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

GEORGE L. WEST

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INTERVIEW

[Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. West]

Q: Mr. West, I wonder if you could give us a little about your background before we get you into the Foreign Service.

WEST: Well, I guess start with birth. Born in Seattle in January 1910. I was removed to San Francisco with my family during the First World War. Went through grammar school

in San Francisco. Then we moved down the peninsula to Burlingame. I went to high school there for a year. And then I went to a preparatory school in Marin County just north of San Francisco, from where I graduated in 1928.

Upon my graduation, my godmother, who gave me a part of a ticket to a, not a ticket, but a... She had been planning on going on a tour of the Far East under the auspices of a man named Upton Close [? of Washington Hall]. She decided not to go and transferred it to me.

I had been admitted to Stanford and was planning to go there. Then I began to talk to various of my father's friends. My father had spent a certain amount of time in the Far East. An apparent opportunity came to go to work for British-American Tobacco in Hangzhou, which I expected to visit during the course of this trip.

Well, I went out on that trip. This was summer of '28. And we went to Japan and Korea (then Japanese-occupied), Manchuria, and met the last Emperor there.

Then we were in Peking for an extended stay, because we couldn't continue on to Hangzhou by train. There was one of the many civil wars going on between the various warlords, and the bridge was out on the Yellow River.

But, fortunately, I had a distant relative who was the widow of one of our ministers to Peking. And a colleague of mine on this trip also had a cousin who was married to a Marine language officer. Well, we spent the winter in Peking, thereabouts, the tour having proceeded by another route out.

Finally, we did get through to Hangzhou. I would say that Peking very definitely stimulated my interest in the Foreign Service. I saw a lot of the legation people in those days, played polo with them, and just generally became interested.

Arriving in Hangzhou, it proved that just as the wars had prevented going through to Hangzhou from Peking, so they had rather upset British-American Tobacco, called BAT (they made a cigarette called Golden BAT). Their plans to grow tobacco (they felt they could grow better Virginia tobacco in the surrounding area there than they could in Virginia or Rhodesia), but that had gone out. So they paid me for a month of doing nothing much.

Then we proceeded down the Yangtze, with various stops, to Shanghai. Then, this is spring of '29, I got meningitis and was evacuated to Japan.

Then I came back and went to Stanford, entering around September or October, '29. I graduated in '33.

It happened that the next door neighbor in Burlingame had been acting secretary of State years and years ago, between Hay and Root, and was the diplomatic advisor to the

Standard Oil Company of California. I went to work for them when I got out of college. At that time they were not giving any Foreign Service examinations.

Q: Because of the Depression.

WEST: Right. Roosevelt came in on a, we forget it, an economy program. You've talked to some of the old-timers, so you know what it did, how people had to pay their way to their posts -- the new appointees, who had been waiting three years, some of them, to get an appointment.

At any rate, I went to work for them and was put in the Foreign Land and Lease Division of the Production Department, the foreign part of which was sometimes referred to as the company's diplomatic service.

Standard Oil of California had been a large domestic producer, but had not gotten too much involved abroad, except for Mexico, Columbia, and Venezuela, under the Richmond Petroleum Company. But when I went to work, they were trying to get concessions in the Netherlands East Indies by buying up a few small fellow oil companies there in Java.

I thought perhaps I'd be going out there, but, actually, before I'd gone to work the company had taken over a Gulf Oil Company concession on Bahrain Island. This was a concession that an Australian prospector, named Major Frank Holmes, had gotten in return for drilling a couple of water wells for the Sheik of Bahrain. The Gulf geologists gave sort of noncommittal finding of it.

Gulf at that time was one of five American companies that were in the Iraq Petroleum Company. The Iraq Petroleum Company had what they called a redline or purple agreement that went around the Arabian Peninsula, including Turkey, where it was agreed that none of the participating companies would go in on their own, that any development should be by the Iraq Petroleum Company.

Well, on the day I went to work for the company, in July of '33, Standard Oil of California signed an agreement with the Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia (who was then continuing to conquer most of the Arabian Peninsula) for an oil concession over in the East, El Hassam.

The company, after they got a petition showing in Bahrain, the geologists put their heads together and began to wonder where the oil had started from.

In those days, Bahrain was noted for its pearl fisheries and then they had lots of divers. They used to get fresh water by diving with goat skins off the coast, bringing up fresh water. Well, they figured that the fresh water must come from the mainland.

Q: There's a big aquifer that runs under there.

WEST: Yes, and they figured that the oil must have come from the same place. So, with the assistance of Harry Sinjun Richard Philby, whom we'd put on our payroll, and he had discouraged the British, that's a long story in itself, Philby...

Q: This is not Kim Philby, but his father.

WEST: Well, at any rate, it turned out I was sent to Saudi Arabia to be the assistant to our representative to the Saudi government. Remember, at that time there was no American diplomatic or consular representation there at all.

Q: Where were you assigned?

WEST: I was assigned to Jeddah, where the various legations of other countries were. At that time, the co-capitols were at Mecca and Riyadh.

Our geologists, and later our petroleum engineers, were of course working on the other side of the peninsula. So I went out there in the spring of '34, spending over six weeks in our London office.

Our London office was run by a Mr. Lloyd Hamilton, who had been the primary negotiator of the agreement. He was maintained by Standard Oil of California in a London office on Lombard Street. And I worked there.

I might mention that my next door neighbor, who had advised me about the Foreign Service and told me basically that I couldn't afford it, had put Hamilton on the track of Philby.

Philby played quite a role, at least a negative role, in knocking the British interests off. Philby, himself, is quite a story. I'd like to get together sometime with some of these people who have written about Kim Philby, like Paul Ignatius, Young Ignatius.

At any rate, I went out there, and it was, of course, a fascinating assignment. I had agreed to go for two years. I did quite well financially, at least considering I came out in the Depression years.

But, I returned to the United States as soon as I could in '36, with the idea of preparing for the Foreign Service examinations, which I did.

I took the written examinations in fall of '37, the oral I think was January of '38, and was appointed shortly thereafter.

After my years in Saudi Arabia, I went in the Foreign Service and was assigned to Windsor, Ontario, which if I'd been living in Detroit would have gotten travel expenses of five cents, I think. That was my first post.

Mine was a rather small entering class, partly because one man did so well. That was Philip Bonsal, who was the oldest member, with whom I'd gone to cram school. He'd had a great deal of experience, and he did very well. He got one hundred in a number of the examinations, the general examinations, which meant that the others were graded on his.

I might say, speaking of your maps...

Q: We have maps all around us.

WEST: I got one hundred in the geography examination (which meant I was the top man in geography), which counted for one out of 20 points. This was the three-day examination.

I'd offered Arabic as a language, but on the day I was in the department to take my oral examination and my French oral examination, there was nobody to give me the Arabic.

I had decided that I didn't want to go into the Far East because I felt that it was a fairly big world, and I wanted to see a lot of it. If you were going to do well in the Far East, you did it as a language officer and consequently spent a great deal of your time, specifically in those days, in China. It would have meant mostly consular work.

At any rate, that's just an aside. Our class went out in two groups. I think it was in March I was sworn in. We all went to Canadian or Mexican or Cuban posts, probationary posts.

Q: That was the idea. You went out. These were all big posts; it's a good place to get some training.

WEST: Well, they weren't big posts, necessarily. A lot of them were small border posts. They didn't want to invest any more money than they had to in you. Also, they brought you back to the school, normally, after about a year.

Since they actually brought both groups... The group that went out in July, new budget year... This was a familiar time to get assigned and be sworn in. We were a total of 23 in this Foreign Service school.

At the time, I was engaged and didn't want an immediate assignment abroad until I'd gotten married.

As a result of that and getting one hundred in the visa examination, I was assigned prematurely to the Visa Division (it was VD then, now it's VO, Visa Office, which is a slight improvement). I was settling down in that when Denmark was occupied.

Q: This was World War II.

West: Yes. We were not in it, but Denmark was occupied. Roosevelt immediately decided we had to do something about Greenland.

It was put partly on a humanitarian basis, that they were entirely dependent on Denmark for their supplies. Mr. Berle was put in charge of this project. The President had pointed out, in one of his fireside radio talks, that Greenland was essentially North American, that the fauna and flora were North American, the natives were North American. At any rate, we were rushed up there. I say, we, an acquaintance of mine, whom I'd also known in college, was sent up there. When they decided to send somebody up, they got a fairly senior officer, who was a bit of an elegant type. He was called in to Berle's office to say what his plans were.

Q: This is Adolf Berle.

WEST: Yes, at the title of Assistant Secretary, I think. I'd gotten to know him while I was in the school, actually. In those days, you came in the school and were entertained at the White House, you called on all the Assistant Secretaries, and all that. It was a smaller service, naturally.

He was called into Berle's office and asked what his plans were for the consulate. He said, well he thought he would...

Q: This was the consulate at Godthab.

WEST: Perhaps I'm jumping too far ahead. [On April 9, 1941] The United States made an agreement with Henrik Kauffmann, who was the Danish Minister in Washington, whereby he did not recognize the authority of the German occupied power in Denmark. And he made this agreement whereby we, among many other things, took over responsibility for supplying the country. There were other factors involved besides relief. That was recognized by the Red Cross sending a man up with us, Mr. Reddy of the Red Cross.

Let me go back. The big item there was the cryolite mines. Cryolite, people are not too familiar with it; I certainly wasn't. It is a mineral, the only commercial deposits in the world are up in Greenland. It was mined by a government company, or quasi-government Danish company, with Danish miners. It was on a fjord.

The two principal North American customers were Penn Salt [?] Company of Philadelphia and the Aluminum Company of Canada. The other was strictly a defense thing. One of the first things in the order was the use of Greenland, if possible, to ferry aircraft to the British, that is going from Newfoundland to Greenland to Iceland.

Q: Airplanes in those days had a much shorter range.

WEST: Otherwise you had to go by ship. Maybe I'm telescoping this a little too much.

We went up on the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard had a lot of experience in Alaskan waters, as they have more recently with the Exxon experience [in Alaska]. We went up on the Coast Guard partly because they were willing and able, and the Army and Navy were arguing who should be in charge.

We were given the house of the sole doctor, Danish doctor, in Greenland. In the preliminary arrangements, Mr. Hugh Cumming, who was on the desk at the time, didn't know whether it was furnished or not.

So I was authorized by the department (I think this is probably a unique experience) to go up to Abercrombie and Fitch and buy certain cots and things of that sort, plus all winter equipment: skis, snow shoes. I got nice cashmere underwear, nice cashmere pajamas for Penfield and myself. And such things as Coleman lamps and cots, chairs. The rest of it we did with packing cases, for the time being. I guess I'm the only one that ever had a free charge at Abercrombie and Fitch.

After we'd been there awhile, we'd had a Sears and Roebuck house shipped up, that is, all the parts, and it was constructed by a Greenland carpenter. We also had put in batteries and a wind charger.

Once, in the dead of winter when there was a hundred-miles gale, the thing broke loose, and I went out to put on the brakes. It was not far from the house. Next to it we had a little building where we had all of our batteries. There was a little space between that little house and our house.

Coming back, I got swept off my feet. This was the first winter just after my boss had left. I broke my leg.
I was swept off my feet into the flagpole, a couple hundred yards, and had to crawl back to the lee of the house and get into the house. I had to cut open my boot because it was swelling so much. I got in, got on the sofa, took off my belt, wrapped it around the pillow, and sat there pleading [?] between the light to get some attention. We had no telephones.

Sure enough, the boy from the telegraph office, who came down to deliver some telegrams, saw the light.

There was no doctor in South Greenland at that time, but they took me into this little infirmary. These Greenland nurses pulled the damn thing straight on me and put me in bed with just sandbags around it and pulleys.

I had to move all of my codes down there. We devised a Greenland code for use with all the Army, Navy, Air Force, ourselves, and the Greenland government, based on the Brown Code.

At any rate, one of first things was the cryolite mine. In fact, we put in there first. A quick arrangement was made whereby some of the...

I should explain that this mine was right on the edge of a fjord. In fact, the mine to some extent went under the fjord. It was the sort of thing where it wouldn't take much to knock the edge of it off and to flood that thing, either by air or by sea.

So the Coast Guard supplied some petty officers. They made a blind guard and they had some anti-aircraft weapons and whatnot. It was just a small detachment. Then we proceeded up to Godthab.

At that time, there were two governors of Greenland: one of South Greenland, one of North Greenland. Godthab was the capitol, if you wish, (it had about four hundred people) of South Greenland.

The Governor was close to retirement. Although he had an American wife, he didn't go all out for this. He was rather nervous. He was worried about his retirement when the Germans had won the war. So we sort of induced him to go down to New York.

The cryolite ships that used to ply between Denmark and Greenland were then put on the run to Philadelphia. The Governor of North Greenland became the effective [?] in charge.

We did a number of things, initially. One of the biggest problems was that the Germans and the Norwegian Quislings were landing meteorological parties on the east coast of Greenland; the east coast being largely uninhabited except for a few trappers.

It seems that a lot of your weather for western Europe originates up on that icecap. It's invaluable, from a military standpoint, to get meteorological reports from there.

So we went around to the Coast Guard, and we'd find these places and destroy them. Once we took a [German?] ship, and (we were not in the war, mind you) they escorted this ship, practically towed it, into Boston harbor. The crew was arrested for entering without visas and interned for the duration of the war. Although as I say, this was still before Pearl Harbor.

One of the big projects was to find some places where we could put in some airfields (and I do mean fields). Greenland is, as you probably know, mostly ice, with a lot of rocks around the edge of the icecap.

One of my jobs was to go with a joint Army-Navy group to explore for possible sites. Well we did find one site, way up at the north. It was designated Blue Wessy [?].

But the best site in the south, which was where we wanted to be primarily, was down on the southwest coast in Tugeyark [?] Fjord, which was actually called by the Danes Eric's Fjord.

It's where Eric was supposed to have landed and named it Greenland because there were some willow bushes around there. There are no trees in Greenland, and there's not much else.

There was a glacial moraine there, which, although it had a pretty good pitch, looked as if it was a possible field.

The Army engineer was a man named Gerlenski. He described the surface of it as "gravel." Well, in the long run it proved that, although there was a little gravel on the top, you got down a bit and you had these, I'm not showing any racial bias, but they're referred to as "nigger heads." They're small boulders, which subsequently were known as "Gerlenski gravel."

At any rate, they had an awful time getting equipment ashore. They should have put in a pier as the first thing they did. But we had ships, so many ships there you had to unload them by lighter. All kinds of ships were sent up with heavy equipment. They were stuck there sometimes for over a month just because of the tempestuous weather.
Actually, when December of '41 came along, I was on a banana boat in that harbor, drinking a rum and cola, when we heard the news of Pearl Harbor.

I should go back and mention that we did an awful lot of travel up and down the coast, lining things up. My boss went out in the late fall of '40 to go down to the States before the ice pack came in.

The ice pack comes around from the east to the west and then up the west coast. Godthab, for example, is inaccessible by ships for several months of the year.

So I was left there in charge. Incidentally, the Canadians had also sent a Consul and Vice Consul up there, recognizing their natural interests and the aluminum companies' interest in it.

And so I spent the first winter there. The Canadian Vice Consul was actually a Scotsman, a marine biologist from McGill. We did quite a study of the fisheries; I did the commercial aspects of it. This was the chief support of the island during the war.

There had been a small crab cannery, but the crabs had disappeared, so we converted it to shrimp. It was with a good deal of pride that when I came back to the States I'd go into Safeway and see "Produce of Greenland." They'd had little glass jars.

The big thing was the sale of their cod. It used to be that a lot of the cod was shipped to the Mediterranean countries.

The Portuguese, themselves, did a lot of fishing. In fact, up in North Greenland in Ngelaund [?] I went aboard a Portuguese fishing... They have a big mother ship. It's a

hospital that is loaded with sardines going up, and those are used as chum to cast. They had a fleet of about 30 or 40 smaller vessels. The mother ship did all the meteorological work in the shipping.

It was quite an operation. They were still operating during the war. The reason they put in (they normally were not permitted to come in) was just to bury a man and, incidentally, to get some fresh water. They had a priest and all that. I tasted all the ports, the green ports.

So there was a great market for the cod, and particularly though, for the liver oil, not only cod liver, but halibut liver. These drew a terrific premium. They did great with them in the States. A lot of the cod went on to the West Indies, Spanish-speaking countries.

The base eventually became operative. An awful lot of planes were lost flying from Newfoundland because of the storms. We established a meteorological system, with people taking recordings every day. I used to put up a balloon every day. This was a fascinating experience.

Q: You were there until 1942, is that right?

WEST: I came down on a plane in spring of '42, just about two years after I'd first come up -- and left in very Arctic conditions. We had a hard time landing at Goose Bay because of all the snow, and them came into a sweltering Washington, D.C., where I stayed for some time.

I was put on loan to the Navy, partly because after two years in Greenland I'd lived in Greenland longer than had any other American, and most recently was most familiar with a lot of the conditions up there.

Then I got an assignment, through Mr. Cumming, to Sweden. Of course I might say that originally they'd been saying, "Well, you'll go up for six months," but I'd spent two years up there. Well, I went to Stockholm.

Q: How did you go to Stockholm during the war?

WEST: Well, first we flew from La Guardia to Limerick, Ireland, in a flying boat, I remember, with Barry Bingham on board. I was in London. Then we went up to Dundee and waited quite awhile until we could get a good dark night, and were flown over in the bomb bay of a Mosquito.

Q: A Mosquito being a British light bomber.

WEST: Then I arrived in Sweden. Maybe this little incident is worth telling. We had a legation there, and they were beefing it up quite a bit during the war for reporting purposes, covering German-occupied Europe.

I arrived there, and Herschel Johnson was the Minister. He was an old pro after a couple of days. He was occupying a very elegant apartment, which had belonged to the King's brother. He said he wanted to have a junior officer living with him, so that he could carry on from home at times.

He had a reputation for calling a Chargé up at one o'clock in the morning and saying, "Winthrop, I've been thinking about..." He was hardworking and a good professional.

The Minister asked me if I'd be interested in living there with him. I don't think I had any particular suspicions at the time, but I did know that after living with my boss for two years in Greenland (that is when he was there), I wasn't too anxious to continue that.

The bright lights of Stockholm were really rather appealing. I was just 32. I backed out. Then that summer, another fellow who I was living with, a fellow named Alan Leitner, he'd had a similar experience when he arrived in Sweden, and he, too, had dodged it. Over in Finland, Minister... One of the problems of being 80 is that, although I can remember these things, I can't remember names.

Q: Don't worry about the names.

WEST: Arthur Schoenfeld was the Minister. He was taken out, and Rob McClintock, whom I'd known from Stanford, became the Chargé.

The department wanted to send someone over there to be with McClintock, so they asked Herschel Johnson at Stockholm if they could spare somebody. He then suggested that I be sent over.

So I went over to Finland and had an apartment. It was pretty bad; we were under bombardment. So finally I moved into the legation residence with the McClintocks. We'd be up on the roof a couple nights a week with incendiaries.

Q: At this point we might mention that it was a peculiar situation, that Finland was kind of an ally of the Germans, but not at war with us.

WEST: That's right. The Germans had gone in. All the legations were Axis countries, so to speak, except for two neutrals, Sweden and Switzerland, and then the U.S. and Brazil. There was the black sheep of a prominent family (sent about as far away as they could get him from Brazil) who was the Brazilian Chargé.

Along about Easter, '43, we got instructions, because we were surrounded by Germans. Everybody who came in the legation was photographed right across the street. We weren't allowed out of the city. We could go downtown.

We did go to the consular luncheons, which were something, because all the Consuls were Finnish citizens, and this was their opportunity to really put it on, foodwise, liquorwise.

The Germans were... Mannerheim would never meet with Hitler.

Q: Mannerheim was the Marshal who was also [President of the Republic] the head of [?]

WEST: A great man. He told us our codes had been compromised. We'd known that. I think they were compromised in Yugoslavia, actually. He was very standoffish, but the Germans were very much in occupation. You can't blame the Finns after the Winter War. Any enemy of the Soviet Union was their enemy. But things were pretty rough for the people there.

Then came Easter of '43, and the department instructed us to break relations with the Finns. That Easter weekend I was over in Stockholm, with my former colleagues out on my old boat on the Mälaren sailing.

McClintock was authorized to break relations within 48 hours. He was to convert money, Finnmarks, into dollars. He got his wife out. She was pregnant and came over to Stockholm.

I was in constant communication with him during this period. Then a message came through to Sweden. The message was: If you have not already done so, do not, repeat, <u>not</u> break relations.

The responsibility for the Katyn massacres finally had been recognized as the Soviets'. And they did not want that to be associated with our breaking relations with the Finns.

Q: The Katyn massacres were the massacre of Polish prisoners of war by the secret police of the Soviets.

WEST: So I stayed on in Sweden. My work was chiefly with reporting on German... We had a special reporting section reporting on German-occupied Europe. My particular assignment was the Baltic States and Finland. I had a group of former Presidents.

By this time, Germany was occupying the Baltic States. The Soviets had, then the Germans. This was when the Germans pushed to the east.

I had a number of former Presidents, Foreign Ministers, etc., of Latvia, Lithuania, and particularly Estonia, working for me monitoring German radio broadcasts from the other side, and trying to put together as much of a picture as we could.

I was commuting once a week to Helsinki with a pouch, with oral messages, back and forth to McClintock. I'd go over, he'd meet me at the airport and give me what there was, and then I'd fly back.

We'd have lunch in the woods outside the airport. Once I almost got on the plane from Riga by mistake. "Achtung! Achtung!" -- I thought it was calling the plane for Stockholm. I didn't though.

But at any rate, I was enamored with the daughter of this former Estonian Foreign Minister. So then about Christmas time, '43, they decided that they would give McClintock a break. Meanwhile I had stood by for the birth of his son in Stockholm.

This time, Johnson was asked to name two people. He named Leitner and myself, both of whom had refused to live with him. Of course, later it was exposed that Herschel Johnson was a homosexual. At that time, he had a young guy named Bloomingdale, who was supposed to be a Special Assistant, CIA, he had this boy, who later was caught with him in Brazil. This isn't the kind of thing...

Q: No, but it gives a little feel for the problems. But was this sort of suspicioned or you just didn't, I mean both of you...

WEST: We put our own things together. It was suspicioned at that time. The full confirmation didn't come until after the war. Johnson was then at the U.N. as deputy to Warren Austin, our first Ambassador to the U.N. Then he went to Brazil, and he had Bloomingdale there, too. I don't know the whole story down there.

Meanwhile, the right hand not knowing what the left hand was doing, Leitner had received orders to go to London. And so, West was supposed to go.

I was not too anxious to go back. I was somewhat involved. I was way up in the north, at Sieliensborg for Christmas, Lucia and all the rest of them.

McClintock sent me the Finnish paper, the Helsinkisanomat, with the announcement of my assignment there. This is rather a good story, because they had this article, all in Finnish, that this was the final insult of sending an officer, even more junior than McClintock, to be the Chargé. The article was in Finnish, but broke into English when it quoted from my biography: "Appointed Foreign Service officer unqualified." Instead of "unclassified." You went in as Unclassified C in those days, Vice Consul and Third Secretary. The editor, old Aerko (we used to go in the Soundov with him), was a good friend of mine. McClintock took great delight in underscoring this in red and sending it to me.

At any rate, I dodged it, and they sent Ed Gullion from London. He arrived in Stockholm more dead than alive. I guess he hated my guts, because he'd had a great setup, both professionally and personally, in London. He went on... I mention his name because later

on he did break relations. (I guess it was in the summer of '44.) And he, in turn, was transferred to Stockholm.

Q: Well, what was the attitude of the Swedes towards the United States, and how did we deal with them while you were there?

WEST: Depends on the time and place. Sweden, when we first arrived, made a fetish out of their neutrality. They were not too friendly. There were some who were fine, but others, no.

Q: The war was going well for Germany at that time.

WEST: That's right, that's right. On the other hand, you get into the south of Sweden, where the nearer to Germany you were the more pro-Axis they seemed to be.

You go over to the west coast, Goteborg, and we were shipping ball bearings out of there every other night to England.

I wasn't personally concerned. In fact I did get down to Malmo once, just to do the pouch for our Consul down there.

But then, after the landings, it got considerably better. A lot of our aviators were force-landed in Sweden, as were a certain number of Germans. For awhile, the Swedes were releasing one-against-one. Then we were allowed to build up a credit as things got better.

In early '45 when they called for the U.N. organizing conference, first McClintock was assigned back to the department to go to the U.N. conference in San Francisco, then I was.

He got off, but it took me a hell of a time to find the ideal conditions. In this flight, it was a larger transport, which went way north on dark nights.

I was told that after the San Francisco conference I would be assigned to our mission next to the Netherlands government in London.

Stanley Hornbeck was the so-called Ambassador at that time. When I'd first gone through London on my way to Sweden, Rudy Schoenfeld (the brother of the guy who was in Finland) was the number two to Biddle (our Ambassador to these other countries, to the exiled governments).

I was told I'd be going to the Hague, to that or to the Hague, depending on whether the war was over or not.

Well, I thought it only proper, going through London, to call on Mr. Hornbeck, who was the Ambassador accredited to the Netherlands government in exile.

Of course, the department in its usual inimitable way, had not notified Mr. Hornbeck that they were sending me. He resented that. "Well, what do you think you can do?" He was an old curmudgeon; he was notorious.

I did as well as I could. Went up to Prestwich. Oddly enough, there were a number of other diplomats from other countries that were heading for the U.N.

One of them was the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, Joseph Besh, and his aide. There was one bedroom left. Bech, his aide, and I had to share it (which is sometimes cited as the reason I was subsequently assigned to Luxembourg -- it wasn't true!).

I went out to San Francisco, which was my home anyway. There were lots of relatively junior officers who were assigned to the Secretariat, which was being run by the Americans, the guy named Hiss, if you remember.

Q: Alger Hiss.

WEST: Part of our duties were to act as liaison with the foreign delegations. I was assigned (quite logically considering my future) to the Netherlands delegation and to the Norwegians, having served in Danish and Swedish posts. Later on, the Danes came in. They were not in at the very beginning because they were not the belligerents. During the course of the conference, which was the best conference I've ever attended, I got word that Mr. Hornbeck really didn't want me, so I was assigned to Washington.

I came back to Washington and was put in Foreign Service Administration and worked on a project with Penfield, who wound up there, too.

Then I was put on the Yugoslav and Bulgarian desk. This was the old Southern European Division. It covered Italy and the Balkans. The occasion for my going in was the Balkan and Italian peace treaties, which were being done in Paris.

The head of our European office, Doc Matthews, was in Paris and had taken with him Sam Reber, who had been the Director, Chief (you know they changed the title) of Southern Europe.

And so, Wally Barber, who had been on the Yugoslav desk, moved up to be head of the Balkan. They had co-directors. Red Dowling was in charge for Italy. I went on to the Yugoslav desk. And also Cyril Black, who had been a professor from Princeton, who had been on the Bulgarian desk during the war, I took over those two desks.

Q: What were our interests at that time in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia? How did we see them?

WEST: Well, Bulgaria was still under the Allied Control Commission, that was a tripartite thing. Our man there was Maynard Barnes. Eventually, just before I left SE, we resumed relations with them. This would have been in '48. I had gotten married in '47. Donald Heath went as Minister, but we'd had Chargés there for quite awhile.

On the Yugoslav side, one of the biggest things was they'd shot down a couple of our planes, and we had an awful lot of hassles with them.

Q: Let's talk a little about Yugoslavia. This is an important relationship, and it switched over about '48. You were there before that happened. How did we see the Yugoslavs when you were there?

WEST: Well, of course, remember we had been primarily backing Mikhailovic.

Q: He was basically the Royalist candidate.

WEST: Yes, that's right. One bit of business that we went through so damn much was with the Yugoslav government wanting to try various people for treason, as war criminals.
Another was (which shouldn't have been much of an irritant, but it was) that our military people in Austria were supplying one of our stations in Bari, there were a lot of flights back and forth.

Q: Bari being in southern Italy on the Adriatic.

WEST: On the Adriatic side, about halfway down. They persisted in flying over Yugoslavia. And Yugoslavia, somewhat unreasonably we thought, objected. They kept filing all sorts of claims that this, and this, and this, and this.

Q: On the desk, were you trying to get the military...?

WEST: We would, yes, and I think the longest note... I remember when it was published a few years back in the foreign relations service annals. It was probably the longest note that's ever been written.

I got all these statements from the Pentagon, specific denials of this allegation, this, this, this, went on and on and on. And really what I did was put it into the form of a note.

It happened that Barber was away that weekend. And I had that Jack Higgerson, who was then the director of EUR, so I went right to the Acting Secretary, Will Clayton, to get the thing signed. We called in the Yugoslav Chargé -- it was Labor Day weekend -- called him in for Tuesday and presented him this note.

Well, we had done enough independent investigation to know that all these guys (although the instructions were to avoid Yugoslavia) said: "Why the hell should we go over an Alp when we could go dead through them?"

In other words, they were damned if they were going... But they filed their flight plans showing that they were going over the [?]. So finally the Yugoslavs shot a couple of them down -- one of them practically in Tito's back yard up at Bled in Slovenia. That was quite a hassle.

The other thing, they had been seeking a GI who had stolen a Soviet Jeep and shot a Soviet officer. Well, actually, we got that son of a bitch out before they knew it, but they wanted another guy who was in the embassy. That went on for longer and longer. And of course there were congressional pressures. But we weren't about to give him up. We finally rushed him out and got him onto a plane.

The most interesting thing from a history standpoint, is that there was to be a meeting of what they called the Danube Conference, which was to take place in Belgrade.

The participants included not only the Riparian powers along the Danube, but also the Allied Control Commission representatives: Britain, France, ourselves, and the Soviets, of course. (Not the French, British.)

It was to take place in Belgrade. Then there was a notification from the Soviets: "No it's being transferred to Budapest or Bucharest." Then we went to the Yugoslavs and they said, "No, it's not being moved, it's being held in Belgrade."

Well, our Ambassador (I think it was Cannon at the time, or was it Paterson?) was away. Gordon Reems was the Chargé, and he had a couple of damn good junior officers who'd been assigned there while I was on the desk, one of whom was Bill Leonhart.

Q: It was probably Cavendish Cannon.

WEST: It was Cavendish, that's right. He'd been up to Vienna with his wife who was a Viennese.

The telegram came from the embassy: " This is it. This is a break." Cavendish came back, and like an experienced diplomat's: "Well on the one hand, this, on the other." He went on again. He later was Ambassador to Athens. We still say this is it. Anyway, they were right, that was the break.

Q: You were in the department. How did you, and the officers about your rank and age level, view the Soviet Union in '45, and how did that change?

WEST: Well, in '45 at the end of the war, there was a great deal of admiration, in a sense. But also we really thought they were sons of bitches for a lot of things they had done.

For example, I happened in San Francisco... A fiancee I had who was Czech, and taught Jan Masaryk, and the beating they gave him (I say beating, this was verbal, but the pressures they put on him)...

You remember the Soviets insisted on having White Russia and the Ukraine represented. They were definitely the enemy as far as we were concerned.

If you're dealing in Bulgaria, and the Allied Control Commission is trying to do something to save the Bulgarians from being completely a vassal state...

Also, where the Soviets were the opposition, we had a great admiration for the Yugoslavs, I think. At least I did. The people I dealt with, these were pretty gutsy people. You're talking about '45, the war is just over.

Q: '45 to '48, because things started to change.

WEST: Increasingly the frustration... If you were in Balkan Affairs, the frustration of dealing with the Soviets in all those countries, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, was considerable.

Now in '48 I was up for transfer, and Wally Barber was very nice and said, "You wouldn't want to go to Zagreb, would you?" This would have been a pretty good assignment for a junior officer, although Zagreb had been the pits for a long time as far as the person stationed there.

I guess it was Ted Achilles who was head of WE, Western Europe, at that time. There was a guy who had been in Luxembourg for years and years, George Platt Waller (who is a book in himself). They had to replace him, so they thought that a nice honeymoon post would be Luxembourg.

I was brought intensively into all the preparations for NATO, the western European union, the western European army, and sent to Luxembourg.

Q: What was your job in Luxembourg?

WEST: I was it, the Chargé. It was a curious thing. Technically, you were really Chargé en Titre, not Chargé ad interim.

The British and the Dutch had the same arrangement. They had a permanent Chargé in Luxembourg, but an Ambassador in Belgium, who was accredited down there.

But, for example, I presented credentials from the Department to the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, my old roommate Bech.

I was also Second Secretary in Brussels, under Admiral Kirk. I made a point of getting up there at least once a month and playing it the way they wanted. Kirk's a delightful guy. He later was Ambassador to the Soviet Union, but he'd been the top American Navy man during the Normandy invasion.

Three of us were sent out simultaneously: Doug MacArthur to Paris; Woody Wallner (who had been out of the service because he'd married an English gal, but was back in) to Brussels; and myself to Luxembourg, in connection with NATO planning.

When I went through Brussels on the way to Luxembourg, you could see one thing that was bothering Kirk.

He'd finally gotten rid of Waller. Waller sort of thought that he was definitely in charge.

Kirk wanted very much... He said, "You know, it's funny that the British Ambassador here, who is also accredited to Luxembourg, has been to the palace for a meal, and I never have. It's really strange, isn't it?"

So when I went down there, first I called on the Chief of Protocol and, as well as I could, intimated that Kirk would like to come down when I presented my credentials -- wouldn't it be nice if he could do something about it. I didn't specifically mention feeding him, but at any rate, they did. That helped me in my relations with Kirk.

Later on, when the Goodyear Tire Company wanted to go into Luxembourg, the Belgians and Dutch were trying to block it because of some Benelux agreements. I eventually discovered that the Belgians had, themselves, invited Goodyear at one time.

I got them from Eyskens, who was then the Belgian Foreign Minister, at a party in Arlon in the Belgian Province of Luxembourg. I got Goodyear into Belgium.

Kirk wasn't too happy that his clients didn't come back. It was a good thing for Luxembourg, it was good service for an American company, a new job there.

Luxembourg was fascinating. Here I was, a junior officer, at a very lovely residence. It had formerly been the Gauleiter's. It had been built originally as a German legation.

Luxembourg was a fascinating assignment. Gosh, [Field Marshal Viscount Bernard Law] Montgomery, [General Jean] de Lattre de Tassigny, and all of them were getting the European...

The headquarters for the European Army was established there. A lot of people don't know much about this. The Western European Union was one way of folding Germany into this thing, as a preface to NATO. This was all part of our German strength. It was nice while it lasted.

Then President Truman, in his infinite wisdom and on the advice of his wife, sent Perle Mesta to Luxembourg.

Douglas MacArthur, who was back on the desk in WE, had promised that I'd be gotten out, if and when it happened. And so, I was immediately... Jimmy Riddleberger had asked for me over in Germany. Jimmy was the POLAD (political advisor) at High Commission in Germany. I was ready to get out in a hurry. I was a DP (Displaced Person), had to get out of the residence.

Then there was a great stall in getting a DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) for her. The department recommended a fellow named George Renchard, who was quite well-off, who had been with Cordell Hull's outer office, broken by a weekend assignment up to Ottawa, and his wife was quite wealthy. In fact, quite many years later, they lent Truman their residence in Washington, while some of the intensive work was going on in the White House. They wanted to send George Renchard there. This is sort of funny, my having been turned down in favor in Renchard to The Hague. He was a good friend of mine. She'd [Perle Mesta] call up Harry and say... What she wanted was a bachelor. She'd gotten a military aide, he wasn't really an Attaché, Bertie Hoffman, who was very nice, very social. He would be her escort.

She had her sister, who was really the power behind the throne in terms of all this nefarious plotting, and her niece, plus she'd gotten a gal from the Press Club, professed to be her public affairs officer. Then she had brought her personal secretary. She had all these women, and she wanted to pair them. She was thinking very much of the social side.

As a matter of fact, our Vice Consul was transferred out shortly after she got there. They named somebody who was then down in Marseille, but who was going home on home leave, to succeed this fellow as Vice Consul, Third Secretary.

So she asked if he could come by Luxembourg on his way home on leave. She quizzed him, and no he wasn't married and all that. Of course, the guy got back to the States and got married, so he's out, send someone else.

They go on about Renchard. There was a letter from Chief of Personnel, Don Smith signed it. I eventually found out who wrote it. It was the stupidest letter to ever go out of the Department of State. It said: Mrs. Renchard is a woman of some means and a very accomplished hostess, and would be of great assistance to you in your representational activities -- telling "The Hostess with the Mostest."

I think this arrived at the same time Lindsay Crouse was visiting in preparation for the musical *Call Me Madam*. I wasn't fancy pants, actually, that was my...

She eventually got a guy. Meanwhile, she was over in the States, and she spent about five months over there. And they paraded all these models in front of her. She finally got a

guy named Clinton Swayze, who was not married. He lit up as a homosexual. He had these exquisite tastes, and she was the most gauche person you could...

Q: She was Oklahoma oil or something.

WEST: They had a little oil, but she was a Scurvan, they had Scurvan Hotel. You looked down on it from the Petroleum Club in Oklahoma City. She was 30 or so, and she married an older man named George Mesta, who was head of Mesta Machine Tool Company. He didn't leave her much money, but of course when he died, she was still in her 30's. I don't know exactly how old she was. They weren't married all that long.

So she came to Washington. Eventually, Swayze arrived. She was the most gauche person you can imagine.

Q: Did you serve with her?

WEST: I had to stay on until I could go, until Swayze arrived. She'd give these parties, and she'd insist that the General up in Weisbaden send a certain number of guys down every weekend. And she'd give these receptions, and they'd be played up in the papers. There again, I have material for a number of books. Either that or chapters in my biography.

Q: While you were there, did you just do the business?

WEST: I did the business. Finally, I got off, and I went to...

Q: Were the Luxembourgers, the officials there, sort of laughing at this?

WEST: Well, they were not too happy. You see one thing that had happened was that for years the Netherlands Minister in Washington, a guy named Hugh Legalle, had been pushing Bech and been pushing Prime Minister Dupont to make an embassy. Legalle sold the idea to the Department that they would send a Minister to Luxembourg. Mesta was never Ambassador, she was Minister. It was still a Legation when she was there. It was the next guy, Buchanan, who became Ambassador.

Q: So you went to...

WEST: I went to Frankfurt and was under Sam Reber. This is summer of 1950. She'd [Mesta?] arrived earlier. Sam Reber had succeeded Riddleberger as Political Advisor on the High Commission.

They put me in charge of a big amorphous division that had a lot of public affairs and reorientation programs. There were two-hundred-odd Americans.

The only one making any less money than I did... There were two guys, Peter Hooper... They were gradually bringing Foreign Service officers in, but most of these people were reserve, left over from the Army and Navy. There was a male stenographer, Dale Carson. They made less than I did. I was Class Three, I think. But that only lasted a few months. My chief job was to cut it up, cut it to ribbons.
Then I went back on home leave. On the way home, I went through Paris and met up with the Kirks. Mrs. Kirk convinced me I should get some tickets to this new play in New York, *Call Me Madam*, with Ethel Merman.

So we sat down and wrote a letter to Lindsay and Krause, saying that I'd be arriving in New York at such and such a time and would like two seats, for which I would insist on paying.

So, sure enough I got on this ship. I was going back on the Liberté, rooming with Elam O'Shaughnessy, Churchill's Man of Confidence during the war. It was a great crossing.

And I did go see *Call Me Madam*.

My wife was pregnant and had gone back ahead of me. She wasn't in Frankfurt very long.

After my child was born, I went to Bonn, where I took over the... At this time, High COG was still in Frankfurt. Bonn had been selected as the future capitol, and, in fact, it had become the capitol. Most of our political officers were sent up to Bonn, or had been there for some time.

I succeeded a fellow named Bernie Gufler as head of External Political Affairs. My opposite number was a guy named Charlie Thayer, who was in charge of Internal Political Affairs. Bernie went on, Charlie stayed.

So I did all of the High Commission work. Reber would come up to Bonn to meetings of the Political Advisors at the High Commission once a week.

British, French, and American Political Advisors would meet at the Petersburg once a month. And I would do all the backstopping. I was head of the Political Subcommittee. I was his Deputé.

Q: What were your major political concerns?

WEST: As time went on, we were helping to reestablish the German Foreign Office. We were vetting the people they were sending as they established relations with various countries.

Q: By "vetting" you mean you were checking to see whether they were fairly clean as far as the Nazi past.

WEST: They had this diplomatic academy down at Schwerin. For example, each class each year we would send up to Berlin on a U.S. aircraft to see West Berlin. The theory being that anybody who's going to represent Germany abroad should at least have been in Berlin at least once in his life.

We did a lot of things like that, but my chief work was on the Political Committee of the High Commission, that is backstopping Reber for those meetings, but then almost daily meetings with my French and British opposite numbers.

Q: Was that so you'd have a unified approach?

WEST: Well, there were an awful lot of problems. The French kept trying to do all kinds of things. We were trying to return and build, put the Germans back in business as a nation.

During the latter part of my time there, a lot of the stuff was working towards this agreement for abolishing the occupation, modifying the occupation statute.

That was interminable. First, among the British and French, and then with the Germans. First of all, you had to sort out all the questions. Not only did the Political Advisors meet once a month, the High Commissioners met once a month. The Deputy High Commissioners met once a month. And you did all of the backstopping for that.

Then there were all these problems about the French recruiting for the Foreign Legion in the Saar. The French on the Saar was a constant problem, because the French were just really getting all the reparations they could, you might say.

It was a fascinating job. All in all, all of the control also was in charge... The High Commission was in charge of the airport in Frankfurt. Innumerable things concerning the occupation.

These meetings I spoke of, at least one of them would be in Berlin each month. That meant going up to Berlin. The problems in Berlin were infinite. The divided city and people kidnapped. Fantastic variety. I was fortunate in having some very good junior officers. Roy Hatherton, for one. I got Renchard on my staff there. This is the way this thing bounced around.

Q: Why don't we move on. You left Bonn in 1953, you went to the War College from '53 to '54, which we'll skip, and then you came back to the department in '54, where you were what, the Director of Franco...

WEST: No, wait a minute. In '54, they were giving us our assignments abroad. I was supposed to go to Bucharest as DCM, but my daughter had signs of TB, so I asked to be delayed awhile. I wanted to stay in Washington.

So I got tapped to be Deputy Director for Policy of the Voice of America, up in New York. The Director's name was Leif Ericson. He resigned. (I don't think it had anything to do with the appointment of his Deputy.)

But they decided that they'd wait for another Director before that. Andy Burdick, who was head of USIA, asked me to form a policy-planning staff for USIA.

That did not appeal directly to me, so I went to Bob Ryan, who was Chief of Personnel then, and I said, "You have to assign a certain number of officers to Commerce and to USIA, don't you, every year?"

"Oh, no, we only assign people who are particularly qualified for particular jobs," he said.

Well, I said, "Burdick wants me to take a job that hasn't even be set up yet."

"Oh, he can't do that," he said.

So I found myself assigned to Western Europe, at a division, office rather. First they thought I should succeed Fran Spaulding as Officer in Charge of Swiss-Benelux Affairs.

In fact, I took a week before I graduated from the War College just to go over there, because the guy on the Belgian desk, Sheldon Vance, was leaving, and they wanted me to familiarize myself with that part.

But then I went back and graduated. Bob McBride, who'd been Officer in Charge of French and Iberian Affairs, had been transferred to Paris. So they asked me to take that job, instead. I assumed charge of France, Spain, and Portugal.

Q: I have you from 1954 to 1957 doing that.

WEST: Well, there's a step in between, but basically that's right. So, I was French and Iberian Affairs.
A lot of it was concerned with North Africa, of course. I spent a certain amount of time over there.

Then I became Deputy Director of Western Europe under William "Bill" Tyler, who had been the Deputy. John Hova succeeded me on French and Iberian Affairs.

I was up at the U.N. for the General Assembly and then back. Then I was up for assignment, and I got this nice offer from Turkey to be Political Advisor there, where we had a considerable military presence and lots of NATO stuff. At the last minute, they had to replace Woody Wallner, who was a Political Advisor in Paris. So I went to Paris.

Q: Before we move to the Paris assignment, there are two areas I'd like you to talk a little about: one was in dealing with particularly Franco-Iberian Affairs, the relationship with

Francisco Franco in Spain and how we felt about him, and the other is about African problems. At the time how did we see Spain? Were we trying to get rid of Franco, or did we feel he was there to stay, or were we going to try to co-opt him? How did we feel about that?

WEST: I would say that we did not have any daring policy as far as Spain was concerned. Franco was a fact of life. Our chief work, vis-a-vis Spain, was getting our bases.

One of the things that so completely influences the exercise of foreign policy is military requirements. Our relations with both Spain and Portugal were essentially concerned with military.

Q: Military bases. Because Portugal at that time was under Salazar and it was a...

WEST: That's right, but we had our bases in the Azores. There was the constant problem of... Mind you, Portugal was in NATO, renewing our base agreement.

Q: Every couple of years that becomes a major...

WEST: This is it. For example, Spain... All kinds of things.. After we got there in numbers, we had a hell of a lot of problems with our military in Spain.

Q: In this period were we putting bases into Spain?

WEST: Absolutely. We were putting in not only air bases, but the big submarine base, Rota.

For example, when I first went on to French-Iberian Affairs, the Commanding General (who had been an Air Force pilot and the chief military negotiator of the Spanish air base agreements) came back to testify in Congress.

The one way a poor State Department person could get to his territory was thanks to him. So I got a ride to Spain with him.

Unfortunately, he was pretty fed up with things and wanted a break.

Our first stop was Bermuda. I had to spend a week there because he would say: "You can't guarantee the weather between here and the Azores." The other factor was that I was way up on him in gin rummy. He wasn't about to want to go on.

Eventually we got to the Azores. Then we went through some more of this nonsense until I finally got to Spain. And that's the way my first general familiarization trip went from Spain to Portugal then down to Tangier.

Q: In effect our military requirements were calling our shots with both Spain and Portugal.

WEST: Yes, essentially.

Q: How about with Africa? Because we're talking about the time when the end of colonialism had really about five or six years to run.

WEST: Africa. The big thing then was... I'd no sooner gotten my feet under my desk in '54 when the Algerian thing started.

Q: This is the long war of independence by the Algerians against the French.

WEST: That's right, and you also had similar problems in Morocco coming up, so I would go to Tangier.

The big topics were the military requirements of Spain and Portugal, the Algerian developments, plus a lot going on, let's face it, in Saigon.

I went in at the time the French got out of Indochina. My next door neighbor, Walter Roberts, was Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs. It wasn't so much Franco-U.S. stuff as it was the French involvement in North Africa and the Far East.

Q: My impression was that there was a major civil war going on in the Department of State between those who were saying: We've got to keep France happy in NATO, no matter what they want on the colonial side, let them have it so we don't threaten the NATO side, and the other ones who were saying: The winds of change are coming, we're Americans, we're opposed to colonialism, and we can't support this. How did you find yourself in this?

WEST: When I came in Mendes France was the Prime Minister in France. He was responsible for getting them out of Vietnam.

My biggest problem was the way things were going in Vietnam. I'd rather go into the Vietnam thing when I became director of WE, later. After all, remember Senator John Kennedy made some... He knew about Algiers.

Q: But I was wondering about you. Did you feel any particular pressure on you in the Western European side to give support to France? Did you find yourself beating down efforts by other parts of the department to show more sympathy towards efforts for independence?

WEST: To this extent, that there would be certain developments, be they in the Far East, be they in North Africa, for one bureau that is involved.

There are two bureaus involved: one the home team, you might say, of the African Bureau, Near Eastern Africa or the Far Eastern Bureau, and the European Bureau.

Naturally, we were expected to bring forth our perceptions of how this affects Franco-American relations or Spanish-American. These things used to lead to the argument usually, and sometimes with the CIA involved, going into the Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs' office, Alex Johnson, George McGhee.... As I say I can... Maybe this business, I'll refer to it when my experience as Director...

Q: Why don't we talk about that. We don't need the whole panorama, but let's talk about your time with the Vietnamese problem.

WEST: I prefer. Let me get off first. It really became acute later on when I got involved with George Ball, which is another, more interesting story.

While I was Deputy Director of Western Europe, I was up at the U.N. for the General Assembly as a Senior European Advisor. That was right after Suez and right after the Hungarian thing. Those were the two big topics.

Q: That was the fall of 1956.

WEST: Yes, fall and winter. On the one hand we wanted to bring the French and British back into circulation again, because, of course, that had been quite a bone of contention, particularly with the French as far as Eisenhower was concerned. Then on the other, there was the Hungarian thing.

I then went to Paris as a POLAD, and that was a fascinating job.

Before going, I had broken in our Ambassador-designate to France, Amory Houghton. I flew over, he took the boat, and I greeted him at Le Havre.

My offices were at Camp DesLoges. I was assimilated, Major General, I had my own car and chauffeur, a Navy man, two stars on my license plate, all that military stuff.

But I would nearly always spend the morning out there. I first was with George Decker, a four-star General, who came back to be Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. Then I was with Williston B. Palmer.

I would be at the embassy staff meetings every week. I would meet with a group, and I would be at the USRO staff meetings every week. Then I would meet them, the military political officers in the embassy, there were two, and the political officers of USRO (United States Regional Office), it was the backstop for our NATO delegation and the OEC and all the rest of them.

Then I spent about half of my time away, going all through the European Command area, which was not only all the NATO area, but wherever we had military assistance missions.

I'd be down in Morocco. I'd be in Ethiopia. I'd be in Tehran, Turkey. A lot of it having to do with military assistance. Back in the old business with Morocco about the bases and stuff there.

But it was a very, very rewarding job. I think I got nice recognition from it.

Then I was to go to Cambodia as DCM. Bill Tremble had been named as Ambassador there. But this posed a family problem.

Also in that job in Paris I worked very closely with General Norstad because, technically, I was political advisor to SAC Europe.

Norstad wore two hats: the other being SHAPE, as the Supreme Allied Commander. Also he was the Commander of U.S. Forces in the European Command. Normally, his Deputy in that capacity voted the stock. In other words, he was at Camp DesLoges. And there were these four-star Generals who were Deputy to Norstad in his U.S. command. He did get into the U.S. side of things quite a bit with respect to Germany and Berlin. And there my background... He used me a great deal more than he used his own Political Advisor, although the two of us were together.

I was there with two different guys. We met once a week over at SHAPE. First was Ridgeway Knight and then Ray Thurston. With respect to Thurston, Norstad used me primarily to go to Berlin and things like that for him. We did an awful lot of travel.

Q: In a way I'd like to move back one thing, and then we can finish up. First could you tell me a little about your impression of George Ball and how he operated.

WEST: That comes further ahead when I'm in WE as Director. From Paris I did not go to Cambodia, because it was an impossible situation. I had my mother-in-law who was dying in Paris. I just couldn't have left the whole business.

At any rate, I went into the Inspection Corps for two years, which I found vastly rewarding in terms of experience. Fascinating, strenuous. And then I came back.

Bill Tyler had become Assistant Secretary. He wanted me to come back. McBride had gone back, had been Director of Western Europe. The guy that he had replaced before... I don't know if you'd know these names at all. McBride was later, after Morocco, Mexico, and a few other places. A great officer, long since dead. Tyler wanted me to come back to take over Director of Western Europe, and then replace him as Assistant Secretary.

I came back, and I was immediately very much involved with problems outside of Europe. One was Indonesia. We're talking about January 1962, to be precise.

As soon as I got back, the CNO, Chief of Naval Operations, Anderson, was having a big briefing on the Azores with all the White House people and all the State Department people, but particularly all of the NSC, and people like Schlesinger who were with Kennedy. This is where I came in sort of business, and the terrific importance of it, and what we had to do to do it.

And I said, "No, you don't do it that way. You do what we've always been doing, and that is we dole out enough arms to the Defense Minister." (His name was Santos Costa as I recall.)

You don't buy the Portuguese, but you can sort of influence them by sweetening that part of... Militarily it didn't make too much sense to beef up the Portuguese forces. All they did was run them into the Pyrenees anyway, these aircraft.

But, they're very prideful people, and the thing that was getting them, of course, was what they felt we were doing in Angola, Mozambique.

I remember coming back also one of the big problems... I learned that... We were reading all of the Portuguese Embassy's traffic with Lisbon. We were getting information from a number of sources.

My best man when I was married, Gullion, was Ambassador in the Congo. As far as Angola was concerned, I learned that Holden Roberto (he was our chosen instrument there) had been received in the Department of State by Mennen Williams. I thought, good Christ, what the hell...

Q: He was Assistant Secretary of African Affairs.

WEST: He was made Assistant Secretary for African Affairs before we even had a Secretary of State. He was chosen before Rusk.

Q: He was a political payoff.

WEST: He has two guys working for him as Deputies. One is a guy named Wayne Fredericks, who was a real zealot. I mean, a very fine person, I'm sure, but, boy, Africa for the Africans. This guy was really something to deal with. The other, Henry Tasca, who was completely un...

Q: He was my Ambassador for four years in Greece.

WEST: Well, you know Henry. Between the two of them... Williams you could deal with, but Tasca and that... They were so, shouldn't say they were afraid of Williams, but they didn't dare do anything that they... It was true that if you got to Williams later, he would agree. But they did the damnedest things.

Had a guy who was assigned to Mozambique, who had served in Portugal, a guy named Reed. He was going to go out to Mozambique, and we suggested he go by way of Lisbon and check with the embassy there. Oh, boy, no, he can't go near Lisbon. This sort of stuff, this was really internecine war.
This guy Sheldon Vance, who had been on the Belgian desk when I first... He was in the department, I guess this was before he went out as Ambassador to the Congo. Oh, boy, the fights we'd have, with George McGhee refereeing them. I remember Woody Wallner, who by then was a Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Organizations, would be present.

We'd have these terrific arguments, and also with the CIA, too. Oh, they played some dirty work. We'd agree on a telegram on a Sunday, and Vance would say, "Oh, I'll take it to the code room." Well, he'd take it by way of his office where he'd change it a bit, and then it would go out. Then there would be hell to pay next week.

For example, I went with Rusk to a NATO meeting in Athens in the spring of '62, I think it was, and we'd do all these talks with the other Foreign Ministers. I'd accompany him as the Senior Advisor.

We'd sit up all night with the Portuguese, and they'd tell us this and that, and what we were doing. Rusk would say, "No, no, I can assure you that what we give to Holden Roberto, maybe one gun a month."

This cocky little Portuguese... They used to have big guys, who were sort of Anglo Portuguese types, but this little guy was a real fighting cock. "Your information is entirely incorrect, Mr. Secretary." And bang, bang, then we'd have another session.

I remember we were meeting in the Ambassador's home. Henry Labouisse was the Ambassador in Greece then. They'd finally leave, and Henry would say, "What the hell is going on?" I said, "Mr. Secretary, I don't know. It's like the Dance of the Seven Veils. Every once in awhile the CIA comes up and says we want to do this. And in the course of that we would find out they were already doing something else, which we didn't know about."

And he sent this, oh he had me compose it, this telegram to Ball and said: What the hell is going on with the agency?

As it was, when I went to Athens I'd take the briefing book, which was all sort of muddled over because the different bureaus all said this... I at least said that our support of the rebel forces, I would say.... And if they had been questioned, I'd say, by the Africans, who weren't represented at that, I'd say well, the moral support we're giving them by receiving Holden Roberto or something like that...

There was this constant warfare with the African Bureau on all items down the line. The Far East, why, the Dutch were being a little not too, giving too much... They were going to get out of the West Irian as they called it, West New Guinea we call it. And they, we finally... They didn't get much negotiating... And I found out my predecessor as...

One of the first weeks I was in at WE as Director, a Dutch Deputy, a DCM I think it was, came in, a guy I'd known in Bonn, and said, "Well, you know, your predecessor said we could land these men in uniform, these soldiers not in uniform, stopping off in Guam," I think it was. And I looked at Hilton Stone, who was on Dutch Affairs in the bureau, and I said, "Well, let me look into it."

At any rate, I brought this up in the Secretary's meeting. Tyler did not like to go to a lot of these staff meetings, so I very often would represent the EUR in the Secretary's morning meeting.

Oh Christ, Harriman just went nuts about this thing. As a matter of fact, Bobby Kennedy had just been to Japan and not been well received. He was going to Indonesia. I remember Harriman: "I am not going to have the blood of the President's brother on my hands. We cannot do this." I said, "No, don't worry."

But everybody laughed, it was so exaggerated, Harriman going, you know... It was a little lese majeste, I guess, laughing in his face.

But at any rate, most of the things you did had to do with other bureaus and encountering them. It was either that or with the military.

Incidentally, the Chief of Naval Operations was not too well liked after the briefing he'd given, and pretty soon you know where he winds up -- Ambassador to Portugal. He's a nice guy, George, but he's not too able. I'd see him quite a bit, but still.

In the spring, I was... I'd been divorced in '61, summer of '61, while I was in the Inspection Corps. I came back to Washington in January of '62 and found it... I'd been sitting in as Deputy Director of the office.

Then it was put up to me, would I become Director? Well, I was engaged, there were a lot of factors. I still was carrying on as director while in Western Europe they hadn't gotten a replacement in. A guy came after much delay, then he was in an automobile accident and was out for a couple of years and came back later.

I was sort of fed up, and I thought, "Well, I'd better be getting some money if I'm... I've got a daughter to support and I want to get married again."

So I put in for retirement. There were a lot of people retired. They were holding out that you would, that it was quite advantageous to get in '62... Special deal was on.

Everybody at that time was under the [$?] 20,000 limit. Everybody from the middle of Class Two all through Class One, career Ambassador, career Minister. I was Class One officer. I had made Class One from Class Two in three years, which was a record. But I was tied by Marshall Green. There were three of us that year. I had a great professional future, I thought, but I just couldn't see it.

Now, to get back to Indochina. All the time I was in WE I was very much involved with what was going on and had my own ideas about how far we were going, to get Bao Dai and that bunch. Also, there were an awful lot of things I didn't like the look of. The people who were trying to run the place under Bao Dai...

Q: Bao Dai was the so-called Emperor of Vietnam.

WEST: These types were guys who had toadied up to the French, and then the French had been beaten. The support for the government was mostly from the guys who'd voted with their feet from North Vietnam.

Q: Who'd left North Vietnam in '54 and come back.

WEST: And the Catholics, particularly. And, of course, Spellman was constantly popping up with this.

Q: This is Cardinal Spellman of New York, who was an extreme right-wing, very influential [?] at that time.

WEST: Don't we know it. I think it was about late '61 when we decided to appoint something like six hundred military advisors.

Paul Harkins was sent out. I had met Paul several times. First of all, when he came through Paris I had dinner with him and General Schuyler, who was Norstad's Deputy at SHAPE and an old friend of Harkins'. I guess they were at West Point together.

Mr. Harkins did not impress me very well. He was sort of a flamboyant, pseudo-Patton type. (I could tell you some stories about Patton and Luxembourg.) Then he was going out to take the NATO command out in Turkey.

Well, on my frequent visits to Turkey in my POLAD job... The guy who took the job I might have had there in Ankara as the Political Military Officer was Collins.

And the things that Harkins was doing. For example, the Turks had put in... These are trivial things. The Turks had forbidden the import of coffee, of all things. They had very stringent... Harkins, of course... The Air Force PX, the commissary type thing... He was taking coffee and giving it to all his Turkish friends and all that. He'd go drawing it out, and other things. They were widespread abuses of Turkish law. I thought that was a bad sign.

The real thing that bothered me was that I had observed how these MAGs operate. To begin with, each service has to be represented. Some officers are for training, some are for supplies, some are for tactics, all sorts of things.

They had some damn good officers out in these... They chose some of their best officers. In fact, they were so good that they would become very identified with the armed forces of the country in which they were working.

There had been a few example of accidents that had occurred, but you could see that... I made the point to Ball that in a state of insurgency or war some of your military are going to be flying a few of these missions, they're going to be up at the front line. You're going to have some Americans killed.

Take the French, they fought this long war, and they did it largely with... Most of the fighting was done by Foreign Legion, Germans, in other words. Also, they did not send draftees to Vietnam, the French did. It was the dirty war as far as the French were concerned. You were out there when?

Q: This was much later, in '69 and '70.

WEST: He said, "Well, write some of this down for me."

Q: This is George Ball, of course.

WEST: George Ball. I did a bit of it. Then I did another paper that went into just what is this Vietnamese government, how much popular support do they have.

We're inclined to think oh, the other guys are so evil. I had friends who had known Ho Chi Minh. In fact one of them who had conveyed the suggestion that he go to the United States... He was in Naval Intelligence, this diver. This is politically a very good idea. Not to say whether we could do it militarily. And he passed some of this on.

We began getting kickbacks. Schlesinger: "What's he trying to tell us about domestic politics?" In other words, they took the statement that the French, even though they were fighting for their empire out there, could feel they could use French draftees. The inference was: They're telling us that we're the ones that judge American public opinion.

I had said specifically, of course it was an intimation that this was not going to be a very popular thing to get in feet first, that we were going in too heavily.

George Ball was notably for expressing reservations, constantly. Not just with Kennedy but with Johnson later. Not that that had anything to do with my leaving, but it did sort of turn my...

Q: I'm just looking at the time. I think we'd probably better cut this off now, but I really appreciate this.

WEST: I probably should have made some notes.

Q: No, no, this has been fine.

End of interview