrying about it. But the UN set up a separate working group called DBS (Direct Broadcast Satellite), a sub group of the Space Committee of the UN, and had meetings both in New York and in Geneva and I started attending those meetings. I had to write speeches for the U.S. Delegate on these questions. The U.S. was still trying very hard to have an open society and with no control, etc.

So I suggested we have a conference at Airlie House out in Virginia and bring in the American networks, non-profit broadcasters, the various engineers, the FCC, all the people involved in broadcasting and foreign relations, CIA, all these things that have communications all over the world. Let's see what our real policy is rather than just the general principle. Do we want somebody coming in with God knows what directly into our homes? Let's at least discuss it. Let's find out to what extent the American networks are interested. So I went to New York with another guy from the Planning staff and dropped in on the News Divisions and Engineering Divisions of ABC, NBC, CBS, Public Television, Public Radio; there wasn't much television then. We had this three-day conference up there and I brought in lawyers from Harvard, with what the law says about the international legal situation. They came out with quite a sizable book of the papers prepared for this, not the give and take, but at least the papers. Some of them were fairly substantial pieces of work. Then we had meetings, which I chaired as a member of the Policy Planning Staff, with State and USIA and CIA, Defense and others to consider what our policy should be on this. The ambivalent thing was the technology. At one point NASA was saying this is so far off it isn't even worth worrying about yet because the antenna has to be so big. Then we got word in the course of the meetings that the Japanese are coming in with a smaller one that can do things that countries may not be able to control as easily by just saying we don't want these antennas out there, these huge dishes.

In the course of time we decided, those of us at State that were working on it, you know it was foolish to make a political thing of this, because this is going to be solved by the technology. If it moves fast enough nobody is going to be able to control it, so we don't have to make a fool of ourselves antagonizing all of these countries. The result was there were some people especially people still working for Frank Shakespeare who wanted to go out with a big flag, but the decision finally was that you know this is going to be solved. This will be our way anyway because the technology is moving so fast that it can't be stopped. It's silly to crucify ourselves because some of these meetings I attended in Geneva and New York were very rancorous with some of the African countries screaming that the U.S. wanted to reinstate colonialism by the airways. So that was an interesting episode.

The man who accepted me went out of the picture right after that, when Kissinger came in with one of his boys from the White House, Winston Lord. Winston Lord became the

Chief of Policy Planning and he's the one I worked with most until the end of the Nixon Administration and then the Ford Administration and then came Carter. He brought in another one of Kissinger's boys but somebody who had quit Kissinger over Vietnam, Tony Lake. So the people I worked for were Winston Lord and Tony Lake. I did the same thing for both of them, more or less, in a sense.

I told Winston Lord, I had just come from Greece, and seen how our policies tied up with the junta, and "I would like to do a paper on human rights, not just human rights, our relations with authoritarian regimes." Mr. Lord's answer was, "Ah, Henry thinks this issue is a never-never land, no parameters, no boundaries. The issue is unmanageable." So I worked up a few other things on this direct broadcast and then Congress got after the Assistant Secretaries. Congressman Fraser, who later was Mayor of Minneapolis, was the head of a Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House in charge of international organizations and human rights and he started berating everyone of our Assistant Secretaries when they came up for money, saying, "Why are you giving money to these bastards and those bastards, etc.? They are oppressing their own people." They were tongue tied, no answer. This was still under Kissinger. So finally Mr. Lord said, "Maybe if you want to try something, go ahead." So I spent six months doing nothing but working up this paper. I started and went to the Historical Section and got them to do a little preamble about the history of the U.S. in relation to this issue around the world and then I went to each of the regional bureaus and got the information of what's going on in each country, where we're tied up with Somoza (of Nicaragua) here and the Shah there. I came up with a hundred-page paper summarizing what they are doing and why it is causing a struggle. I came up with five options: doing nothing but talking a little bit more about it but still doing nothing; and at the extreme, running to every place to fix everybody up. This paper was supposed to be discussed with Kissinger in a meeting. They started a series of meetings to introduce Kissinger to a few other subjects. My paper was supposed to be the second paper of that series. The first paper was one on Germany done by John Kornblum, who sat in the next office from me, and now is going as Ambassador to Germany; he's head of the group on Bosnia, was Assistant Secretary for Europe. But when my paper showed up Kissinger wasn't there. He was in Syria. The Deputy Secretary was Mr. Ingersoll, who had just come in from the Far East; I think he had been in Japan as Ambassador. He was Assistant Secretary for the Far East and then Kissinger pulled him up, a businessman, to be his Deputy. When my paper was to be discussed I had primed somebody who had just arrived from South Korea, Ambassador Phil Habib. I asked him what he thought about it and he said, oh, he'd support my paper. We had this meeting of all these Assistant Secretaries and Ingersoll in the chair with Mr. Lord beside him. I never attended those meetings. I had written it and Mr. Lord introduced the paper and said, "I don't agree with this paper." I thought I had it cleared throughout the Department and made some changes but Mr. Lord said, "I thought the Secretary ought to know what the rest of the building thinks about this issue." Various people piped up and one guy, who was Head of Intelligence and Research and later was Editor of Foreign Affairs, one of Mr. Kissinger's close associates, Mr. Hyland, said, "I think this is an overreaction to the Greek situation." He had done some research and discovered I had just come from Greece. But I didn't mention Greece anymore,

particularly in the paper, and somebody who was Ambassador to Jordan, a real old Near Eastern hand, said, "Yes, I can imagine me going in to talk King Hussein about allowing this, that and the other you know." But the few others said little. There was quite a bit about the Shah of Iran and how this is going to react against the U.S. Then, Phil Habib made quite a spiel.

He was sitting at this end of the big table with Ingersoll at the other end. Until now, Ingersoll was his boss, Assistant Secretary of the Far East and Habib was in Korea. Habib says to Ingersoll, "You know what my instructions were: I wasn't to raise this issue with General Park or any of those guys." He says, "But, what could you say if these people are pulling fingernails and we are giving them all this money; don't we have to stand for something? So, of course I talked to them about this." He said, "The only way I got away with it was I never reported it." I thought he was going to be fired the next day, but everybody seemed to know Habib and this is where he was: he contradicted his orders and got away with it by not reporting it. I passed this along to somebody who was writing a biography of Habib.

*Q: Did this paper surface again, because when the Carter Administration came on board...*

SIRKIN: Before I finish, you wanted to know about Kissinger's relations with his Policy Planning Staff. When Kissinger was about to leave the Department, at the change of the administration before Carter came in, he had an awards party with the whole Policy Planning Staff. By then I was already just a consultant. Since I was acting as a full member I attended this event. He made a very funny little speech: "I hope with the change of administration that you'll all do well, but you don't have to do well, you're a bunch of Democrats anyway." He made a lot of cracks about this Policy Planning Staff. Even under his guidance it caused him a lot of grief because it disagreed with him on many things. So he was in a sense giving people an award for raising ideas other than his own and that he found troublesome because they raised issues that he obviously didn't like to face.

For months I never heard anything about my paper as far as Kissinger was concerned and one day Lord said to me, "Oh, by the way, the Secretary said on one of his trips that he finally read your paper and says it's a good piece of work, but he's not going to do anything about it." I recommended he at least change the rhetoric and I think it did change the rhetoric a little bit.

This little footnote: I ran into John Kornblum at the Foreign Service Institute. He gave a little spiel in the afternoon at one of the workshops. He says, "Oh, I'm glad to see you because I've been mentioning you in the various talks I give. I use you as the example of how one man can make a difference." He felt that really I was working so hard on human rights. I tried to correct him to say that a lot of other people had things to do with that, not just my paper.

In a sense now to get back to the transition. I was still around when Tony Lake and Cyrus

Vance and Warren Christopher came in and they had made human rights an issue with the campaign and I thought they were going maybe a little too far. They appeared to be overstating what could be done so I sat down and just made a job for myself. I was still a consultant and I wrote another paper. A little bit from the old one, but I indicated there's a difference between discovering what the human rights issue is and reporting on it. What you do about it depends on a lot of other things. We have all these other things to deal with and sometimes even pro-human rights policy in one aspect can contradict another and you have to make choices; it's not just a simple thing. So I felt this would help to be corrective to what Carter and some of his people were saying. Anyway, I wrote this paper. I don't know at what point it was going to be discussed, if ever, but Vance had to make a speech on Human Rights Day at the University of Georgia. I guess Dean Rusk invited him where he was Dean at the Law School to come over and give a speech. Tony Lake and Vance, I guess, thought this was a good occasion to do a human rights thing. He asked this woman they appointed as Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Patt Derian, for a draft and Lake says to me I have a draft from her but it is unusable; what have you got? I just gave him my paper that I had almost finished. He's a very facile writer and he just picked up my paper and turned it into a fancy speech and that became the Carter Human Rights Policy.

*Q: That's a wonderful story, my gosh. Were there any other issues particular during this time before we end this?*

SIRKIN: I was there a long time off and on. At one point the psychological warfare people in the Army decided they wanted to get into this anti communist propagandist act. They had facilities that they could use within the Armed Forces and in the countries where they are, and they came up with a proposal of how the psychological warfare people could play an important role in the effort to fight communism in areas of information and propaganda education tools. I organized a meeting of several elements of USIA, who were dead set against this, CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Pentagon Assistant Secretary for International Affairs with various elements of State who would be involved. I didn't say too much, but the way the meeting was organized that whole proposal was clobbered. Even the Pentagon people weren't too happy about it.

*Q: Shows the strength of setting up the meeting, knowing what you want to get.*

SIRKIN: It wasn't difficult because even the people in the Pentagon were leery of it. They didn't want to say no, so they turned it over to some higher authority. Nobody wanted it, including, as I recall, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs in the Pentagon. They didn't think these people had the sensitivity and nuance that would be required. We had too much anti-communism brewing instead of clever nuance, the thing that appeals to intellectuals and so forth.

*Q: Well, Abe, maybe we might stop at this point, what do you think?*

SIRKIN: Okay.

*Q: This is great. All right we'll stop here.*

*End of interview*