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

WILLIAM M. WOESSNER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is November 29, 1999. This is an interview with William M. Woessner. This is being done on behalf of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Bill?

WOESSNER: Yes.

Q: Let's start at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

WOESSNER: On May 14, 1931 in College Point, Queens County, part of New York City. My dad was a New York City fireman. He had lost his father when he was a boy, went into an orphanage, came out at 14, and went to work on a railroad to support his mother and siblings. He and my mother married in 1929. I have a younger brother.

Q: What is your mother's background?

WOESSNER: She was a housewife. She worked for R.G. Dunn and Company when she came out of high school. She also had to go to work young. But she enjoyed R.G. Dunn and Company and made some money on the stock market and then lost it all in 1929.

Q: So, she got married.

WOESSNER: Yes. She and Dad had known one another from the time he was in the orphanage.

Q: Were you living in College Point?

WOESSNER: Yes, I was born there and grew up there until I left to go to Europe on a Fulbright and on to Northwestern University, the Army, and then the Foreign Service. I never came back after that. But the family lived there until very recently when we had to move my mother down here.

Q: I think it's so interesting to look at where our Foreign Service people come from, particularly people of your generation. So few were to the manner born. Did your father have any high school?

WOESSNER: No. He finished elementary school education in the orphanage and then was released at the age of 14. He was always very conscious of the fact that he had not had more formal education. Those were rough years. His mother took in washing, one of those classic stories. He had two sisters and a brother. The brother went into the orphanage with him. The girls stayed with their mother. Then as a New York City fireman, again and again he took the exam to become an officer, but he never had the academic background to make it. I think he was conscious of that.

Q: College Point. During the time you were growing up, what was it like?

WOESSNER: Although it was part of New York City, it was very much a community apart. Physically, it was separated from the rest of Queens. To get out there, you had to take a causeway through marshland. It was located close to what became the Queens end of the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge. Largely Germans originally settled it in the mid-19th century, Hungarians from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a certain number of Irish. A man named Conrad Poppenhusen founded an institute that was the first free adult education school in the United States. There was a hard rubber factory there. Its heyday was in the 1920s with lots of Biergartens along the shore. People would come over from Manhattan. It was a happy community, lots of trees. We really had a very enjoyable childhood.

Q: Did you get any feel for local politics? I would imagine that, with your father being in the fire department, you couldn't help but avoid politics.

WOESSNER: I think in those days if you had a position in the police or the fire department, you had to register as a Democrat, but other than that, neither of my parents was ever politically active.

Q: What about at home? By the time you were getting aware of things, it was still the depths of the Depression. Was this a subject of concern? Having a job with the fire department was considered a good deal, wasn't it?

WOESSNER: I remember Mother often saying how fortunate we were that my father had this job. He went to the fire department about the time they got married. I can remember as a boy homeless people coming under the window looking for food. That seems so incredible today, but it's true. We didn't have anything left over from the end of one month to the other. My father's salary of $3,000 a year was a princely sum in 1931 through 1939. Then everything changed. But during those years, people would come and look for food. She would have them in for soup and sandwiches or a piece of pie. She was a good cook. If we were deprived, we didn't know it. We were just so happy. It was very secure.

Q: I remember the same experience, although I was in Pasadena, California. We lived close to the railroad tracks and people used to come by and ask for food.
WOESSNER: It was a two-family house. Shortly after I was born, my parents moved in with my maternal grandparents. They were downstairs; we were upstairs. My grandfather died in 1940 when I was nine. So, I had both grandparents for that whole time. It was a tremendous formative influence. It was really a close-knit loving family.

Q: Your name is of German origin. How about the German influence? This is prior to World War II.

WOESSNER: We were very conscious of being a German-American family, although both my mother and father were born in the United States, probably because my maternal grandparents were so close at hand. My grandfather emigrated in 1890. His name was Mohrmann. Before he left Germany, he felt that he owed his country something, so he did his military service and served from 1888-1890 in the Zweite GardeRegiment zu Fuss. He served in Berlin. 1888 was the so-called "Dreikaiserjahr." The old Kaiser died and was succeeded by Vicky's husband, who was the great liberal reform hope. He only lasted 100 days and then Kaiser Bill came to the throne. That was important to my grandfather, yet when he came to the United States, there was no question where his loyalty lay. It was very interesting. There was a love of the Heimat, but this was his new country. The real test came with the First World War. He had only one son. His son felt obliged to volunteer. My grandfather understood that and accepted it, but it was painful. His son went into the Navy, but never saw action. He died in the flu epidemic two days before the war ended. He was the only son they had, and then my mother, who was younger. So, I was always aware of the memories of that uncle.

My grandparents spoke Platt Deutsch at home to one another, so I would hear that. But they spoke English to us, of course.

On my father's side, the family was also German, but I didn't learn about them until much, much later. My father's mother was born in the United States. My father knew that his father had come from Germany but didn't know any of the details. While assigned to

Embassy Bonn, my wife and I went rummaging around the churches in southwest Germany. We found that my father's grandparents had emigrated to the U.S. in 1870. My father's father was only four years old.

Q: What effect did the Hitler years have?

WOESSNER: It impacted us in the following way. I remember a real serious falling out among old friends in the German-American community. My grandparents belonged to something called the Steuben Society, which was primarily for social contacts, picnics, bus rides, dances etc. But in the 1930s, there were friends of my grandparents who became Hitlerites. My grandparents were not involved, nor did they know people in the Bund, but there were people – primarily those who had emigrated a generation later than my grandparents – who spoke out in favor of Hitler. My grandfather wouldn't have any part of that. So, friends really parted over politics in Europe. It was interesting. In 1940, war had already broken out in Europe. The local chapter of the Steuben Society in College Point had a meeting and was thinking maybe they should not march in the Memorial Day parade because there was anti-German sentiment and people questioning whether it was appropriate. My grandfather stood up at the meeting and said his only son had died wearing the uniform of the United States Navy, he was proud to be an American, he was also proud of his German heritage, and if they didn't have the guts to march, he would carry the flag alone. He was 77 at this point. So, in fact, he marched, they marched; it was the biggest turnout the Steuben Society ever had in a Memorial Day parade. He was made the marshal of the third division. As they were marking time to fall into line behind the second division, he dropped dead of a heart attack. Very, very dramatic. It's the way he would have wanted to go. He loved life. He loved to dance and he loved parties and he was very popular. But on that issue, it was quite clear where his loyalties lay.

Q: What about school there? Let's talk about elementary school.

WOESSNER: I always loved school. PS27. Rella Burke was the principal. It was within walking distance. I was a good scholar. I finished elementary school at 12. I had the first six grades at PS27 and then went to a junior high school that was a little further away but also in College Point. Then I went on to Flushing High School.

Q: When you were in elementary school and maybe a little beyond, was your family a reading family or not?

WOESSNER: No.

Q: What about you?

WOESSNER: Yes, I loved to read. The same way the family was not into things cultural. Their tastes were very much low middle class. They liked fun. There was a sharp difference between my mother's background, the grandparents and my father's. My father had come from a rather austere background. Dancing, gambling, and carousing of any kind simply were frowned on.

Q: Was this Protestant?

WOESSNER: Yes. Both sides of the family were Evangelisch. They were married in the Evangelical Church in College Point. That's where I was baptized. My mother's family loved to gamble and they loved to dance and sing. We always had a lot of fun. For Dad, you had to sort of bring him along. He had a lot of disappointments in life. He didn't expect much.

Q: Coming from that background, it was not easy.
WOESSNER: There was a Pietistic movement of people from Switzerland into southwest Germany in the 14th or 15th century. I traced the family roots back to that.

Q: So you're really going back to John Calvin and that sort of thing.

WOESSNER: Yes.

Q: What about you and reading habits? Was there Carnegie library or the equivalent thereof?

WOESSNER: Yes, we had a good public library. I used it all the time. I did like to read. I came to music fairly early. My father had a collection of "classical" records. Classical meant you never listened to them because they were really special and he got them through Raleigh cigarette coupons. He was a chain smoker and he saved up his coupons and sent off and got Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms et al. Then those albums lay in the basement never to be touched. Once as a special favor to me, I asked if I could listen to those records. Oh, well, he knew he could trust me. I went down. It was an old RCA Victor phonograph. You had to lift up the top and it had a very heavy stylus and these 78 rpm's. You played one side and then had to change the needle. It was Beethoven's Fifth that was the first one, but it was the second movement where something happened. It was a majestic, sweeping sound. I sat there and started to weep. I was all alone in the basement with all these dusty cobwebs around. That was kind of the beginning of a real love for music that has been an important part of my life ever since. I never played an instrument, but loved music, loved opera. A couple of years later, I was a camp counselor. I was in college by then. I earned tips for the summer. At the end of the summer, someone offered me the chance to buy a subscription to the Metropolitan Opera. I used all the money I had earned. I couldn't keep the seat. I had it for one year only. It belonged to a family that had had it since the beginning of time. I remember Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" coming up and I thought that was too heavy for me. My father, who never went to an opera in his life, said, "Do you know this music? How do you know you won't like it?" I said, "It's just such heavy going." He said, "But you have the ticket. Why don't you go? Then if you don't like it, you'll never have to go again." Of course, I went and it was one of the most powerful experiences of my life. The same thing when the time came to go on a Fulbright scholarship to Scotland. I was going to turn it down. I also had a scholarship to go to graduate school at Northwestern. My dad was an inspector for the fire department, so he was out of the firehouse a lot and roamed around town, was well-known, well liked. I was working on Saturday mornings in a jewelry store.

He stopped by and said, "Mom tells me you're not going to take the Fulbright." I said, "No, I don't want to waste a year." He said, "Why do you think you'd waste a year?" I said, "Well, I need to get on with my education." I was all of 21. "I don't want to lose the scholarship to Northwestern." He said, "You know, I bet if you write them a nice letter and tell them you have a chance for a Fulbright, they would defer the scholarship for a year. You have no idea what you might do in a year there. You're young enough that you wouldn't waste it." It was so obvious and I was just too stupid. I listened and I thought about it. I wrote the letter. Northwestern wrote back and said they would be happy to defer the graduate school fellowship for a year. It was a full scholarship. I went to the University of Glasgow and it changed my life. I met my wife and it led to the Foreign Service. I'm jumping ahead here. It all comes back to my father. I owe him so much. He never understood how much he really meant to my brother and me.

Q: What sort of reading did you do?

WOESSNER: All the usual boys' adventure things, mysteries, and some biography. I had a good English teacher in high school. I enjoyed reading Lowell Thomas and Richard Haliburton.

Q: Going on to high school, what was the high school like at that time, the ethnic mix, attitude towards studies and all that?

WOESSNER: It was the same high school my mother had gone to for one year. I managed to stay for four. It was in the neighboring town of Flushing, so I had to take the bus. Ethnic mix? I don't know how conscious I was of that at that time. I guess northern Queens was still predominantly white although there was a significant black population. It was a very good high school. I enjoyed it immensely. Good teachers. I graduated salutatorian. I particularly enjoyed history, languages. I took Spanish and French. Members of the faculty had dissuaded me from taking the third year of French because I did too much foreign languages and should concentrate on science. I thought later in the Foreign Service how much I would have liked that third year of French. I was very social. I liked fun. I was no athlete. I guess I was fairly popular.

Q: During the time you were in high school, 1944-1948-

WOESSNER: I started in February. That was still at the time when people graduated in January. That all ended a couple of years later. I went to college in 1948, so I had to wait six months.

Q: During the time you were in high school and a little before, World War II was going on. Were you following it in the newspapers?

WOESSNER: Avidly. We didn't get "The New York Times." We got "The Daily News." But opposite the editorial page, there would always be a map of the Russian front. I remember following where things were happening, although when the war broke out, December 7, 1941, our tenant came down and said, "The Japanese just bombed Pearl

Harbor." I didn't know where Pearl Harbor was. I was 10 at that time. I remember the air raid drills, going under your desk and covering your head and all the things. In those early days there was kind of a sense of imminent danger. That soon passed.
Q: As a young boy, were you taking an interest in military things, types of weapons, tanks, airplanes?

WOESSNER: No. I was aware of some of the things that featured in the war, but I can't say I had a particular interest in things military.

Q: What about geography?

WOESSNER: Yes, great interest. Always fascinated by places. We got "The National Geographic." When my wife first visited before we were even engaged, she had an evening alone with my father and they went into the basement and he was showing her things he had made. He was very clever with his hands. He had done a replica of our Lutheran church. He had done various things for Christmas and then showed things that my brother had done, a Scottie lamp and bookcase he had made. She said, "What did Bill do?" He thought a minute and turned and pointed to a shelf on the side wall filled top to bottom with "National Geographics" and said, "Bill did those.

Q: Was there any particular concentration in history?

WOESSNER: Certainly American history. We got so much of it. I majored in history in college and then in graduate school was into diplomatic history. So, it's a thread that ran right through from the earliest days. Ancient history also intrigued me – the Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. I also took a great interest in history that had to do with religion. I was very religious. That gives a totally misleading picture, but I was very interested in religion and believed deeply. I was confirmed a Lutheran. But it was during those years that I began to question my faith very strenuously. So, I read a lot of things that had biblical exegesis, the history of biblical times. I went through a very wrenching time and even went and had a private session with my pastor. Instead of addressing my concerns and my real questions about faith, he nailed Jesus to the cross for me. I had the benefit of a private Lenten sermon. That may have been critical. Maybe it wouldn't have changed things anyway. But in those two years, 16 and 17, I really fell away from my faith completely until finally there was nothing left. I said, well, the one thing I knew I would never lose was my faith in Christ as a personal savior. Of course, that went, too. Although my parents were both believing Christians and what the pastor used to call "four wheelers" because they went to church for baptisms, confirmation, the wedding, and the funeral, unlike some of my aunts and uncles, they were not truly devout. The important thing was that they did not put undue pressure on me. I seriously thought of going to a seminary to become a minister. That changed in those years when I was 16-18. I think they probably were disappointed. My father would have gone to a Lutheran seminary (He was offered a scholarship.) if it hadn't been for the fact that when he came out of the orphanage, he had to work to support his mother. He in particular would have been pleased if I had chosen the ministry, but they never reproved me in any way or exerted pressure. That is another thing for which I am eternally grateful.

Q: Did your brother take a different course than you?

WOESSNER: Yes, totally different. You would find it hard to believe we were brothers. Although he's two and a half years younger, he came through four years later. When I think back, some of those teachers should have been horsewhipped. "Oh, you're Billy's little brother. Oh, you're not like Billy." Billy was an outstanding student and a really goody two shoes. Richard was very different. So, not surprisingly, he was clever with his hands where I wasn't. He was an athlete where I wasn't. He was not a scholar, but what he did excel in were the natural sciences, which I had no aptitude for. Yet he and I were and have remained to this day very, very close. He pursued a career in aeronautical engineering, went to Grumman and did very well, wound up on the LEM project, the Moon thing. No, very different. A math teacher in high school whom I was close to, who liked me and enjoyed me but recognized how good my brother was, took him aside once and said, "You're not your brother. You never will be your brother. You shouldn't want to be your brother." I think this for the first time instilled in him some self-esteem in the sense that he didn't have to be another Bill Woessner.

Q: When you graduated in 1948, what did you want to do? The draft had stopped by this time.

WOESSNER: Yes. I graduated from high school. I knew I was going on to college. Graduation was in January and I couldn't get into college until September. The first thing I remember was this tremendous aching, emptiness inside. These had been four immensely happy years. Everything was so uncertain. I took a job in Central Library in Queens County just to mark time and earn a little money and then went to college in September. I was a semifinalist for a Rhodes scholarship and also a semifinalist for a full four-year scholarship to Columbia University. Instead, I went to Queens College, which was again a bus ride from home. So, I lived at home. I had an absolutely fabulous experience. I've always enjoyed school and those four years of college were marvelous years. It was a good school.

Q: Talk about Queens College.

WOESSNER: It had been a boys reformatory. When we were kids and we were misbehaving, Mother always said we'd wind up there, and I did. It had a nice campus. It wasn't built up yet the way it is today. It was part of the city higher education system, so it was free education. My parents did not have to mortgage the house or do any of the things they were prepared to do. There, I guess, much more than in high school, I became aware of the diversity of society and had friends from all walks of life and all backgrounds. That network of friends was quite strong. There was something about my family that attracted so many of them. I won't say they all came from dysfunctional families or unhappy backgrounds, but there was some element of that. People could always come home with me. I could bring people home without prior notice and say, "Put some water in the soup." Mom was always very welcoming. We had lots of parties at the house. Those were just wonderful, fun years.

Academics were a breeze. It was too easy for me, I think.

Q: When one thinks of the New York system, one always thinks of the heavy influence of Jewish immigration. Was that impacting there? This was a group that, particularly in those days, gave great emphasis on moving up and ahead and competitiveness.

WOESSNER: Yes. I think that was very evident. I had a lot of Jewish friends. My closest friend in grammar school was a Jewish boy and my closest friend in high school was a Jewish girl. Then I had lots of Jewish friends in college, but also lots of non-Jewish friends and black friends. In College Point, there were no blacks, so the first time blacks came home with me, it was something of an eye-opener. Like the bus driver, "You got on the wrong bus" kind of thing. "No, we're not on the wrong bus."

Yes, there was a striving for academic excellence, but I wouldn't want to give the impression of being bookwormish. It wasn't that at all. It was stimulating and fun. I got into campus politics. I had no interest in politics. I had a friend who was a Young Republican and the Young Republicans were practically an underground organization. There was a big fight between Stalinists and reform communists. "The Daily Worker" was sold at the gates of the college and campus was a hotbed of real radicalism. People would take up all these screwball causes and demonstrate. I just thought the whole thing was such rubbish. I remember somebody from the Yugoslav trade mission or consulate came to campus after Tito's break with Stalin and he was harassed. It was a big rumpus on campus. This Young Republican friend of mine said, "I want you to stand for student council." I said, "I don't want to do that, Roger." He said, "Oh, please, it would make such a difference." I said, "Yes," but didn't do anything. On the Friday afternoon that was the deadline for submitting a nomination for candidacy, as I was leaving heading down the hill towards the bus stop, Roger came running after me. He said, "Willy, did you register?" I said, "Oh, Roger, you couldn't be serious. No, I did not." "Well, please." He literally hauled me back, took me in, and I registered. I had to give my platform. I wrote down, "More sex and less politics on campus." That was my platform. This was a school where people took their politics seriously. No surprise. I won a landslide victory. I wound up on student council in spite of myself. That was fun, too. Then I was reelected, so I was there in my senior year as well. Good teachers, too. Wonderful teachers.

Q: Was it that you weren't challenged or was it that this was your milieu?

WOESSNER: It was my milieu. That's what was easy. A sidebar here on the Foreign Service. I didn't find out until I headed the political panel of the Board of Examiners that the score that I had posted when I took the exam many years earlier was unusually high - which said to me that there's not a great deal of correlation between success on that exam (You can be bright as a button) and the things that make you a success as a Foreign Service officer. On the BEX panel we interviewed candidates from Georgetown, Fletcher, or whatever, who were high flyers academically and somehow thought that gave them a God-given right to come into the Foreign Service and we were turning some of them down. That's not what's going to make it for you in the Foreign Service. I haven't thought about all that in a long time.

Yes, I liked school. It was fun. It was easy. I had top grades. I was valedictorian.

Q: What about social life at that time?

WOESSNER: Very social. Among other things, I was introduced to a Christian Science Monitor youth group. They were a delightful bunch of young people who were different from all the friends I had on campus. I was very active with them in their social affairs and theatrical productions. I had always enjoyed theatrical things, even in grammar school. But then one day they approached me and said it had been two years that I had been with them and was I not interested in becoming a Christian Scientist? I said, "No, not remotely. I thought that was understood from the beginning." Then they politely asked if I would cease and desist. About half of the membership, most of them girls, broke away. Ah, well.

*Q: You were taking history. Were you looking_*

WOESSNER: No idea. I wish I could tell you I had a vision of where I was going to go, but I just rode along.

Q: I think that when most of us look back, myself included, it was one day at a time more or less.

WOESSNER: I can tell you when I showed an interest in the Foreign Service. That was thanks to a man who had a fellowship at Queens College. He had just graduated and while going for a graduate degree, taught some classes in colonial history. I was one of his students. He entered the Foreign Service while I was overseas on my Fulbright year. When I came back, he told me about it and thought that I would be interested. That sparked the interest that finally led to my sitting the exam. Many years later his final assignment in the Foreign Service was as economic minister-counselor at Embassy Bonn while I was DCM. We have been friends all these many, many, many years.

Q: Who was that?

WOESSNER: Charlie York. A great guy.

Q: I knew Charlie in Yugoslavia.
WOESSNER: Yes.

Q: You were saying you were going to Northwestern and then you decided to get the Fulbright. What put you off on this course, one to go to Northwestern and the other to apply for a Fulbright?

WOESSNER: The story of how I applied for the Fulbright is very inspiring(Ha!). I had a history professor who saw in me the college's first chance to get a Fulbright. I said that I didn't have any particular interest in going overseas to study. "Oh, but this Fulbright is terribly important and you'd be a good candidate. I really want you to try-" (end of tape)

He said, “You’re going to do a research paper on English constitutional history.” I said, “What? Are you mad?” I had had a course in English constitutional history with one of the best professors I ever knew, Gaudens Megaro. He had been in the OSS during the war and was a real maverick. He made constitutional history come alive. It was so current - the relevance of what happened in the fight between the kings and the barons to what was happening today. But beyond that one course, no way. He said, “You need to have a project and it needs to be something that can only be done at a foreign university.” He knew some professor in Leeds or somewhere. This whole thing seemed so calculated to me, but I went along. It was important to him. He wanted me to do it. So, we put in that I would do constitutional struggles under the Later Stuarts. It was that focused. And I forgot about it. I had applied for a fellowship, a graduate scholarship, to go to Northwestern and I received notice that it had been granted. I was looking forward to that. Arthur Link was there, as was Richard Leopold, who was at times an advisor to the State Department. He was teaching diplomatic history at Northwestern. They had a good history department. Then the letter came that I had been granted a Fulbright to go to Glasgow University. I said, “Glasgow? Where is that?” I told you the story of how I finally came to accept that and postponed Northwestern. But I was terrified. Here I was going with completely false credentials. I would be exposed as a fraud.

I arrived in Glasgow in September of 1952. Nine girls came to see me off. None of them was there when I came back, but that is another story. It was all so different. It’s a very old fashioned university, was in those days. “The professor will see you in a week or two.” You just wandered around and had no orientation, no bearings as to what was happening. The “professor” referred to the one who was head of the department, whose name was Browning. The students held him in awe, not to say terror. He received me in his chambers that looked like an ad for a man of distinction holding a glass of whiskey. The light was streaming through. I thought, “This is it.” I went in and we chatted a while. Then he told me that I would be studying under Esmond Wright, but Esmond Wright was in the United States right now and it would be another two weeks before he came back. So, I couldn’t do anything but wait two weeks until he came back. He happened to mention that Wright’s specialty was American colonial history. I left totally nonplused. Whatever happened to English constitutional struggles under the Later Stuarts? I didn’t raise that specter at all. It was many years later and by accident in a conversation with my wife, who also was a student under Professor Browning, that I found out. There was indeed a professor of constitutional history at Glasgow. His name was Chrimes. He and Professor Browning had a blood feud. They hated one another. The last thing Browning would ever have done was to give his Fulbright student for the year to Chrimes. That’s how it worked. Years later, I served on the Fulbright Commission both in London and in Bonn. I thought back to the way I had been selected. Scandalous, no doubt, but it was a life-transforming year, which is what they wanted.

Q: Talk about that. First, this was still a period of great austerity, wasn’t it?

WOESSNER: Oh, yes.

Q: How did you adjust to this?

WOESSNER: I'm adjustable. It was an adventure. It was exciting. It was fun. I never guessed they were still on rationing. I went into a hall of residence, which was on a hill opposite Gilmore Hill, where the university was. You had to go down into the park and then up the other side. In the hall of residence, there were primarily Scots, but also several English students. There were two Cypriots, a couple of Africans. It was an interesting mix, all boys, of course. The matron was out of Dickens, really severe. We had to give in our ration books. We got three eggs a week. There were real limits on meat and other things. So, yes, you were aware that here in the fall of 1952, seven years after the war ended, there was still great austerity. But before getting to that, I should mention the briefing we had in London to get ready for our Fulbright year. The final speaker finished his remarks with "Here you are in a Fulbright year, a great opportunity. Don't let your studies interfere with your education." That's all I needed to hear. That was my watchword for the year. So, I took Russian language. I took a course in Eastern European studies. Obviously, I had American colonial history with Professor Wright, who became a close friend to my wife and me. He later became a Member of Parliament. We renewed our friendship during the five years we were at Embassy London. I thoroughly enjoyed my year in Glasgow. That is where I met my wife. We married three years later. The friendships I made, some of them have held up to this day. People were very, very hospitable. The Scots are really wonderful people.

Q: Did you get a feel for the politics of Scotland and the English?

WOESSNER: It is a distinct culture, a distinct nation. Scotland has its own educational and legal system, its own established church and many of the features of a separate country. National pride and cultural nationalism are very strong. I just ate it up. Even the maudlin stories about the Jacobites and Prince Charlie. I visited many of the historical sites and spent a lot of time in the Burns country. It has been a powerful influence in our married life. My wife is a Scot. You see it in all of the children. We celebrated St. Andrews night last year. The three boys were all in their kilts and the girls their tartans.
Q: What was the feeling there towards the United States?

WOESSNER: I would say there was a profound sense of friendship and sympathy and gratitude and all that, more than probably in England. But there also was a tinge of ambivalence, much stronger in England, a problem with the past and with the loss of empire.

But basically you didn't experience anti-Americanism. We got that later in continental circles among intellectuals and opinion makers and so on. That is a whole subject unto itself, but in our Foreign Service years, our first three assignments were Vienna, Warsaw, and Berlin. In each of them, there was a powerful popular love for all things American. Not always among intellectuals, but among ordinary people, deep gratitude because they knew how much they owed to American support. But that's getting ahead of the story.

Q: Were you picking up British politics, particular Labour versus Conservative?

WOESSNER: Yes, a lot of it. Scottish nationalism, the Scot Nats were in their first full flower. It was during my year there that Ian Hamilton and other students stole the Stone of Scone, carted it off in the boot of a small car, and broke it! My wife knew Hamilton and we met up with him about a year ago in Florida, but that's another story. So, you had the Scot Nats. It was also the year of the coronation. I went to London. Classes ended in May. I hiked through the highlands, went with some friends to the Isle of Skye, those sort of things. But I was in London in time for the coronation. It was a year of powerful emotions. I loved these people. I loved the experience. I loved everything. To be young and so impressionable. It's hard to capture it all in words, the friendships I made. At the end of the year, when I left the hall of residence to go to the train station to take an overnight train to London, nobody had alerted me to this, but virtually all the guys of the hall came to see me off. They stood on the platform and sang, "Will ye no come back again." I was bawling my head off.

Q: You say you met your wife. What was her background?

WOESSNER: Her dad was a chartered public accountant. The family came from around Loch Awe, but lived south of Glasgow. They were quite well to do upper middle class prior to the war. They had a nanny. It was a big family. But their fortunes turned after the war when most of my father-in-law's clients were nationalized. They lived in more straitened circumstances after that. My wife was the second child. Her brother, the oldest, was killed in an automobile accident. He was only seven. His death affected the family deeply. My wife was very independent, very strong-minded, exhibiting a lot of the influence of her mother, who came from an Ulster background. She was a top student and a gifted linguist. She wanted to go to university, but her father couldn't see that, thought it was a waste of time. Her place was at home. It was only by winning a dramatic acting scholarship to a school in Belfast that she blackmailed him into letting her go to Glasgow University. The last thing he wanted was a daughter on the stage. She did very well at Glasgow and that's where we met. She was a third year student when I was there as a graduate student. We were in one of these big lecture halls. She came down to talk to me the first day of class in the New Year. She asked if I had had a good Hogmanay. I said, "I don't know what you mean." Hogmanay was the biggest holiday of the year. It was New Year's Eve. I said, "Oh, I'm afraid not. I was on the Continent. I went to visit relatives in Germany and then I went to Paris for New Year's Eve." She said, "How could you not be in Scotland." One word led to another. Then she invited me to her home for a canasta party (which dates this story). I was to be a date for her friend. I didn't know that. By the time the canasta party was over, her version is that she had made up her mind. She gave up her Scottish boyfriend and, she says, set her cap for me. That was the beginning of a wonderfully erratic courtship. As everyone likes to remind me, the smartest thing I ever did was to marry Sheila. It certainly was and much, much more. But she had to fight to get away from home. She secured a position with the British Foreign Office. Her father didn't want her to take it. So, she went to London without his blessing. That was very, very hard. Then she compounded that by emigrating to the United States. It took him a while to forgive her. He had certain expectations. She wanted to be independent. It was not easy. She had a lot of guts.

Q: When did you go to Northwestern?

WOESSNER: I came back when the Fulbright year was over. I went to London for the coronation, but instead of going straight home, I hitchhiked around Germany and Austria for 10 weeks with a rucksack. I stayed at youth hostels. That was a great adventure. I didn't get home until September and then went directly to Northwestern.

Q: Let's talk a bit about hiking around Germany and Austria. What was your impression?

WOESSNER: Well, again, it was intensely enjoyable. I keep saying this over and over again, but it's true. It was a magnificent adventure. I walked most of the way.

Q: There was always this lingering feeling about what are these Austrians and Germans going to do next time. Was that still there?

WOESSNER: No. What I did encounter was a deep revulsion against any use of military force. That lesson had gone in very deep. The aftermath of the war was still very evident everywhere. I went to Cologne. That was the first major city I saw. It was the last major German city to be rebuilt. When I got there, if you left the immediate town center where the cathedral was still propped up with great logs and sandbags and there was a facade of stores, beyond that there were just miles and miles of rubble as far as the eye could see. I was not prepared for that. But I stayed in a youth hostel there. I walked along the Rhine, the high ground above the river, and it was up there where somebody had a portable radio and I first heard the news of the uprising in East Berlin in June of 1953. I carried a rucksack and hitchhiked as well as walked. Germans were very keen to pick you up because of the chance for contact with foreigners. They were very hospitable. They didn't have much but would share what they had. It gave me a chance to practice my very feeble German. That was fun. I carried a dictionary with me all the time. I went through the Black Forest.

Austria was still under occupation. Vienna was under four-power administration. I went by train through the British zone from Linz, into the Soviet zone and enjoyed being in Vienna. It was exciting. I saw the change of guards when the Russians took over from the Americans. Four years later I returned for my first posting in the Foreign Service.

Q: You came back in 1953. How long were you at Northwestern?

WOESSNER: One year. It was a full scholarship for my master's degree. I did an honors paper on Pershing's raid into Mexico and did research in the Library of Congress on Wilson's diary and that sort of stuff. Arthur Link was my professor for that. It was good. I was a straight A student. They wanted to renew the fellowship so I could go on for a doctorate. But by that time, the notion of going into the Foreign Service had already been planted. My father said, "Are you ever going to work for a living or just go on and study forever?" I said, "No, I think that's it." I turned down the fellowship and volunteered for the draft. The draft was still in effect.

Q: The draft went out in 1946 and then with the Korean War in 1950, it came back in.

WOESSNER: It certainly was in effect in 1954. I could have kept on applying for deferment, but I wanted to get it over with. That was a very good experience, two years in the Army.

Q: You were in from 1954 to 1956.

WOESSNER: The summer of 1954 to the summer of 1956.

Q: What did you do?

WOESSNER: Basic training was at Fort Dix. I was assigned to Fort Monmouth to do I&E (information and education) work. From there, I was assigned to Fort Slocum, to the I&E school. Each assignment brought me progressively closer to home. My uncle claimed I was going to defend Long Island against Russian submarines. I went to the I&E school and finished top of the class. The faculty asked me to stay on. I did. A wonderful experience there. I actually liked being in the Army. I particularly liked basic training because I met people that I never would have met in any other way. I said it then and I say it still, I understand all the reasons why the draft was abolished but yet I regret it because in a democracy I think it's important that if you're not in actual military service then there should be some alternative service where you're exposed to all walks of life. It was a good experience. And I liked the physical part, too, because I was never an athlete, but basic training was a hoot. I laughed my way through that for eight weeks. Out doing things. Being so close to home, I had altogether eight weeks of leave. Four weeks a year. I took the first three weeks and hitchhiked on a MATS flight to Germany and visited relatives there that I had gotten to know during my Fulbright year. Then at the end of my tour of duty, I took five weeks and hitchhiked to Scotland, renewed the courtship with my wife. That was fun.

Q: During the time you were training at Ford Monmouth, what was your impression of the recruits coming through?

WOESSNER: Quite a few of the college graduates were real snobs. They thought they were better than the sergeants that they were mixed in with. The sergeants were assigned to the school to upgrade their education. Many of the young guys with college degrees had a superior attitude that just bugged me. I gave tutoring classes after hours for the NCOs because they needed the extra help. I couldn't help but think of my father and how he would have felt in this situation.

Q: I was an enlisted man for four years after graduating from college. My impression was that one good sergeant was worth about four normal college graduates from the better schools.

WOESSNER: If I were going into combat, then the answer was so obvious. I rose to the exalted rank of PFC and the Army wanted very strongly for me to attend officers' candidate school. It was a good experience but I did not want to make a career in the Army. I said, "No" and was discharged six weeks early on June 30, 1956. In September, I went

into the Foreign Service. But that's another chapter.

Q: Why don't we cut off at this point? We'll pick this up in 1956. You've already talked a little about what led you into the Foreign Service, but I'd like to talk about the exam and what you were gathering about the Foreign Service, the real motivation to go in.

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Today is December 8, 1999. You're coming into the Foreign Service.

WOESSNER: I entered the Service in 1956.

Q: As you came in, were you picking up anything about the Foreign Service? Did you do any research?

WOESSNER: My interest in coming in started during my Fulbright year overseas. I believe I mentioned that a man who had taught me in college himself went into the Foreign Service and encouraged me. When I finished my graduate degree, I volunteered for the draft to get that out of the way. While I was in the Army, I sat the written exam and then took my orals. I remember going for my orals in uniform. As far as knowing about the Foreign Service, I'm amazed how ignorant I was. In fact, when the chairman of the board who examined me called me back in to tell me that I had been accepted and congratulated me and wished me a good career and all that, he said, "Just one word of advice. I suggest before you enter the Foreign Service, you might want to find out a little something what it's all about."

I was discharged from the Army in June of 1956 and got a call to report to Washington in July. I said, "I was really planning to treat my parents for their silver wedding to a trip to Europe and to go with them. Could I enter the September class instead of in July?" They said, "Of course." What they didn't tell me was that a change in the grade structure was imminent. The lowest grade was FS-06 in June. In August, it was changed it to FS-08. All those who entered in the July class as FS-06s automatically became FS-07s in August. I came in as an 08 in September. It took me two and a half years to make 07. So, that was a costly trip to Europe with my parents. But I entered in September. That was a class the stars fell on because in the first weeks at the Foreign Service Institute [FSI], the A-100 course, you had the Suez invasion and the war there; the uprisings in Hungary and the crushing of that; and Poland teetering on the verge. We would flock around the tickertapes on every break and every chance we had. It was a very exciting time to come into the Foreign Service.

Q: How did you feel about the members of your class? Can you characterize them?

WOESSNER: We were a large class of 32 students. There may have been four or five women. I don't believe any particular attention was being paid at that time to diversity. It was a very congenial group. I was struck how much experience some of them had. I remember one officer came in with seven languages and he was five years older than the

rest of us. He went on to be my supervisor in Berlin years later and somebody who is still a friend. The group was enthusiastic and evidenced very little cynicism. There was a sense that this was an exciting career we had chosen.

Q: How did you find the basic training?

WOESSNER: I don't remember all that much about it now. But at the time, again, I responded very positively. It was all new and all exciting. Then the big anticipation was your onward assignment.

Q: When you came in, I think there was always a wish list.

WOESSNER: You had to fill out a form that asked, "What is your career ambition? What would you like to be?" I said, "Well, I guess you aim for the top. Secretary of State." So, they took me aside and said, "Ambition is laudable but usually one aspires ultimately to becoming an ambassador. Really the Secretary of State is not up for grabs." In later years, of course, the Service came close - hitting the number two with Walter Stoessel, who was my ambassador in Germany and somebody I loved dearly. No, I didn't have any strong sense of where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do. Those interests developed later. In fact, my first assignment was somewhat accidental.

I had to go to the FSI German class because my German was 2+ and they wanted to get it up to 3 before I went out. There were openings in both Vienna and Munich and the man who made my assignment sent me to Vienna, thinking it would be better to have an embassy experience. It would be a broader experience than the consulate general. As it turned out, there was no JOT [junior officer training] program in those days. So, there was no rotation. I spent the two years in the consulate in Vienna. The consulate was physically separate from the embassy. I was well into my second year in Vienna before I even set foot in the embassy. But it was a fantastic experience.

Q: You were there from 1956-1958?

WOESSNER: I was in FSI for the A-100 class, followed by German language. There was no consular training course at that time. I just went out. I went out in May. Sheila and I got married in March, so this was really our honeymoon. I was there from May of 1957 until July of 1959.

Q: Can you talk about Vienna in 1957?

WOESSNER: They were fresh out from under the Four-Power occupation. During that Fulbright year, I had actually taken a train into Vienna while it was still under occupation, so I remembered it from that time. But they were starting to spruce things up. The Opera had been restored. People were investing money in shop fronts and it was a lot of fun to be there. It's a romantic city with the old fashioned schmaltz. Several things about the Viennese struck me. How resolutely they looked backwards. It was as if the Kaiser had died the year before. Fresh flowers were on the Kaiser's statue. Franz Josef died in 1916.

All the old traditions were still kept very much alive. The operetta was very good. We were on honeymoon enjoying everything. We traveled a lot, took in whatever we could afford on our limited budget. Our first son was born there. We named him after St. Stephens Cathedral, the Stefansdom. If it had been a girl, it would have been Elizabeth for the Kaiserin Elizabeth. That's the kind of mood we were in. In fact, we saved the name for our third child. In the office, the first year I did immigrant visa work and then the second year non-immigrant visa work. It was a lively staff, a lot of fun. I found it very satisfying. The camps were still full from the Hungarian uprising.

Q: Did you get involved in refugee work?

WOESSNER: Yes, but only in the sense that the great movement of refugees had already taken place out of the camps and to the United States. Those who were left were the hardcore people with tuberculosis or people with particular placement problems. I dealt in that first year with the various relief organizations. HIAS was particularly effective. There was the National Council of Churches and a Catholic relief group and the Tolstoy Foundation. A lot of Hungarian refugees were still trickling into the U.S. Every case had to be processed very carefully. I got an enormous amount of personal satisfaction out of helping these refugees. I remember one man coming in. He was a rabbi and his whole family had perished in the Holocaust. In the course of the interview, he showed me a picture of his wife and four or five children, all of whom had been slaughtered. That was his first family. He had remarried and proudly introduced me to his new family. It brought home to me just what we had been spared in the U.S. The immediacy of the war, the aftermath. Everybody had stories whether it was those in the camps or those who had lived through the Soviet taking of the city when all the women were raped. There was an enormous reservoir of popular goodwill towards the United States, gratitude for all that we had done. But here it was 1957. The war had been over 12 years and in many ways it was still very fresh. That was something I experienced again at the next post in Poland.

Q: I was in the Refugee Relief Program for part of this time in Frankfurt. I got there in 1955. One of the things I got from this was a tremendous lesson in postwar and war history about migrations, where people came from and all that. I imagine you were getting the same.

WOESSNER: Oh, yes. It was an exposure to a living history. For me, it was exciting.

Q: Were you getting any reflections of people leaving Yugoslavia?

WOESSNER: No, very little of that. The ones coming through primarily were from the Hungarian uprising.

Q: What was your impression of how the Hungarians were being relocated in the U.S.?
WOESSNER: No idea what happened to them afterwards. The INS played a key role in the processing of all these. But I had the sense from what I heard that those who were taken care of by the relief organizations were well taken care of. These were very effective, efficient operations from getting them cleared through the immigration hurdles to

resettling them after they were in the U.S. But I didn't have any personal experience of a resettling.

Q: How did you find the outlook of the consular officers? Who was running the Consular Section? Sometimes you have old hands who have been there, seen that, done that.

WOESSNER: Yes. It was a small section. This was not a visa mill. But those of us who were on the line and doing the actual processing, we weren't at all jaded. We were too fresh. It was too new and it was very emotional in many ways. It gave me a great sense of satisfaction. The head of the Immigrant Visa Section was a woman who was the widow of an FSO who had died in internment by the Japanese in Shanghai, China, not through mistreatment but he had had an accident. She could be rather difficult. Her behavior was such that in this day and age…well, it was just outrageous. Talk about sexual harassment. We didn't think in those terms then. She must have been 50 and took an unhealthy interest in her junior male officers. One young bachelor had a particularly rough time fending her off. It wasn't easy for my wife either but we managed. That was another age. As far as her attitudes toward all this, yes, she had seen everything, done everything, and we had to listen interminably to how much better things had been in Shanghai.

Q: Sometimes you run across people who were very unsympathetic to the difficulties of clients.

WOESSNER: This was not true here. It wasn't a question of lack of sympathy. She had an alcohol problem. She was very wrapped up in her own personal world. But she did not interfere in the way we conducted business. No, there was no lack of sympathy. The only time I ever noticed a lack of sympathy was when I was doing nonimmigrant work in the second year. One applicant who was mentally deranged would come to the counter every six months or so and give the locals a hard time and then some poor, unsuspecting vice consul would have to go up and deal with him. The consul general said one time, "Gee, if only he'd pull a knife on a vice consul once, maybe we could do something about it." I thought that lacked sympathy, but perhaps that's not the kind you meant.

Q: There is always one or two of those that the vice consul gets stuck with.

WOESSNER: But the staff was wonderful. We got to know them all socially and personally. A lot of those friendships lasted for years afterwards. (End of tape)

When we left post, the entire staff gathered outside the consulate. The baby was decked out in his Lederhosen and everyone fussed over him. As we drove off, I was weeping so much I couldn't drive. Two blocks away I had to pull over. It was that kind of emotion. I think that probably nothing equals your first post in terms of emotional attachment.

Q: Did you have any contact with the ambassador?

WOESSNER: No. I didn't set foot in the embassy until well into my second year. That's something my boss discouraged. I did indicate several times that I would like to know what

goes on in the Political and Economic Sections or something of how an embassy worked. She said, "What's the matter, consular work not good enough for you?" It was that sort of an attitude. But despite her objections, at one point I was actually invited to come over and attend the ambassador's staff meeting. He was a fine ambassador. I could see him lean over to the DCM and ask who that person was down at the end of the table there. I had been there 18 months.

Q: What were you looking forward to doing once you left? Did you have any choice? Did you know where you wanted to go?

WOESSNER: By that time, I had a real sense that the future of so much in Europe was going to revolve around Germany. That was self-evident. I was particularly interested in studying the Soviet-German relationship. I had taken some basic Russian during my Fulbright year. I indicated that was a field I would be interested in. The Department responded that Russian language and area studies were heavily oversubscribed and suggested I go for a year of Polish language to be followed with an assignment to Warsaw, again in consular work. I had hoped to do something different, but I didn't have hang-ups on that. If that's what the Department recommended, it sounded fun and exciting. That's in fact what I did.

Q: You took Polish from when to when?

WOESSNER: 1959-1960, one year at FSI. We were a small group. We were four officers and one spouse.

Q: Often one picks up a considerable amount of knowledge about the country from the language instructors. Were you getting anything about Poland?

WOESSNER: Yes, enormous. Our instructor was Adam Wojna. His brother, Richard, had stayed behind in Poland and in fact was an apparatchik. He was into Polish press and media work and was a loyalist. Adam and Richard were estranged, but Adam in his own way was very politically interested. So, we had a huge dose of what was going on in Poland that went well beyond the actual language. I thought it was superb instruction. The way it was done was six hours in the classroom with no windows and you go round and round and round, taking the tapes home and studying them. Halfway through that year, I was starting to dream in Polish. I would wake up babbling in Polish and my wife would shake me. Those friendships were pretty intense, too.

Q: Who was in your class?

WOESSNER: Bill Buell most notably. He went out to the Political Section when I went out to the Consular Section. There was Ross Titus, who specialized in East European Affairs after Warsaw, but left the Service early because of his wife's illness. And Greg Nowakoski. It was a good group. All four of us went to Poland. Gomulka had come to power after the near-uprising in 1956. The effects still lingered, the last vestiges of freedom. Collectivization of agriculture had been called off. There was a lot of intellectual freedom and freedom of speech. The clampdown from the secret police and all the rest came in the

middle of my tour in Warsaw. So, we had a chance to compare what it was like before and after.

Q: You were there from 1960 to when?

WOESSNER: 1962, a two year assignment.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WOESSNER: Jake Beam, but not for the whole time. He left a year later and was succeeded by John Moors Cabot. Both men were exceptionally competent.

Q: How did you see Poland when you arrived in 1960?

WOESSNER: You were struck by how shabby things were. There is a smell to Eastern Europe and I encountered it there for the first time. Almost from the outset, I developed a very high regard for the Polish people. This amazing spirit, this vitality surrounded by deprivation that never seemed to get them down. Nor did they ever seem intimidated. There were always ways around. They had a wicked sense of humor, which was a saving grace. We became very friendly with many Poles. During the first year, there was no problem having them to the house for parties, doing things with them, going to their homes. We were struck by the Polish sense of hospitality and I came to realize later that this was really a Slavic tradition. You cannot do anything for a Pole or give anything to a Pole without it being reciprocated in full measure and then some. That becomes hard when you know how little these people have. I remember at one point Bill Buell's wife, Jeanne, and the Tituses, Ross and Marian, and Sheila and I went off traveling around Poland just to see some things. We were on our way to Krakow. We went through Czestojowa, which is where the great shrine is, the Black Madonna, where Mary appeared in the clouds and the Poles defeated the Swedish army and drove them back.

This is still a place of great pilgrimage. The regime did everything possible to discourage pilgrims. The train service would be cut off and you would be harassed if you didn't show up for work. Nonetheless, they came from all over Poland on foot, quite remarkable. Anyway, we went through Czestojowa and while the other four were off doing something, I wandered on my own and struck up a conversation. One thing led to another. It was a very nice lady. I played it dumb, saying, "What's going on here?" She explained to me what an important feast day it was and that pilgrims were coming from all over. I said, "That's fascinating. We're on our way to Krakow." She said, "Krakow? Why would you go to Krakow?" I said, "We have no plans to stay here and obviously this town is overfilled. There would be no accommodations." She thought a moment and said, "Why don't you come home with me?" She didn't know me. I said, "That's extraordinary, very hospitable, but in fact, I'm not alone. It's not just my wife and I. We're actually five people." She thought about that a little while and said, "That doesn't matter. You should all come home." With that, the others reappeared and I explained that we had all been invited to go home with her. We went along with some misgivings. I said, "What will your husband say?" She said, "Don't worry. He's just taking our son to camp right now and he'll be home

this evening and it will be alright with him." I'll make a long story short. We're all sitting around in the living room and by this time it's dusk and this is in August, August 15. The husband comes home. We hear whispering at the door. I said, "This is where we get our exit ticket." This man, very tall, stood in the doorway, looked down at us in the small living room and said, "Where there are guests in the house, there also is God in the house." That was it. He broke out the vodka, we broke out the scotch, and she ran and got some tomatoes and onions and made a little meal for us. We got very jolly. This was really irresponsible of us. I finally said, "Look, it's so nice being with you and enjoying your hospitality, but it's getting late and we really can't stay here tonight. It would be too dangerous to you. We're not just American tourists. We're actually from the embassy in Warsaw." She said, "That makes no difference to us. Before Gomulka, I wouldn't have dared speak to you in the street. Now, I'm not afraid." Here husband said the same thing. So, that night in their small house, they cleared room for the five of us and in the evening we went up on the mountainside with the pilgrims with all those candles, the processions, the singing, hymns you never hear in the West. There are Polish hymns that are hauntingly beautiful. I am not Catholic, but like the rest of the pilgrims when that whole mountainside erupted in song, we just sank to our knees and cried. It was so powerful. It almost epitomizes what Poland was all about during the two years we were there. It made a lasting impression. Yet the other side of the picture was a persistent, virulent, anti-Semitism that defies all logic. Perfectly normal decent, warm human beings who would risk their lives for you, show great courage and bravery, still had this ugly quirk. They would say, "Everybody knows the American Congress is controlled by Jews and the American media is controlled by them and the Jews are running the communist regime here." It's true that there were some Jews in the communist apparatus, but the truth was, in Poland, there were very few Jews. They had been wiped out. That to me is something I never squared in my own mind with these people, whom I loved and admired in so many other ways, but I couldn't get over that.

Q: I talked to one man who was in the 1970s in Poland. He said that as far as he was concerned, there probably were two or three dedicated communists in the entire country and there wasn't much real belief in communism.
WOESSNER: Quite right. There was opportunism. There was no Walter Ulbricht in Poland. These people came to terms with a superior power and one they had lived with on their borders for 1,000 years. So, they made do. There was an inner resistance, a psychological resistance. Of course, the role of the Church during those years was incredible. The churches were filled to overflowing at every Mass – and with young people, not just the elderly. There has been a lot written about this. The Church was a powerful political force. Now in the last 10 years, things look different. But in those years, to be Polish was to be Catholic, to be Catholic was to be Polish. It was indivisible. Of course, the Ukrainians and the White Russians had all gone. Stalin took the eastern half of Poland. The Jews had been exterminated and the Germans had been driven out of the west. So, what was left in the rump Polish state after Yalta was 98% ethnically Polish and catholic.

Q: Did you find any reflection of cynicism about Marxist Leninism? I was serving at about the same time in Yugoslavia. There were courses in Marxist Leninist this and newspapers. They were just filled with gobbledygook of communist rhetoric. Was this going on then?

WOESSNER: Of course, the government, the official organs, were going overtime on it, but absolutely nobody took any of this seriously. Cynicism is no word for it. It was just an understanding that the regime said one thing but nobody believed it. There was a naive faith in America. America was still the fabled land. You would drive out in the country in an embassy car or your own personal car and you'd get stopped. Peasants would gather around. "Are you from America?" "Yes, we are." "You must know my cousin. He's in Buffalo." This sort of thing. Any American space triumph or other success, the Poles were jubilant over it. The pro-American sympathy was just extraordinary.

*Q: In the Consular Section, you must have run across the fact that Chicago has more Poles in_ Chicago is the second largest Polish city in the world next to Warsaw. Were you running into reflections of the Polish-American_*

WOESSNER: Overwhelming. The immigrant rolls had been reopened. That was part of the liberalization. We dusted off the old registration books from the early 1950s. People had been registered in 1951, 1952, and here you are in the 1960s and you're processing them. There was a lot of validation that had to be done. Were the people who signed then really the same people? The waiting room was something to see, especially in the winter. The trains would come in from all over Poland during the night and by 6:00 am the crowd in front of the Consular Section was enormous. Usually, somebody would come down early and let them come in out of the cold. Then as they streamed into that huge waiting room, our clerks would go and man the desk. The other thing that happened was, as the temperature rose, they wore those great big, hairy sheepskin coats and then the fleas started to pop out. So, you had fleas jumping all over the place. The memories that come back of that. And then interviewing these people. It was a chance to use my FSI Polish, but you quickly found out that that Polish and the Polish these peasants spoke were some distance apart. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed using the language. Again, you had a sense of helping people.

Q: What about communist oriented organizations? I assume there was a Polish Communist Youth.

WOESSNER: For those, it was just routine, pro forma membership. It was not a bar to immigration. But yes, there were a lot of sticky cases that came up, especially if there was something on file that somebody had denounced somebody. I tried to get at the root of that. I had more than one run-in with the Department in which there was security information that hadn't been clarified in which a visa was denied. I would appeal it and marshal as much evidence as I could. That could take a disproportionate amount of time. There was a mindset back in Washington that "When in doubt, keep them out." These things you had to deal with very seriously. I got a lot of satisfaction out of that, too.

Q: Where were the denunciations coming from?

WOESSNER: You didn't know. The information was classified. You couldn't confront the potential immigrant with the source. It required a lot of resourceful work, getting testimonials and evidence to the contrary – how do you get evidence to the contrary if you

don't know what you're_

*Q: I would think you'd be running into more trouble when you started_ The normal peasant had no problem. But when you're getting into what would be the professional class_*

WOESSNER: Exactly. That is where the problem came. These were people who were in many other ways the most qualified and would make the best new citizens. There were Poles who went to the U.S. after I fought one of these battles back and forth with the Department and for years afterwards, I would get Christmas cards in which they would tell me what they were doing, how they had prospered, how their sons were now going to American colleges. It's storybook stuff. Just wonderful. So, people would often say, "God, you're still doing consular work? That's not career advancing." But it was personally very, very satisfying.

Q: This is my field.

WOESSNER: This was before the days of consular cones. So, there was a widespread sense that if you wanted to earn your ticket to doing political or economic work, then you had to do consular work. That often resulted in what you described before as cynicism. I was on the Board of Examiners when we had the consular cone introduced. It was much better.

Q: Did you have problems with people who might have been tainted or were suspected of war crimes during WWII?

WOESSNER: I cannot remember a single case. I won't say there could not have been anybody, but, no, that was not a real issue at the consulate in Warsaw. For the non-immigrants, it would be bona fides. How do you establish that they really will come back? For the immigrants, it was more to whom were they going and would we be sure they wouldn't become a public charge. Once again, those refugee organizations with which I had worked in Vienna were active in Poland, too.

Q: Were you doing any political reporting on the side?

WOESSNER: Very little. Jake Beam sent me up to Gdansk when the first shipment of PL-480 grain arrived in a huge tanker. The military attaches swarmed all over me. I would be going to an area that was militarily out of bounds. They wanted me to observe things in the harbor and this, that, and the other thing. The harbor was sensitive and out of bounds. When I arrived, there was a launch flying an American flag waiting to take me on a tour of the harbor. There was a great to-do made about the shipment. The grain was very important for Poland at that time. During my time there, a huge mountain of zlotys managed to pile up. They paid for the grain in local currency. So, that was one example. Another time I drove my parents to Auschwitz. Sheila was expecting our third child at the time and couldn't travel. On the way back, we ran into Warsaw Pact maneuvers. This was in September. I remember saying to my father, "I want you to jot down the license numbers." Tanks were going by. Everything was on the move. My father got so excited. His son, the

spy. It was not really spying. We were going along and he was on his second pad of paper. I said, "You know, Dad, if we get stopped, you'll have to swallow this." I got back and turned this all over to the Army attaché and he said anytime I wanted to change careers, he could get me a job in military intelligence. (not likely) But those things were really few and far between. All the time we were doing things that had a political significance and those things would be reported. But we were seven of us in the Consular Section, including doing citizenship work. There were six in the reporting sections. We called ourselves the "Outer Seven." At that time, the EC had the Inner Six and the Outer Seven. There was a certain amount of pride among the seven of us.

Q: Who was your supervisor and what was his or her background?

WOESSNER: The head of the Consular Section when I arrived was Francis T. Underhill, just a marvelous human being with a wonderful wife who was a great Foreign Service mother. I forget where Francis had been, but most of his career had been spent in Asia. He finished as ambassador to Malaysia.

Q: He just died a month or two ago.

WOESSNER: We remained very close friends. In fact, I was calling to arrange our next get-together (They would come up and visit us every second year or we would go down and see them in North Carolina) and Francis had just died that morning. He was a great human being, one of the finest drafting officers I ever encountered. His ability with the English language_ in retirement down in North Carolina, among other things, he continued to write a column for a local newspaper. I have saved many of those columns. They were all done with wit and erudition and good judgement and good instinct. John Davis succeeded him. John went on to make a great name for himself as ambassador to Poland. We have also remained very close. It's interesting the bonds you form in those early years in the Foreign Service. They can be really strong and lasting.

It was a good section. Morale was very high. We felt that what we were doing was very important. It was fun.

Q: You said that about halfway through this 1960-1962 period, the Gomulka period ended and the secret service started.

WOESSNER: They began to crack down again.

Q: How were we reading that and how did it affect the embassy work?

WOESSNER: The most dramatic evidence of it was that your Polish friends started falling off. You would get a phone call the day of the dinner party – "We can't come." You were being tailed. The surveillance was a lot more intrusive and obvious. Wives were jostled in the markets. Art Olsen of "The New York Times" had his home burglarized while he was away. Also, the tapping of your phones. Everything was more obvious. That contributed to a certain dampening. But the work went on. You did the best you could. The Poles

remained more courageous than ever, the risks they would take in the face of this kind of intimidation.

Q: Were you picking up the fortunes of the great Soviet-Polish friendship?

WOESSNER: Oh, come on! The hatred and fear of the Soviets was the hatred and fear of the Russians which was hatred and fear that was 1,000 years old. This was tribal. This was so deep in the Polish soul. There was no fooling about it. Here was this poor country with no natural borders. To the east, they have the mighty Russian bear. To the west, they have the Germans. The fear inbred was equal, except that to the east it was tinged with a sense of superiority, "We the Poles are the superior people to these miserable Russians," and the west it was the almighty Teutons, their cultural superiority.

Q: Were you picking up through the embassy through the Inner Six and other colleagues a feeling about whither Poland at this time? Was Poland looked upon as a solid member militarily of the Warsaw Pact?

WOESSNER: We would read the analyses of the entire Warsaw Pact, how reliable they were. Every time the Pentagon did a Sandkastenspiel, this would be factored in. But the truth is, in terms of the whole structure of the Warsaw Pact, there wasn't much that was changing and there wasn't much leeway. Whether or not the Polish army would remain loyal .You could give various scenarios of circumstances. But in the end, that was not a make or break factor. It was one of these things that was of interest, but nobody really thought that the Polish army would make the difference. If the stakes were high, the Soviets would do it themselves.

Q: Did you work with the case of Scarbeck? How did that affect you all?

WOESSNER: Scarbeck, we all knew him well. He was general services officer. His wife was German-born, a very nice lady. They seemed to be a devoted couple, so when the spy case broke, it was like a thunderclap. He had gone out to Frankfurt. The Polish secret police caught him in a compromising situation. She had been forced to work for them.

Q: He had a girlfriend.

WOESSNER: He had a girlfriend, yes. She didn't work for the embassy, but she certainly worked for them. He was caught and they had incriminating evidence on him. The stuff he actually gave to them when we reviewed it all, in hindsight, was nothing that made any difference. Jake Beam at one point said – I think it was his wrap-up of his years in Poland – "I wish this was something the Poles could read," never thinking that they would, thanks to Scarbeck. Then came the trial back here. The embassy was emptied out. The ambassador, the DCM, the whole Inner Six. There were two of us left at post one weekend. The other officer was Jack Scanlan, who also went on to a very long and illustrious career in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. Jack said, "We'll, you're an 0-7 and I'm an 0-6, so I'm the charge." The case was stunning, but really had no impact on morale.

Q: Was there concerns as you traveled around about the Polish secret police trying to compromise people? Did you have to travel in pairs?

WOESSNER: We did travel in pairs. No effort was ever made that I knew of to compromise me. I went off with Jack Scanlan on a memorable trip to get out and see something. We arrived in Rzeszow in southeastern Poland. Jack was more experienced. He had already had a tour in the Soviet Union. I was appalled at what a wretched, shabby town this was. I remember going into this miserable hotel and commenting to Jack how awful everything was. He said, "Bill, you don't know what you're talking about. If you took a train in Moscow and loaded it up with ordinary Soviet citizens and it was a closed train and you drove them through the night and you opened the doors here in Rzeszow, they'd all think they were in Paris." That may have been a slight exaggeration, but it showed that all things are relative. The Polish standard of living was higher than the Russian standard of living. But, no, other than phones being tapped, obvious surveillance, there was nothing more dangerous than that. Nobody got really roughed up.

Q: You were a collegial group. Were there any intellectual activities going on, plays, newspapers, poetry that showed a sign of non-conformity?

WOESSNER: Oh, yes. Almost all of it had an undercurrent that was very subtle. In any country in which there is censorship and suppression, creative people find ingenious ways and subtle ways to get the message through and the Poles were particularly good at that. That was true in books, poetry_ there was a very lively cultural life in Poland. Considering the Nazi slaughter and the Soviet slaughter of the elites in Poland, it was amazing there here in the '60s so much of it was reviving. Movies, for instance.

Q: In 1962, you had had your Austrian and Polish experience. What happened then?
WOESSNER: The second half of the language and area studies kicked in and I was sent home to Columbia University to the Eastern European Department. The idea was that I would do a paper under Brzezinski. That is what I had asked for. Unfortunately, that was the year that he took a sabbatical and wasn't active at Columbia. But it was kind of fun being back at university, although when you're married and have three kids and a commute from the suburbs, it's all very different from being single, footloose, and fancy free. But I took it all seriously. I did an honors paper on Poland. It was on the role of the Church. But it really was in fulfillment of the fact that this was part of language AND area studies. It was a little bit crazy having it afterwards. The truth is, for all that investment in me as an Eastern European specialist, I never went back to Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. My next assignment was Berlin and that changed everything.

Q: While you were in Poland, you were considerably removed, but the election of 1960 and Kennedy coming in_ It roused a certain amount of excitement in some people about government service. Did this have any reflection on you or were you too far removed?

WOESSNER: There was a lot of excitement among Poles. The first Catholic President. In the campaign, I was agonizing over how I would vote. Shame, shame, in the end, I didn't vote. We had very good relations with all the staff. It was a large staff, maybe 14 or so

people in that outer office. One lady asked me about the election and how would I vote? I said, "As a matter of fact, I hate to tell you this, but I've decided I'm not going to vote." She was thunderstruck. "You mean you don't have to vote?" That is what struck her, that here was a government employee and he didn't have to vote. But the Kennedy administration, there was a lot of excitement. There is no question. I got the full impact. He was inaugurated in January and I was home by that summer. Then we had the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall while I was attending classes at Columbia. I arrived in Berlin ten days before he did. Then I was in Berlin when he was assassinated.

I was very happy doing what I was doing. It never crossed my mind that I had made a career mistake or that it was anything other than immensely rewarding.

Q: What about your parents coming to see you in your full glory as a vice consul?

WOESSNER: They came to visit us in Vienna, less to see their son the vice consul than to see their first grandchild. They also came to visit us in Poland. I think they were there with us for five weeks. I guess they were proud of me, but these were parents who were always proud of anything I did, so it was nothing new. I basked in parental approval. By then, we had three children. My wife had to fly out to Scotland to have the baby because the hospitals in Warsaw were so bad. A wife of one Foreign Service officer, USIA, had a terrible experience giving birth to a child and the child was damaged. So, from that point on, it was Peggy Beam who stepped in and said, "Any more babies due here must be delivered in the West." Most of the wives went out to the hospital in Frankfurt.

Q: The 97th General.

WOESSNER: It could have been. In Sheila's case, her mother was living in Scotland. Her father had died by that time. She went home and Elizabeth was born in Scotland.

Q: When you were at Columbia, were there any stirrings of protest or was it pretty benign times?

WOESSNER: I can't remember. Unlike when you're an undergraduate and you're on campus all day and involved in all kinds of extracurricular activities, in graduate school, you had a very full workload, a long commute, and a family at home. As soon as I could get away from campus, I would go. So, I was not involved in the unrest at Columbia.

Q: Your posting to Berlin, how did this come about?

WOESSNER: I don't know. It was my understanding that after two overseas tours, I would go to Washington when I finished at Columbia. I got a call from Personnel, who said they wanted to assign me to Berlin. I was stunned. I took some soundings then from people who knew and everybody said what a wonderful, exciting, and interesting city Berlin was and how good the housing there was, which was important for a family person. On the other hand, I was warned against the man I would be working for. I weighed the pros and cons and said, "I would really like to go." It was to the Eastern Affairs Section. That is where the

Eastern European studies came into play. But what that Eastern Affairs Section really did had little to do with Eastern Europe, as such. It had to do with the GDR. You followed what was going on on the other side of the wall. In the exercise of Four Power rights, you had free access to circulate in East Berlin.

Q: You were doing that from 1963-

WOESSNER: I arrived in June of 1963, ten days before Kennedy came. My tour was extended twice. It was a three-year tour, but I was there until November 1967.

Q: Let's talk about the atmosphere of Berlin when you arrived there.

WOESSNER: Mind blowing. We sailed to Bremerhaven. We picked up our car there and drove up the autobahn into Berlin. That was our introduction to the city. We experienced all of the red tape that goes with that, the excitement of traveling on the autobahn, and then arriving in this great metropolis surrounded by a wall.

Q: The wall had been put up when?

WOESSNER: Two years earlier, in August of 1961. In those days, you were housed at Harnack House, the military officers club. The Army ran so much because the city was still occupied. I reported for duty and "Oh, Woessner, hi. Welcome. Go away and do something for ten days. We've got the President coming." They could in no way be bothered. The place was in a stir. So, we were there when Kennedy appeared at the Rathaus and gave his famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech and all the rest.

The atmosphere was pretty heady. As you know, there was this incredible turnout of Berliners that far exceeded the White House's expectation. The President was not particularly sympathetic to the Germans or to the Berliners. He didn't have a good relationship with Adenauer. His closest advisors generally tended to favor a deal with the Russians. That is what really counted. Berlin was a stone around the neck. It was a place where anytime the Russians wanted to apply pressure on us, they could. It was more liability. That was the mentality leading up to this. That trip more than any single event turned John F. Kennedy around. He didn't plan to say the things he said. It was a momentous day.

Q: Someone I interviewed who was there before that time and maybe including that time was saying that when the Kennedy administration came in, they were very nervous. They felt that the group around Kennedy and Kennedy himself weren't sound on Berlin.

WOESSNER: Oh, they certainly were not.

Q: The feeling was that "We have reached stability. These Kennedy types may sell us out."

WOESSNER: Had the Soviets played it more shrewdly or not overplayed their hand, there were times when a deal could have been struck at the expense of Berlin. After June 1961,

the American commitment to Berlin was rock solid.

Q: What were you doing while you were waiting? Were you able to get out and see Berlin?
WOESSNER: A little bit of that. You get settled in. I don't remember too much except that I was anxious to get in the office and get started.

Q: Your job was what?

WOESSNER: It was political reporting. There was a Political Section there that dealt with access questions to Berlin and the politics of West Berlin, the relationship with the mayor and Bonn. The Eastern Affairs was supposed to concentrate on the politics and economics of the GDR. We were pursuing a policy at that time of denial of recognition to the GDR. Together with the British and the French we maintained something called the Allied Travel Office. Any East German citizens wanting to go to any NATO countries had to have a special pass from the Allied Travel Office. It was in support of the West German policy, the Hallstein Doctrine, which denied diplomatic recognition to any nations who gave recognition to the GDR. This was still a period of great rivalry between East and West. My first summer there was the summer that Egon Bahr made the speech at Tutzing Academy entitled "Coming Closer Together through Rapprochement." He enunciated a policy of small steps. This became Willy Brandt's policy and gradually changed the relationship between the two German states. There was still a lot of jockeying for position but it was the beginning of the change.

I also was aware of and sometimes involved in the trade in human beings. This was followed primarily by intelligence agencies and CIA, but the Evangelical Church was one of the main conduits for the money. The West German government paid money to the East German government through the church and then the East German government would release the prisoners. One of the things that I took on that nobody had done before was the role of the church in Berlin. My boss, the head of the section, had me to lunch the second day I was there. He asked what I had done at Columbia and I told him about the paper I had done on the Polish church. He said, "Oh, you're just the person. How would you like to follow the role of the church here?" I said, "Oh, I'm not exactly an ecclesiastical attaché type." He said, "Never mind." I'm so glad he did because it was one of the most fascinating aspects of my time there. The church was highly political. It was very much attuned to what was going on both East and West. I went and visited churchmen in East Berlin and talked to them and got a lot of useful information.

Q: When you say "church," what are you talking about?

WOESSNER: The Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before the war, Berlin was probably 90% Lutheran. There was a Catholic Church, St. Hedwig's Cathedral in East Berlin. A very courageous cardinal was in charge over there. But politically, they never had the heft that the Evangelical Church did. They were not really involved in such things as the prisoner release program.

A particularly exciting event was the visit of Martin Luther King to Berlin. He preached in

the West and then he went to the East to preach. By this time, I had very good contacts in the church and elsewhere. He got to Checkpoint Charlie and he had forgotten his passport and they let him go through anyway. He went to the church in the center of Berlin that had been the main church of the bishop, who had been banned by the East Germans from coming over to hold services there. The church was overflowing. They were crowded outside. As he was fighting his way through the crowd, I managed to say to him, "Dr. King, you see the size of this crowd. There is another church about six blocks from here and that is also filling up because word has gone out that you're going to go over there. Is there some way you could do that?" He did. He gave a sermon and they smuggled me in the back so I was hiding behind the altar. There was no room in the church. He used biblical allusions, walls coming down, walls separate people. It was a powerful service and was well received.

Q: It was translated?

WOESSNER: Yes. The choir sang Negro spirituals. Then sure enough, when he left the church there, he went on across town and spoke at the other church. The regime didn't dare try to stop him. They had even let him come through Checkpoint Charlie when they had perfectly good grounds for stopping him. That was one of the highlights of my tour in Berlin.

Q: What was your impression of the East German church?

WOESSNER: First a sidebar on Lutheran theology—on the concept of Obrigkeit—on the church's attitude toward civil authority. From the time of Martin Luther, the church subscribed to the view that it had its own responsibilities which were spiritual, but that on political matters it did not defy the civil authorities. This led to a great crisis of conscience during the Nazi period when some pastors did defy the Nazis and went to concentration camps, even death, while others were silent and went along. Something similar recurred in the GDR, although the regime was certainly nowhere as totalitarian or as criminal as the Nazi regime. Pastors were not hauled off, tortured, and killed. Still, it took a fair bit of political courage to stand up to the regime. The church encompassed the whole gamut from those who stood up to the regime to those who were active collaborators. The church in the early years was still the only unified organization left in greater Germany. The Evangelical Lutheran Church was both West and East and the political and ecclesiastical boundaries overlapped. Then the DDR split it finally and irrevocably so that the church in the East became self-governing and had its own governing council. That was a tough one to counter. Church membership went way down. Unlike the Catholics in Berlin, the Lutherans were much more nominally Christian. When the pressure was put on, they fell away from the church in droves so that attendance at service went way down. But then again, those who stayed were probably more committed than any had been before the war. The churches became vehicles for inner resistance. For those Lutherans who rediscovered their faith, it became a very deep, meaningful experience. I would estimate that maybe 10% of Lutherans were active in the church during these years.

Q: What was your impression of compare and contrast between the GDR and Poland?

WOESSNER: In Poland there was this tremendous national unity, a great, deep patriotism which was also bound up in the church. Being Polish was being Catholic; being Catholic was being Polish. There was an intense resistance to alien rule because there was no doubt in the minds of the people that their government was propped up by a foreign power that they found odious. In the GDR, the regime was also propped up by an odious foreign power, but its military presence was very real. Red Army divisions were stationed throughout the country. Furthermore, the sense of national identity was very confused by the existence of a more powerful, more prosperous West Germany whose cultural influences being felt all the time. 85% of the GDR could pick up Western broadcasts. That made for a very different dynamic. There was the yearning for reunification. Over time, and even after the wall came down, a certain subset identity developed that was a GDR thing – "We East Germans did what we did despite the fact that the Soviets carted off all our productive capacity. We lived with these reparations for year and years. We had an oppressive alien regime. And yet we survived and we're proud of what we did." So, in that sense, it was a mixture of wanting to be reunited with the fellow Germans in the West and also resenting the prosperity of the West. The full impact of this didn't really manifest itself until after the wall came down and the discrepancy appeared.

Q: Who was the head of East Germany during this period?

WOESSNER: Walter Ulbricht the whole time I was there. What I didn't realize then (I don't think any of us did, but it came out subsequently), was the extent to which he influenced Soviet policy in ways that the Kremlin didn't really want. Ulbricht always put his own power and the stability of his regime before everything else. He almost had the Soviets as hostage to that. Ulbricht was the unquestioned leader. I remember going over to a big rally one summer in Karl Marx Platz. Ulbricht would give five-hour speeches with a high, squeaky voice, and a Saxon accent that other Germans found so amusing. That particular day because of the heat, soldiers were keeling over and he had to cut the speech short. But the next day, the party newspaper carried the full text of the speech and some sections that he had never delivered carried the parenthetical notation "long tumultuous applause."

Q: After your experience in Poland, were you looking for manifestations within the people you would talk to in East Germany as far as rolling their eyes as far as the standard communist line was or was it a different world?

WOESSNER: Somewhat different in that the Germans were not as subtle or as clever in making fun of their rulers. There was some of it. There was a cabaret in East Berlin that went pretty far, but it wasn't a particularly German phenomenon in the way it was a universal Polish phenomenon. For instance, I remember walking on the streets in East Berlin. I was in a section that wasn't very crowded and out of nowhere a woman came up to me. Clearly, from the way I was dressed, she knew I was from the West. She just said, "Don't forget us," and scurried off. And when I would find myself in a small, intimate group with church leaders or intellectuals, or young students, yes, they knew they were in a tight situation and looked to the West. It was terribly important that we were in West Berlin,

almost as important to them as it was to the West Berliners.

Q: Were there constant incidents at the wall, escaping?

WOESSNER: Oh, yes, this whole period was one of ever tightening restrictions, more minefields, more barbed wire. Every escape would lead to further tightening up until finally it became very difficult for anybody to get out. Prior to my arrival, you had the infamous case of the young man who was shot down at the Wall and lay bleeding to death in the death strip and the West didn't did nothing and he bled to death there.

Q: Who was the head of our mission in Berlin?

WOESSNER: When I got there, it was Arch Calhoun. He was the minister. The minister reported to the ambassador in Bonn and then through the ambassador to Washington. We also had a two-star commandant who was technically the supreme authority in West Berlin but the minister had a determining role in the politics of it all. So, you also had two chains of command, one that went to the Pentagon and one that went to the State Department. You also had some rivalry between the leadership in Berlin and the leadership in Bonn. Arch Calhoun had been an ambassador and would be ambassador again. He was a career officer with a lot of self-esteem and strong leadership qualities. There was no question in his mind who called the tune in Berlin or who made the recommendations to Washington. The ambassador in Bonn was George McGhee at that time.

Those power relationships evolved over time. Years later, I had a chance to view it all from the embassy. There was a rivalry between the embassy and the mission and whose recommendations would prevail. There was absolutely nothing that happened in Berlin that was not subjected to intense scrutiny in both capitals, Washington and Moscow. The idea that Berlin was somehow a tinderbox couldn't have been further from the truth. The chances of an accidental conflagration there were nil. Everything was controlled. There was also the whole business of Berlinery, for example, the British, the French, the Americans all had different rules as to how high the tailgates should be on the trucks going in and out and who submitted to which inspection when. The East Germans were always probing, looking for ways to expose differences among the allies. The way in which the allies would go their own ways on small things and then come together on big things was fascinating. So, you had this constant interplay. On the broad scheme, it would be Moscow and Washington and then Moscow and the three Allies and then below that you had the two German states and their relationship or no relationship to one another and their relationship to their respective patrons.

Q: In so many other international things, the French seem to be odd man out. How about here?

WOESSNER: I think that was also true in Berlin. I never served in France. My experience has always been in the Four-Power context. But yes, the French were generally the odd man out. Their relationship towards Germany was quite clear. They certainly never wanted to see a unified Germany, make no mistake about that. They wanted a Germany that was as

closely allied to France as could be. Thanks to Schuman and Adenauer, great things were achieved in Western Europe. Adenauer was determined that West Germany would be so intricately enmeshed in a Western alliance that it could never break loose again even if it wanted to. That was his lasting contribution. By the time Germany was reunified, which nobody expected then, you wouldn't be able to play the Bismarck game of going East and going West. French attitudes showed up in such things as occupation costs. We were scrupulous about what we asked the Germans to pay for and what we paid for. The French made no bones about making the Germans pay for absolutely everything.

Q: I was just interviewing John Buche yesterday and he was saying how the French would run their troops through Berlin in order to get them reequipped. We had a pretty good deal with cars, where we would have cars that supposedly the Germans would get for Berlin but they would show up (and the Germans knew about it) at all our posts.

WOESSNER: But in the Federal Republic?

Q: Yes.

WOESSNER: That's something I didn't know about. And charged to the occupation?

*Q: Yes. Somehow or another, they would originate in Berlin and end up down in_*

WOESSNER: You would have to say that on the really big issues (Kennedy and Cuba), when the chips were down, the French were first and foremost standing with us. But on so many other things, De Gaulle was getting even for all those years of humiliation by Churchill and Roosevelt.

Q: During the Berlin airlift, there was a tower that everybody was afraid to touch because it was difficult for our airplanes and the French went in and blew it up. As Churchill said, "Of all the crosses I had to bear, the cross of Lorraine was the heaviest." Was there concern at this time that something could happen, that one of the powers might do something which would give the East Germans and thereby the Soviets – weaken our position in Berlin or were things pretty solid?

WOESSNER: If I had to characterize these years, the years of greatest uncertainty were behind us and things did start to stabilize and the East-West equation stabilized. The activity moved much more to the German-German sphere. The West Germans were ingenious in finding ways to get money to the East Germans. There were some misgivings in the West at the time. It was more than just paying for prisoners, but all kinds of things. There were so-called "interzonal trade" and swing credits. They allowed the East Germans to build up an ever bigger deficit. There was a willingness to carry them. It was ultimately successful because it did undermine the East. For instance, opening up the Wall prior to the Four Power Agreement and the GDR-FRG treaty made it a lot easier for West Germans and West Berliners to go to East Germany and every one of them had to pay, so huge sums of money went into the coffers. But that constant exposure to the West, not just via TV and radio, but by visits from relatives and also building up this big trade deficit, in the end, all

of those things came together and so weakened the GDR that it became a liability to Gorbachev and one of the factors leading to the dissolution of the empire.

Q: One of the concerns was that something could happen and all of a sudden there would be real mass uprising of the people in East Germany and that would not be tolerable as far as West Germans would be concerned and there might be a flowing in which would cause the Soviet army to massively intervene and that's World War III.

WOESSNER: I don't think so. Yes, there was that shadow because of what happened in 1953 when the workers took to the streets, that that could happen again. So, the mood in the East was monitored, but I don't recall at any point that we thought that sort of instability or uprising was imminent. Again, the West German policy of pumping money into the East ameliorated an awful lot. Also, letting the most seriously discontented people out, letting them be bought out, so many thousands of prisoners every year, that combination of letting off steam that way and ameliorating the circumstances in which people lived. I would say there was a general discontent and a general alienation but it was never acute and never brought us to the brink of war. Also, all the interactions were so minutely monitored in both the Kremlin and the West that there was little chance for a mistake or something small that could escalate to something big. There were tense moments when the West German Bundestag convened in plenary session in Berlin, Soviet MIGs roared over the city with sonic booms as a way of expressing their displeasure. But eventually as part of the bigger German-German accord, those plenary sessions were discontinued. There was tension over the air cargoes. When the Soviets wanted to apply pressure, they would order us to cease and desist from flying above a certain altitude. The MIGs would buzz our planes coming up the corridor. It could have led to something nasty, but it never did. Both sides refrained from anything that could have been dangerous. In the end, again, as part of the Four-Power Agreement, we agreed to a 10,000- foot ceiling so that if you were flying from Munich or Frankfurt, you'd enter the corridor and drop down to 10,000 feet. Part of that related to intelligence gathering.

Q: The higher you are, the more you can see.

WOESSNER: Nobody thought for a minute that we weren't taking advantage of that.

Q: Were you able to go outside of East Berlin?

WOESSNER: No. Our access was throughout greater Berlin. I traveled frequently and extensively in East Berlin, met with people over there. One of the things I most enjoyed doing was taking visitors over. I gave historical tours and ecclesiastical tours and political tours. I even had a 1901 Baedecker that I could refer to from time to time. It was great fun.

Q: How about the East German opera?

WOESSNER: Yes, we went to that frequently, to the operetta even more, which was a higher quality. Felsenstein was recognized as a real genius. He lived in the West but was heavily subsidized in the East. There were American opera stars who sang at the Comic

Opera and at the National Opera.

Q: It was a time when any American with aspirations had to go almost to Germany, East or West, because there weren't opera houses in the U.S.

WOESSNER: Yes, there was a lot of that.

Q: Did you get a feel while you were in East Germany and looking at the goods that were coming out_ Having been in Poland, there was a great deal of playing up, "Well, the East Germans are still Germans and they really can produce stuff." After Germany got united, most of the East German stuff was third rate.

WOESSNER: There was no question that the appearance of prosperity in East Berlin and for people who went to the Leipzig Fair was much greater. The standard of living, what people ate and what they had, was much higher in the GDR than in Poland. The extent to which bad management of manufacturing processes, pollution, and all the rest had really eviscerated the German economy, that was largely missed by Western experts. We constantly were reading intelligence evaluations that this was the 10th manufacturing country in the world. The truth is that their goods were inferior and vulnerable to competition from the West. After the Wall came down, the real weakness of the economy showed through. But they were very successful in the propaganda they generated. It was that very weakness that persuaded Gorbachev, given the Soviet Union's own weakness, that he could no longer sustain this country.

Q: Did you get any feel for the Soviet military in East Berlin and East Germany or was that beyond your scope?

WOESSNER: That was beyond my scope since they were not in East Berlin. There was a deliberate withdrawal beyond the city, by which they tried to substantiate the notion that this was the capital of the GDR. During those years at least, the Soviets were kept very close to barracks. That eased up somewhat later on. Then when the Wall came down and before they withdrew, there was a total lack of discipline. There was chaos and all kinds of bad things. One of Lucius Clay's great achievements had been to force the Russians to show their hands at Checkpoint Charlie and when the tanks rolled up and we rolled ours up, it was clear they couldn't trust the East Germans. But that was all before my time.

Q: Were there any incidents of American soldiers taking a tank and heading off somewhere, getting drunk or disaffected?

WOESSNER: No. There were some spectacular escapes and some defections, but these were all isolated. One of the most interesting escapes, by the way, involved the future columnist George Will. One Sunday afternoon, I got a call at home. I was the duty officer for that weekend. A man said he'd like to come by and talk to me, that he needed some advice. He introduced himself. He was George Will, relatively young and not yet well known. He said he was planning to go into East Berlin and bring somebody out and what did I think of the idea? I said, "Well, it is becoming increasingly hazardous." I had to warn

him in all seriousness that he should not do it. But I realized I didn't have the authority to stop him either. We chatted for a while and he listened. He said, "I tell you what I'll do. I'll at least let you know what I decide to do." A couple of days later, I got a phone call from Templehof Airport where he was getting ready to fly out. He said, "I just want you to know that I went in and got her out." A couple of years later, while I was at an FSI retreat here in Washington, I got a phone call. A voice said, "You won't remember me, but this is George Will." I said, "Of course I remember you." He said, "I'm thinking of going back to visit Berlin and what do you think if I went to the East? I'm not planning to bring anybody out. I know I didn't follow your advice last time, but I would value what you think." I said, "Look, they didn't stop you last time. They didn't catch you. But I can't believe they don't know that you did it. Their intelligence is very good and everything leaks like a sieve. They keep lists and depending upon the overall political climate, they could or could not arrest you and make an example of you. It could be unpleasant. Unless you have some compelling reason to go, I think it's too risky." He said, "You know, I think you're right. I won't go." That was George F. Will.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? We'll pick it up next time. Where did you go next?

WOESSNER: I came home. I had been lined up for a job a year and a half in advance. When I got home, there was no job.

Q: It was 1967. We'll pick it up with your coming home to no job.

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You came back from where?

WOESSNER: From Berlin, in November of 1967.

Q: What job were you expecting?

WOESSNER: I was assigned to the Office of Soviet and East European Exchanges. The head of the department was Boris Klossen. The deputy was Art Wortzel. Art had recruited me for this job. The problem was that at the point that I came home, U.S.-Soviet relations had gone into one of the bleakest phases of the Cold War. Everything was frozen, but especially the exchanges. In that sense, there was no job. I had the assignment; I moved into the office. But there was very little going on.

Q: How long were you doing this non-job?

WOESSNER: Altogether seven months. I need to explain that when I spent an abbreviated home leave with my parents in New York City and then reported to Washington, a lot of things came together. We left Berlin on a high. It had been an enormously satisfying and happy assignment. Our two youngest children were born there. I mentioned that the Soviets buzzed the city the day we picked up an honorary Berlin birth certificate for one of them. We had a wonderful home. The two youngest children were sent on ahead with a friend to

stay with my parents. We came with the three other children. It was the last crossing of the USS Independence. It was taken out of service after that. We got home and within three days, I had to take my father to the doctor for pains in his stomach. It turned out it was cancer and he in fact died within two months. That was totally unexpected and devastating. At the same time, my wife was diagnosed with a breast lump and had to go for a biopsy. Fortunately, it was benign, but that was the first shadow of that kind that came over us. In the midst of this family stress, we moved with the five children to Washington. For the first time in my life, I had the pleasure of buying a house. I had to go into debt to do it and I don't take kindly to debt. I hadn't learned how to be a good American yet. The combination of all these things - we moved into the new house just weeks before my father actually died - triggered health problems for me, which I understand in retrospect is not unusual. But most significantly, I was stricken with what was then diagnosed as ankylosing spondylitis, a form of spinal arthritis, which meant in effect I couldn't walk. My ankles, knees, and hips were all affected. I got around with great difficulty using two canes. There I was, in a non-job. It was a major turning point. You bounce back and keep on going. I had a very close friend who has been a friend to this day, Frank Meehan, who had been my immediate supervisor in Berlin. By this time, he was up in the Executive Secretariat. After checking with Art Wortzel and checking with my wife, he asked me if I'd like to go to the Operations Center and onto the watch. The reason he put it as a question was that in those days the Operations Center operated on a highly irregular cycle. You worked eight hours one shift beginning at 7a.m. for two days and eight hours another shift beginning at 3p.m. and then another beginning at 11p.m. Then you had two days off and started again. Days of the week had no meaning anymore. Neither did hours of the day or night. Nonetheless it certainly had the desired therapeutic effect. The job was very stimulating, very demanding. Even with my infirmities, I really enjoyed it and did well. One of the most exciting nights of my 30 years in the Foreign Service occurred in September 1968. I was in charge of the watch team when word came that the Warsaw Pact had invaded Czechoslovakia. That was a night to remember. We would have gone off duty at 11:00 p.m. The normal rule was, no matter what was going on, you just handed over to the next watch and they took it from there. But not that night. All hell broke loose and the Operations Center was filled with very important people and a lot of FLASH messages. That was the first time I ever received a CRITIC message.

Q: Here you had been a German hand. How did you see the East German reaction? Was this a surprise?

WOESSNER: The invasion itself? I can't pretend to any expertise on that. The experts in Washington in the intelligence community everywhere were split right down the middle between those who argued that the Soviets had such a stake in economic, commercial, and other relationships with the West that they wouldn't jeopardize that to put down the Prague Spring. On the other side of the equation were those, including my friend Frank Meehan, who argued that ideology and Party supremacy came first regardless and in a case like this dealing with heresy and a threat to orthodoxy, the Soviet leadership would not tolerate it and would put it down. Sadly, they were proven right. I can't say that I lined up on one side or the other. I just didn't know.

Q: Was there any thought of what we would do outside of making noises?

WOESSNER: Our thinking was overshadowed by lingering guilt that we had led the Hungarians to believe that if they rose up, we would go to their aid.

Q: We're talking about '56.

WOESSNER: Yes. So, this time around, I don't think that was seriously considered. The spheres of influence were clearly drawn. But it was a bitter disappointment to see the whole thing crushed that way.

You asked what I thought about the East Germans. The East Germans did participate in the armed forces that were posted around Czechoslovakia. It was fascinating too that we knew everything about troop movements, military placements. What we didn't know was what was going on in the inner circle of the Kremlin. The Prague Spring was suppressed. You asked what my take was on the East Germans. What was so wonderful about the two years in the Operations Center was that that narrow focus disappeared now into a sense of the full range of our diplomatic activities. I learned so much and it gave me a real sense of how the Department works, how the whole foreign policy structure in Washington works, relationships with the Pentagon, with the White House etc., and in that context East Germany, Eastern Europe really dwindled. For some people (Dean Rusk maybe notoriously), it didn't count for anything. But for me as part of my education as a Foreign Service Officer, that was a marvelous assignment.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Vietnam was taking over?

WOESSNER: Yes, increasingly. We had a group up there in the Operations Center dedicated to following things in Vietnam. I saw the impact it had on CIA, on the military, on military intelligence. It skewed an awful lot of things because so many competing resources were dedicated to Vietnam.

Q: Were you there at the time of the Tet offensive?

WOESSNER: The impact was shattering. It's ironic to see the analyses in retrospect. Militarily Tet was a failure, but psychologically it was a turn of events in the whole of Vietnam and our decision to pull out. It was also interesting to be there for the change of administration. You had the November election and the new administration coming in. How the wheels of government grind to a stop, less and less and less happening and then nothing happening and things just deathly quiet through the night when normally it was a beehive of activity. Then the new administration coming in. You weren't aware of it at the time, but Kissinger set Rogers to work on all kinds of analyses, studies, and paperwork, and got the whole State Department churned up doing things that were ultimately meaningless. It was all part of his way of concentrating power in the NSC and in his own hands. But I was one year as captain of a watch team. There were wonderful people assigned to the Operations Center. They were young and cream of the crop and very intelligent, energetic. For my second year I was senior editor and didn't have the crazy

hours. I edited the daily report and the weekly coverage that came out of the Ops Center and other things. Those were two wonderful years.

Q: That was 1968-1970.

WOESSNER: Yes. It would have been the summer of '68 to the summer of '70.

Q: Did you get any feel towards the end about the rivalry between the NSC and the State Department? Was there a feeling of being bypassed?

WOESSNER: Absolutely. More than a feeling. It hit you in the face all the time.

Q: I would think that in the Ops Center you would be presenting papers – because the NSC is not equipped to deal with the world or something – that probably would be read by the major players.

WOESSNER: Yes, I suppose so. But the paper trail is one thing and the power relationship is quite another.

*Q: Did you have a feeling of sitting on things_ You've got Vietnam and all, Africa_*

WOESSNER: Africa certainly was off the radar. The concentration was heavily on East Asia and the Middle East.

Q: In the summer of '70, what happened?

WOESSNER: I went to the Board of Examiners. John Stutesman was heading it up then. He had taken over shortly before. This was going to be his first full cycle. He had recruited me a year in advance. I wasn't at all sure that that's what I wanted to do. Having been right in the mainstream of things substantive, I felt this might be something of a sidetrack. On the other hand, John was and no doubt still is a powerful, charismatic personality who just energizes everybody around him.

Q: He's one of these people who thinks in terms of the Foreign Service as an entity and trying to do something for it. Very few do. They're either hooked on policy or their own career. Could you talk a little about him?

WOESSNER: Okay. Before I go to John Stutesman, just a final footnote on Vietnam and the damage it did. In many ways, it was most damaging to CIA because so many of their best people were diverted there and many of them left as a result. At that time, we were all susceptible to assignment to Vietnam. I knew that if I were assigned, I would leave the Foreign Service. It was not based on ideological, moral, or other grounds. It was simply I would not have been willing to leave my wife and five small children and go to Vietnam. Probably for health reasons they wouldn't have wanted me anyway. But many officers were faced with that kind of a terrible decision. CIA devoted all those resources in order to counteract the reporting by the military intelligence. Much of it was skewed to say what

people wanted to hear.

Back to John Stutesman. What he did on the Board of Examiners was just so exciting. He was looking to revitalize the exam system. He had all of the examiners go through the entire process of applying all over again. We literally had to fill out the basic application form, the papers required for the security check, and then he made us sit the written exam, which for some was very embarrassing. Then we got to the interview stage. I remembered my own interview back in 1954, which was all too typical at the time. Three men sitting across you and you were made to feel as uncomfortable as possible with the one in front of you shuffling through papers endlessly and you wondering, "Didn't he even look at this before you came in the room" to the ones on either side of him just staring at you and then the silly trickster who used to say, "Would you mind opening the window" and you'd go and try to open the window and it was locked shut. John Stutesman's belief was that you don't find out what you need to find out about a person that way. You find out by making the person feel comfortable, opening up to talk to you. So, one of the things we did seemed kind of superficial, but he created a different atmosphere in the room. You had a sofa, chairs, a lamp, and it was made to feel like someone's living room. You didn't sit on the panel three across but were scattered around the room. Secondly, you engaged in some light conversation to begin with and then the first serious question you always pitched to the person's specialty. They had done their doctorate in such and such. Or they declared this to be a major interest. You gave them a chance to expand on what they really knew thoroughly. It gave you a better sense of how articulate they were. Then you could do some gentle cross-examining. Then the more interesting the candidate seemed to be, the more you stepped up the level of questioning. I thought you found out a lot more about these people. That was all John's approach. He had revamped the format, the style, and so on. We were in separate panels because by that time the cone system had been introduced (political, economic, consular, and administrative cone). I headed up the political panel. We traveled around the U.S. I was so impressed with the caliber of people we were attracting. These were many of the best and the brightest. The most difficult part of my job as chairman, besides conducting an interview, came when it was all over. Many more failed than passed, and for the most part these were young people who had only known success, and the idea of being turned down was devastating. If the panel reached the conclusion that a candidate didn't qualify and probably never would, you had to let the person down in a way that left his self-esteem intact. It was always done one on one. If, however, the panel judged the candidate to be a potential contender but not quite ready yet, you had to be realistic in what sort of advice to give. It's cheap to say, "Well, you didn't make it, but try again sometime" if there's no hope. That's just not fair. If, on the other hand, there is a chance, then you've got to be specific. Maybe it's more life experience, maybe going into the Peace Corps for two years and come back. It depends. I found that enormously satisfying. I enjoyed that job as much as anything I've done in the Foreign Service. It lasted a year. I was together with some wonderful people, most memorably Melissa Wells. We became fast friends. She is the daughter of a great soprano and MGM star. When I was a teenager, I had a crush on her mother.

Q: Who was her mother?

WOESSNER: Her mother was Milija Korjus from somewhere in the Baltic. Melissa is ambassador now to a Baltic country, either Estonia or Latvia, and that is where her mother came from. She starred in "The Great Waltz." She was the other woman. Louise Rainer was Johann Strauss' wife. So, one of the nice fringe benefits of that job besides spending a year working with Melissa was also meeting her mother out in California and spending an evening with her. Great fun. So that was the year on the Board of Examiners. I'm full of admiration for John Stutesman.

Q: This was '71-'71. Looking at the candidates, what was the impact of the Vietnam War? We were beginning to pull out of there, but it was still a period of conflict. You had the Kent State shootings and all.

WOESSNER: That is hard to assess. I suspect those who were most upset by the war probably didn't come forward as candidates. But it was not a dominant theme. What was new to me compared to my generation going in 15 years earlier was the concern the candidates had about this as a career. It wasn't a vocation. They wanted very much to come. They were very interested in foreign affairs. But you got questions such as, "What are my retirement benefits?" That would have been unthinkable in my day. Another was "What about my spouse? Can my spouse work?" I believe this was about the time of the Macomber edict liberating Foreign Service spouses. In my day, my wife got evaluated in my efficiency report. She was an adjunct and the Foreign Service prided itself on getting two for the price of one. By the time these young people came forward, that was dead. But Vietnam as such, no, I can't say I recall.

Q: Did you notice any regional differences when you traveled?

WOESSNER: Yes. Again, not surprising, once you were out of the Eastern metropolitan areas (Washington, New York, and so on), the knowledge of current events was not so strong. When we got to current events in the oral exam, we would often get a very defensive cry of anguish. "How are we supposed to know something like that? We don't get that in our papers here." It's not an entirely legitimate excuse, but it certainly was a factor.

Q: I was on the Board panel. I remember going to California and interviewing people who were really top rate from Stanford and all this and yet there was an appreciable difference. Some of these people were from New England, but it's almost as though they had spent too much time surfing or hiking in the mountains. On my panel, two of us had lived an appreciable part of our early youth in California. It was different.

WOESSNER: Yes.

Q: 1971, whither?

WOESSNER: National War College.

Q: How was your walking?

WOESSNER: I was taking therapy. I went to the Arthritis Rehabilitation Center. Ankylosing spondylitis, in the days before they knew how to treat it, resulted in the stiffening of the spine to the point where it was just like a steel pole up your back. Gradually, it was easing. I was able to make do with one cane and then finally I dispensed with the cane, although I still hobbled a bit. I was on my way to a cure, but I still had relapses even after I went back overseas, which was in 1972. But to all intents and purposes, I was functional by the time I left the watch or I don't think I could have taken the rigors of all that travel around the U.S.

The National War College was 1971-1972. Again, a different kind of a revelation to me. I think that course is the finest tribute to the Pentagon and to our armed services that you can find, that the leadership of our military not only is prepared to do this but feels the need to do it for their senior officers. The training is designed for those who are going to be the future admirals and generals. The civilians make up 25% of the class and are really there as leavening in the dough. Included are people from the State Department, the CIA, and a number of other civilian intelligence agencies. The curriculum deliberately exposes these future leaders of the military to the widest possible spectrum of political views. We even had a day with Allard Lowenstein.

Q: The great challenger of the government.

WOESSNER: And others. Civil rights leaders et al. I thought it was a wonderful thing. I learned a lot about the military side of the equation, about the budget of the military and logistics. I enjoyed the camaraderie and the interaction of the services. I came away with an enhanced respect for military officers. Perhaps the most surprising thing was when we would do exercises of one kind or another and we would all have to do role playing and then would be confronted with a crisis here, there, or somewhere else. Almost without exception, the hawks were civilians and the doves were military. The civilians were ready to send in the Air Force, bomb away, send in troops. Then the military officers would always pose the difficult questions. How much? How many? If you get them in, what are the consequences? What is stage two and stage three? How do you get them back out again? Very revealing. Unfortunately, at key times in our history, the people in decision-making hadn't gone to the National War College. So, that really is my comment on that. In those years, they still could afford to send the students on trips overseas. I chose Africa. Most people wanted to go to Europe or Asia and some to Latin America, but I had not ever been in Africa. I went around trying to get an onward assignment and went to the Bureau of African Affairs thinking they would snap me up. I got there and they said, "Well, you have no African experience." So, it was unlikely I was going to go. The trip was just superb. In the course of it, we met General Gowan of Nigeria; Idi Amin of Uganda; Emperor Haile Selassie; we met Portuguese military officers in Mozambique, who were obsessed with the threat of Communist world domination and how they were one of the last dikes against it; all these different stops with world famous figures. We had a day with Idi Amin on the shores of Lake Victoria where the government house is and were treated to a very pleasant lunch. Then he held forth for several hours. It was fascinating. In the course of the Q's and A's, he started as a genial tough guy but gradually the madness came through. It was

absolutely chilling. I had the temerity to ask a question about his relationship with Israel. He immediately jumped to the conclusion that I was Jewish and said as much. "I can see that you're an Israeli," he said to me, "But" and then he talked about this love-hate relationship that he had. The Israelis had really been very helpful to Uganda in the early stages.

*Q: Parts of Africa_*

WOESSNER: Absolutely. And then when it suited his purposes, he turned on them. Of course, now they were the devil incarnate.

*Q: Was this before or after the Entebbe raid where the Israelis_*

WOESSNER: I remember the Entebbe raid. I don't remember the timing, but by the time we were there, his relationship with Israel had gone seriously bad. Here we were in the tropics and you could feel the temperature in the room going down. It was so chilling. He talked non-stop for a long time. After that there were no more questions.

Q: What about when you were in Mozambique talking to the Portuguese? Here you were, mainly a military group, all of whom probably had Vietnam- I would have thought there would have been an interesting dialogue of_ We were still in Vietnam, but we basically pulled out.

WOESSNER: No, there was very little reference to that. This was clearly the mentality of people dancing on the edge of a volcano. The end was coming. They blindly refused to see it or to prepare for it. They were obsessed and they thought that we would respond to the sense that they were last ditch holdouts against communist dominion of the world. I remember the charts they unfolded with great red arrows sweeping over Africa and there they were, holding on.

Haile Selassie, that was very special being received by him. It was during his last days. He was overthrown maybe a year later. Going into the palace past leopards he had on a leash at the entrance. I thought that they did an excellent job in lining up top level people for us to meet, access to them for probing questions. It was a grand finale to what had been a superb year.

Q: During this period, 1971-1972, in your discussions or seminars, did you come across_ This was a very critical time for our military. Our military was falling apart because of the Vietnam experience. The troops were rebellious. The military had lost much of its glow with the American public. It was about ready to remake itself, which it did and which displayed itself certainly 20 years later in the Gulf War. Were you feeling anything about the military talking about "What are we going to do?"

WOESSNER: You mean the soul searching. No, not really. It was there. It was a shadow. But it wasn't the kind of thing you would sit around and discuss. We didn't have barracks to sit around in late at night when these kinds of things might come up. Class was early in

the morning. A full day, the morning with lectures, the afternoon with special activities, and then late afternoon you had your homework to do and people cleared out to the library and then on home. So, I can't remember that as being a real theme of the time we were together. I didn't meet colonels who had been identified as future generals who were saying, "I made a career mistake" or "I don't know how much longer I can reconcile what's going on in Vietnam."

Q: In 1972, Africa did not want you, so what did you do?

WOESSNER: I found out that in fact EUR Personnel had me very much in their little index card and as far as they were concerned, I belonged to them. This was a mentality that Henry Kissinger tried hard to smash, but as far as EUR was concerned, I was theirs. In May just before I went on the trip to Africa, I learned I was being assigned to the Political Section in London. My wife, coming from Scotland, was very excited. We were going to London, which was wonderful indeed. It would put her close to her mother. Her mother would be able to see us and the children. It was a Friday afternoon. I got back from class. We're now in June, close to graduation. I got back from class at the National War College and there was a message waiting for me from Joan Clark, who was the head of EUR Personnel. Ms. Clark wanted to see me right away. I said, "Like this afternoon?" and they said, "Yes." Here we were, approaching 5:00 p.m. and I lived out in Annandale. I said, "Okay, I'm on my way in." I couldn't imagine what this was about. I knew Joan. I liked her and respected her greatly, but we were hardly close friends. She called me in, just the two of us, and said, "Bill, I want to change your assignment." I said, "Why?" She proceeded to describe the situation in London, that it was a huge section, a nine-officer section. Morale was very low. She proceeded to say very uncomplimentary things about the leadership of the section as well as the leadership of the embassy.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WOESSNER: Walter Annenberg. Of course, the State Department had no control whatsoever over him or what he did. Joan wanted to send me to Bonn. She said, "Frank Meehan is now the head of the Political Section in Bonn. He's told me he would like to have you serve under him again. Here would be a chance to do that. I think you'd find the work more satisfying, the environment more satisfying." I said, "Can I talk to my wife about this? Is it a real option?" She said, "Yes, of course, I'll abide by what you decide to do." So, I went home. My wife was deeply disappointed not to be going to London. But as always in those 30 years, she said, "What you think is best for your career, of course, I'll do it." I wanted to have somebody I could talk to. I called Jim Carson. Jim had been the head of the Political Section in Berlin when Frank Meehan was head of the Eastern Affairs Section. He was packing to go on a trip with the Secretary. He was working up on the seventh floor at the time. He said, "If you come over right now and don't mind talking to me while I'm packing." He was a very close friend of Frank's. I went and told him what was eating me up. I said, "We had our hearts set on going to London. On the other hand, it looks from a career point of view, that might be a great mistake and I would very much like to serve with Frank again. Of course, my credentials are sort of in Germany. It would make sense to go back to Bonn." Jim, God bless him, said, "You will go back to Germany

someday, I can assure you. They're not going to let all that go to waste. You have the chance now to live and serve in the greatest city in the world. Frank would be the first one to say you should go to London. Don't listen to what people tell you about the leadership or about personalities or what's good for your career and what's not good for your career." I was reminded then of what I had been told before going to Berlin, that I wouldn't like my boss there, Glenn Mays; he turned out to be one of the most wonderful, caring, mentoring people. He did so much for me as an officer, training me, my writing skills, etc. Jim said, "Every night when you come out of that embassy, you'll stand on the steps and look across Grosvenor Square and smell the air and say, 'This is the greatest city in the world.'" I said, "Thank you." He went off. I called Joan. She accepted my decision. I went to London. In a nutshell, six months later, Jim Carson was dead. He died in the Caribbean. It was really medical malpractice. Botched surgery. He had an intestinal problem. Great loss, great tragedy. He was a super human being.

I went to London. Yes, I was the ninth man in the Political Section. I received not one but two promotions in the time I was there. I finished as the political counselor. It was another great assignment. All of the things I had been warned about were just nonsense.

Q: I think all of us have been warned. My best friend was DCM when I went to Seoul. I was warned that, "He plays his cards very close to his chest. You've got to watch him." I never quite figured out what they were talking about.

You were in London from when to when?

WOESSNER: I was there from the summer of 1972 to the summer of 1977. My tour was twice extended, due in part to the two promotions.

Q: When you arrived, what was the atmosphere there? It was a peculiar situation.

WOESSNER: The head of the Political Section was- (end of tape)

Bill Galloway was the head of the Section. He and the ambassador had a very close relationship. The ambassador trusted him and relied on him. Bill was extraordinarily good to me. He took me in hand, gave me lots of responsibilities and encouraged me and mentored me. I'm very grateful to him. The downside of the equation was that there was a running feud between him and the head of the Economic Section, somebody who was also very good to me, very kind to me, but the ambassador didn't like him and didn't trust him, and so you really had the good boys and the bad boys. If you were in the Political Section, everything was great. If you were in the Economic Section, you were largely ignored. If you think how important our relationship with Britain is in all fields, that was a great loss. Walter Annenberg was an enormously complex individual. Just recently, I finished "Legacy," a biography of him and his father. I understand so many things much better now. He didn't function as an ambassador normally does. He had an excellent DCM, Earl Sohm. Earl and Bill Galloway had a good relationship. Earl also was very good to me and took an interest in me. Some of these things sound repetitive, but again and again over the years, I encountered senior officers who took an interest in me. I owe them a lot. Not everybody

can say that in the Foreign Service.

Q: When you got to the Political Section, what slice of the political pie were you given?

WOESSNER: I was to handle the relationships with the Labour Party, which was in opposition. As far as Bill Galloway was concerned, if they stayed in opposition for 100 years, that was fine with him. Dick Gleysteen handled the relationship with the Tory Party, but actually it was Bill Galloway who kept all the important relationships to himself. He knew all these people so intimately. But the opposition did feel sort of like stepchildren and outcasts. I had my office next to the labor attaché, who was Irv Lippe. There were two during my five years. Both of them had long experience with the AFL-CIO. Of course, the AFL-CIO relationship with the trade unions in Britain was politically terribly important. The labor attaches worked very closely with me. They were not at all exclusive, keeping me at arm's length. I not only attended the annual Labour Party conference in Blackpool, but also the annual TUC conference and was introduced to the top trade union leaders. That was all fun. I asked Bill if I could also establish a relationship with the Liberal Party. Nobody took the Liberal Party seriously or paid any attention to it. He was only too happy I wanted to do it. That provided a very interesting additional dimension.

Q: Let's talk about when you were there. How did we view the Labour Party at that time? Who were the characters? What were the American views of the various stands that it was taking?

WOESSNER: How did we view it? Different people viewed it different ways. I remember the briefing I got in INR. One of the insights the briefer gave me was, "Just remember that the TUC, the British labor movement, has not had its Bad Godesberg." By that, he meant that they had not reached the fundamental position that others in Germany had reached, rejecting socialism and such. There was still this ideological hang-up in the Labour movement and there were some very wild and radical people attached. I think the powers that be in Washington and certainly as far as the ambassador and Bill Galloway and others were concerned, these people were dangerous, hostile, not to be trusted. We paid lip service to the idea that they were the government in opposition and had to be treated as such and we didn't take sides. But in fact, that wasn't true. In my own experience with the Labourites - this may be a slight overstatement - but down deep, you scratch a little bit, most of them (and I'm excluding the extreme left) were more pro-American than the Tories. The Tories still had a lot of the class attitudes and the regret of the loss of empire and viewing the American upstarts with suspicion and so on. This was a generational thing and among younger Tories you didn't come across that so much. But Labourites still had a lot of time for Americans. One of their heroes was Hubert Humphrey - a personal hero of mine as well. I did cultivate very good relationships. I was down at the House of Commons a lot. Many an evening I would spend in the gallery. The rules of the House prohibit members on the floor from acknowledging the presence of anybody in the galleries, but I had a number of MPs who would look up to where I sat and then they would bend the elbow, which indicated I should meet them at the bar. Then they would give me a running brief as to what exactly was going on on the floor or what the implications of some of these things were.

We entertained a lot, my wife and I. She was just marvelous. I had no representational allowance, of course, but we entertained at home. She did the cooking and served, the kind of thing unheard of nowadays. But then, as at every stage in my career, she was a major factor in whatever success I had in working the scene.

Q: During this 1972-1977 period, who were the leaders of Labour?

WOESSNER: Harold Wilson, of course, who came up on the left. This was so traditional. I see the same thing happening now with Gerhardt Schroeder in Germany. In the "party of the left" you come up on the left and then once you've got the leadership, you steer resolutely towards the center because that's where elections are won. Harold Wilson was past master at that. I spent a lot of time covering the fight over joining the European Union [EC]. Roy Jenkins was the leader of that part of the party. Harold Lever, Shirley Williams. It was sad to watch but literally on that issue the best people in the Labour Party were destroyed. One by one, they came undone, either domestically lost their seats or were exiled to a meaningless job in Brussels and so forth.

Q: When you say "the best people," these are the people who saw this as where Britain had to go.

WOESSNER: That's right. Some of the opposition was quite rational and based on the idea a cold shower is all well and good and healthy but not if it results in pneumonia. So there was concern that Britain wasn't remotely ready. There was that element. One of the most vehement opponents of going into Europe was one of the most conservative people in the Party and that was Douglas Jay, whose son Peter was appointed ambassador to Washington by Callahan, but that is another story. I spent a lot of time on the European issue and reporting on it and what it was doing to the Labour Party. There was a fair bit of interest in that back in Washington.

Q: You were saying that you saw that the forces within the Labour Party – were these the union types who were chewing up those that wanted to-

WOESSNER: A lot of them were beholden to the unions. But again even in the unions you had some very conservative elements. The two biggest unions were quite radical. You had the system of party conferences, the bloc voting. The way they went, the conference would go. The most exciting time was when the renegotiation took place. Oliver Wright was the primary negotiator and he and Wilson together combined to work out the terms. Even more exciting was the change in government. It was the coal miners who brought down Ted Heath. I lived through that winter when all the lights went out in Britain. I was there when they won the election, when Labour dumped Ted Heath and Harold Wilson came in. I was down at Transport House the next morning with mobs and mobs of people. My wife was watching on television. She saw me going into a private session with the Labour leaders. One of my Party friends had brought me in and there I was when they were having their first planning session. I was well placed with the Labour Party because I had key contacts everywhere, which during the years that they were in office was great fun. So, there was that. There was the fight for the heart and soul of the party. We were at a miners' gala in

Durham one year and it was traditional that the head of the party, whether he was in office or out of office, would attend the gala. Harold Wilson was Prime Minister by this time. He attended the gala. We were each required to stand and do a solo song. Somebody did "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." Harold Wilson stood up and said that the only song he knew was "On Ilkley Moor Bar T'at" and he needed somebody to sing it with him. There was silence in the room. Then I heard a female voice say, "Well, I know that." I looked and said, "Oh, my God, my wife!" She stood up and sang "on Ilkley moor" to which Wilson responded "bar t'at." Ilkley Moor is a moor in Yorkshire and "bar t" means "without my hat." A totally dumb and meaningless song. I said to my wife afterwards, "That rumbling sound you heard was your father rolling in his grave." She was seated next to one of the communist labor leaders, Nick McGahey, who was a Scot and a rogue of the worst kind. These were unregenerate old-line Stalinists, make no bones about it. He proceeded to tell her how they were going to take over the government. "We will just squeeze and squeeze." She came to our room that night absolutely terrified. He was just outlining the same thing I was used to from New York politics in the '40s and the '50s. If you stay late enough at the meetings, all people who get to bed at a decent hour go home and then in the closing hours you pushed through some totally unacceptable resolution you never could have gotten passed otherwise. Those kinds of tactics they were applying in the trade union. It gained really key positions. Certainly that did give pause to people back in Washington.

There were other fun things to do. The Liberal Party was grateful to have somebody from the American Embassy finally interested in them. These were the days of Jeremy Thorpe and before David Steele came on. There were a lot of good people in the Liberal Party, but because of the first-pass-the-post system in Britain, they never really had a chance. I see that's all being reformed now. The politics in Britain will never be the same after Tony Blair. I was a regular at their Welsh Party congresses and a group took me aside one day and actually asked if I would stand as a candidate for one of the seats. I thought that was rather touching.

Q: Were there any major issues at that time between the U.S. and Britain?

WOESSNER: There must have been over a period of five years. Our relationship was not uneventful and there were major things at stake and weapons systems, intelligence sharing, and nuclear issues. There was always a certain ambivalence in Washington. We trusted the British and worked with them more closely than with anybody else, no question about that, but there were still limits on how far we would go, which was understandable.

Q: This was during the high time of Henry Kissinger. Was there a difference in view of Kissinger and Nixon that you'd get from the Labour side and the Tory side?

WOESSNER: No, I can't say that. Obviously, they would have preferred a Democrat in the White House. But, no. What was noticeable in Britain as elsewhere in Europe was the incredulity over Watergate. That was much more marked. "You're not serious. You're not going to dump your President." I remember my contact at the Soviet embassy. We had regular meetings. He was genuinely alarmed. When we were getting near the end and it was obvious which way it was going, I said, "No, you really need to prepare. The President

is not going to survive this." They never understood that. Years later, I would still hear that.

Q: "They" being who?

WOESSNER: The British, the Europeans. It was that more sophisticated Realpolitik approach to things. It's the same thing when there are scandals regarding amorous goings on in the White House. "Americans are so ridiculous, so childish." But concerning Watergate, they could not understand the seriousness with which we regarded the abuse and betrayal of power. So, that was more noticeable than anything that they didn't like in Kissinger or in Nixon. I would say that Kissinger was widely respected. They didn't always agree with him.

Q: Well, he was European in a way.

WOESSNER: It wasn't so much that but rather that he was a global thinker. There were policies and themes undergirding those policies. Of course, Europeans always wanted to be consulted more than they ever were. You couldn't consult enough. They defined consultation to be more meaningful than the cursory bits and pieces we would give them. There would be an occasional sore place over that.

Q: There was always this famous thing when Henry Kissinger was told something and told, "We should consult Europe" and he said, "What's their telephone number?"

WOESSNER: There were so many parts of Europe going in so many different directions.

Q: Did you find a difference in the relationship when Harold Wilson's government took over as far as our embassy goes?

WOESSNER: Walter Annenberg was succeeded by Elliot Richardson.

Q: Annenberg left in '74.

WOESSNER: Halfway through the Nixon term.

Q: Was there a difference when Elliott Richardson became the ambassador?

WOESSNER: The first difference was, I remember Jim Callahan saying that now they had an ambassador they could talk to as an ambassador. He had made no bones about the fact that with Walter Annenberg, you couldn't rely on private conversations being relayed back to Washington. Annenberg just didn't do that. It either went through Earl Sohm or Bill Galloway or more likely it went through the Washington Embassy. But they were very pleased to have Elliott Richardson as ambassador. He only lasted a year. Although he was very active, I always felt he hadn't begun to deploy his full intellectual powers, which were considerable, because he was still investing a lot of time writing a book. It was sheer joy to be at Elliott's staff meetings. The intellectual power of the man and his utter decency. He was just a wonderful human being. He was very well liked. He didn't want to go back.

Gerry Ford called him. In fact, he was at our house for a small dinner and he was called to the telephone. It was the White House. I went and I got him. Ford asked him to come back to be Secretary of Commerce and said he needed him for his reelection campaign. That turned out to be totally misleading. I don't know what was going on at the Washington end, but perhaps they needed to find a spot for Anne Armstrong. She came from the Armstrong ranch in Texas and was a big contributor. But exactly what the internal politics were, I don't know. Elliott did go back to be Secretary of Commerce but was not used in the campaign.

Q: The Secretary of Commerce is no position for anything.

WOESSNER: Right. You could do that nominally but be given a portfolio that says, "Help me raise money." But that wasn't what it was all about. Elliott was really disappointed to have only one year in London and be yanked out. Armstrong was totally different. The DCM by this time was Ron Spiers, who had a wonderful relationship with Elliott and really functioned as the DCM. He was in despair at his early dealings with Anne Armstrong and with her people. I was afraid we were heading into a major disaster. The first couple weeks were tense. I wasn't sure that Ron would stay or that she would keep him. Like so many political appointees, she brought with her somebody from Washington as a security blanket. But I have to tell you, within a year, she turned into one of the most effective ambassadors I have ever seen. She had tremendous personal charm and grace, great people skills, a wonderful way of remembering everybody's name and things associated with them, taking the time to pay attention to junior people at the embassy with small gifts and little tokens of appreciation. That may seem superficial, but it was part of her style of working. She entertained very well but, most of all, she valued the embassy staff and knew how important they were, knew how to use them and when and how to take their advice. Within short order, she didn't need a security blanket or anything else. That was a surprising development. I remember the day she went to the Palace to present her credentials. That was shortly after she got there, within the first month. By that time, we were already feeling very comfortable with Anne to the point that when we were all decked out in our white tie and tails on the steps of the embassy and the coaches came up front, she was in a beautiful yellow dress, the yellow rose of Texas, and I said to the others, "Okay, this is what we're going to do," and we stood at the top steps on this very solemn occasion, a festive, beautiful day, and we held hands and sang "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody" and danced a soft shoe routine as we escorted her down the stairs. She just loved it. That was Anne Armstrong. When she left post, Ron Spiers and the country team gave a small, intimate party for her and her husband and we just fell all over her.
Then came Kingman Brewster. Unfortunately, by that time, I had my orders to go back to Washington. I had the privilege of going around paying calls with him. By then, I was the political counselor. I went with him to see this key figure in the opposition named Maggie Thatcher. Who could have seen what a powerful force she would become?

Q: When did Wilson come in?

WOESSNER: Heath was there when I arrived in 1972.

Q: The Labour Party was in?

WOESSNER: The election came after the coal miners strike. That toppled Ted Heath and Wilson came in. Callahan was his foreign secretary. Then when he stepped down for reasons of health, I was still there when Callahan succeeded him as Prime Minister. I remember Wilson saying at the time that he would in no way sit on Callahan's shoulder or second-guess him or make comments or so except on Israel. That was the one issue on which he felt so strongly that if the Labour Party were to do anything to make a move against Israel, he would feel morally obliged to speak out.

Q: Where did that come from?

WOESSNER: No idea. Otherwise, Wilson struck me as a man of no great moral principle. He was a tactician, very good at that.

Q: The miners and the unions_ I've never served in Great Britain and this has not been a matter of my professional concern, but they always struck me as being a great hindrance to Great Britain and that Maggie Thatcher by knocking them out did a tremendous service despite everything else.

WOESSNER: That's not unfair. And Tony Blair picked up the pieces. Trade unions are no longer running the Labour Party.

Q: How did we view the unions?

WOESSNER: Just as you've described them, troglodyte, backward looking, and infiltrated with some very dangerous, pro-communist elements. But the big industries were in a period of inexorable decline. The unions desperately tried to hold on to jobs and resisted anything that would have overhauled either the great social welfare system that had been erected in 1945-1951, the entitlements, or any reform of control of the Labour Party. This was true not just of these radicals but also the more traditional trade union leaders. Arthur Scargill was truly a radical and a dangerous one. At the other end of the ideological spectrum was Joe Gormley, leader of the miners. The labor attaché took me over to meet with him. It was after midnight at a party conference. He was very pro-American, old fashioned in that way. But the miners had a privileged position in the whole hierarchy of British labor and they had the wherewithal to hold on to that. They could and did on more than one occasion cripple the economy. They held the economy and the government hostage. I said, "Good evening. Pleased to meet you." I was a new man and this was my introduction to a Labour Party conference. He said, "What do you drink?" I politely declined. He said, "If you want to sit here and talk with me, you'll drink with me." He could consume two bottles of whiskey in a night, that's how far along he was. A big, strong, burly guy, tough as nails. P.S. I had a beer.

Q: On the security side, were we concerned about Labour Party ties to the Kremlin?

WOESSNER: Oh, sure. That's what I mean by the nervousness, the mistrust. But some of

the worst spy cases occurred with the Tory government, so there was a general unease in the intelligence community. How far you could trust them. We had so close a community of interest and there were so many ways in which we shared tasks – they would do it or we would do it – so there was a lot of the relationship that was in our interest to cultivate and pursue, but how did you guard against the rogue elements. That is a thread that runs through the Anglo-American relationship in the whole postwar period.

Q: What about the press? How did you view them as a political officer?

WOESSNER: There was the yellow press, which by American standards is so scurrilous it's unbelievable. The things they were allowed to get away with were just terrible. But the more serious press, "The Times," "The Guardian," even some of the locals, such as "The Manchester Guardian" (which became "The Guardian"), "The Glasgow Herald," maintained a very high standard of journalism. "The Guardian" and "The Observer" tended to be more liberal, left-wing, and The Times more conservative but all of them respectable.

Q: I know that Annenberg before your time was given a very difficult time by the press.

WOESSNER: Remember the story briefly. He embarrassed himself when he presented his credentials. The Queen asked how things were and he gave her a very elaborate, convoluted answer about the work that was going on at Winfield House. He paid for the whole thing and it was redone from top to bottom. The walls were redone with paper that was brought from a castle in Scotland. It was done to exquisite taste and at great personal expense. It turned out to be a triumph when it was finally ready, but in those early months there was a lot of turmoil out at Winfield House. Because of Annenberg's speech impediment and a life spent in elocution lessons, overcoming a stutter that he had as a young man, he had been taught to speak in a certain way which was rather stilted and which used big words when smaller words would have done. He came across that way while newsmen and cameras were present for his presentation of credentials. The meeting was then included in a documentary called "A Day in the Life of the Queen" and shown in movie theaters across Britain sometime thereafter. It produced gales of laughter from audiences, especially Annenberg's reference to the "refurbishment" of the embassy. The press then seized on that and he became a figure of ridicule. It was so bad, at least according to the biography I read, he gave serious thought to going back, fearing that he couldn't be useful to the administration. Nixon wouldn't hear of it. Annenberg overcame all of that. He left very highly respected. The politicians knew that he was not a traditional ambassador, but there were things that he did do that he did very well, gifts he made for Chequers, a big addition, the book he financed on Westminster Abbey, which was a stunning work. He did lots of good things. He entertained well. But most endearing was a farewell luncheon he gave at Winfield House for the trade union leaders and he began by making reference to the refurbishment of the embassy and his early gaffe. By that time, he was able to laugh at it and make a joke of it. Of course, the British just loved that. His stiffness had evaporated. He ended on a very high note. Not a traditional ambassador, but a lot of popular appeal.

Q: I take it you found that dealing with the Labour members, you had already established

your personal credentials early on. How about with the Tories? Did you find this a different kettle of fish?

WOESSNER: The relationships probably were not as personal, warm, and intense, but they were perfectly cordial and I had a number of friends in the Tory Party even though I had been poaching on somebody else's territory at the time. Then being political counselor opened a lot of avenues. That was enough to get me in where I needed to go. But you're right, there was something about those first relationships that you established while the Labour people were in opposition. When they became ministers or junior ministers, they didn't forget, and that was nice. That paid off in a lot of things that were shared with me that made for good reporting back home.

Q: You left Britain in 1977. Whither?
WOESSNER: I came back to Washington to be the country director for Central Europe, which covered Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. I didn't particularly want to come back to Washington because I knew it would be financially a major blow and we had three kids in college by this time – or two and a third rising. I came back in 1977. I was only in the Department for about a year and nine months. That was an interesting time. I didn't like working in the State Department. When I came back years later to be Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, it was even more pronounced. It was the sterility of the constant warfare between the State Department and the Pentagon, the State Department and the NSC, the State Department and the CIA, all of those agencies with one another. Nothing ever seemed to be resolved permanently. It was just put on ice. I don't remember the issue anymore, but it was something that we had been fighting with the Pentagon a long time and finally a presidential memorandum came out which settled it. Within a week, I was doing something pursuant to the new memorandum and the Pentagon objected. They said, "That is not what the President really meant" and there we went all over again. That kind of thing. I was only there for a year and a half. I liked working with the German Embassy. We had a wonderful relationship. The ambassador was Berndt von Staden. He and I remain close friends to this day. The embassy there has always had their best diplomats. I was so impressed with how well they knew Washington and how they were able to cover the crazy quilt of American politics.

Q: Were you able to pick up at that time_ Helmut Schmidt was the head of state and Jimmy Carter was the President.

WOESSNER: It was absolutely venomous. Helmut Schmidt didn't suffer fools gladly. He certainly didn't suffer pious politicians gladly. Jimmy Carter was no fool, but he certainly came across as a real pious person. The chemistry was just awful. Schmidt could be bad, really bad, in his personal relationships, the way he treated people. There were examples of rudeness, discourtesy. I remember a lady in his cabinet saying, "You don't want to take that so seriously. He treats us even worse." Schmidt was the chancellor and he never lost an opportunity to bitch, moan, and criticize the President. Jimmy Carter, for his part, you have to assume there was no love lost, but I'm not aware of any occasion on which he badmouthed the chancellor. It was a one way street. After every flare-up, they would be brought together and have a wonderful talk. The aides would all go around saying, "This is

a new beginning for a relationship" and in a matter of weeks, Schmidt would be back in his office and it would start all over again. But the nadir of the relationship was the neutron bomb. The neutron bomb was not a bomb; it was a weapon. We wanted to develop it and deploy it and the Europeans had a lot of misgivings. Schmidt was crucial to the whole effort to sell it to the other Europeans. Carter leaned on him heavily and against his better judgement and at some political cost domestically, Schmidt went along and the Europeans endorsed the idea. Then you know the famous story where Jimmy Carter knelt at his bedside one night, said his prayers, talked to God, and the next morning woke up and decided he couldn't do this, that it was an immoral weapon. Just a stunning turnaround which to this day nobody has explained satisfactorily to me. It was my happy chore to call Berndt von Staden and say, "Could you come down right now? The Secretary wants to see you." "Oh, yes, be right there." He came. I went to the entrance and met him. Going up in the elevator, he whispered to me, "What's going on? What is this about?" I said, "It's about the neutron bomb." I probably shouldn't have done that. He was my friend. He looked at me and I made a thumbs down. The color literally drained out of Berndt's face and at that moment, the door opened, he walked out, and walked off with the Secretary. Of course, Schmidt never forgave him. In fact, I think the Europeans generally after that had no confidence in the reliability of our promises. It was a long time before anybody went out on a domestic limb for us.

Q: I've interviewed somebody who was in our embassy in Bonn at the time. He said he could hardly wait to vote against Carter at the next election.

I just want to add to this that the neutron bomb was an enhanced radiation weapon that was nuclear and emitted a lot of rays which killed people but didn't destroy buildings. From a military point of view, this makes a lot of sense. It doesn't leave a lot of rubble. It was portrayed as a typical capitalist weapon, protecting property and killing people.

WOESSNER: Also, it was to be deployed in Europe.

Q: Did you find that at your level at the German embassy and the rest of the diplomatic establishment spent a lot of time trying to keep the Schmidt-Carter thing from disturbing relations?

WOESSNER: It was a factor, but life went on. There was such a mutuality of interest that the relationship had to succeed. Professionally, it was very satisfying. I had many completely confidential conversations with the German ambassador or his deputy. It was always honored, respected. To my knowledge, there were no betrayals of confidence. In that job because of the job, there were a lot of other embassies that wanted to see me. There was a Soviet who took me to lunch once a month. That was always fun.

Q: What would we do with the Soviets? At this time, relations were supposedly getting better. We were thinking of commercial relations.

WOESSNER: Yes. I probably should have gone back to the Exchange Department and gotten a job. What did I do with the Soviets? It was just information sharing. They clearly

were pumping us. As a general rule, in London, in Washington, and in Bonn, I never played games with Soviet diplomats, nor did I let myself in for sterile arguments. Once they started down that road, I said, "I know what you're going to say and you know what I'm going to say, so let's skip that." I'm not talking about giving away secret information, but I think it's far better that they are informed about the real situation and how we really think and what priorities are than that they operate on misunderstanding. That's just self evident to me. I had no problem in those relationships. They were fine. That goes all the way back to my time in Vienna as a new officer from 1957-1959. There was a Soviet who told me he had been assigned to me. We stayed in touch afterwards for a while until it became politically difficult for him. He was one of the early Khrushchev supporters, professing that everything was going to be different. Unfortunately, not so.

Q: What about Switzerland and Austria? Did they raise much of a blip on our policy radar?

WOESSNER: Yes. I'm sorry to say that the biggest thing you had to deal with in those countries were the ambassadors we sent there. They were such embarrassments, especially to Switzerland. The stories will make your head turn. One went to jail later and the other just got into one sexual scandal after another. I managed to have two in one tour there. The guy in Vienna was also an embarrassment. It's just not right. I have never subscribed to the notion that only career people should head embassies. I have known too many political appointees who were excellent. But I do believe that it's criminal to send people out who have no qualifications and are an embarrassment to the country. One we sent to Norway while I was principal deputy assistant secretary. The acting secretary patted me on the back when he left and said, "Make sure you make him look good." That's what you do an awful lot of the time when you're in the field. The DCM is making the ambassador look good. That's not right. I can't think of one single thing that is more destructive of morale than that.

Q: Was there anything else that developed during this relatively brief time, 1977-1979, with Germany?

WOESSNER: I was there until May of 1979. The one thing I remember most dramatically from my last months in the State Department was a call from the Federal Credit Union when they told me my credit had run out and I couldn't borrow any more money. That was the same week that Walter Stoessel called me from Bonn and told me Frank Meehan was getting his own embassy. Frank was the DCM. Stoessel asked if I would come out and be his DCM. It is the only time in my years in the Foreign Service that I didn't consult with my wife first. I knew what her answer would be. I said, "Walter, I'd be honored to be your DCM. I accept with pleasure" and that was that. But that was the spring of 1979.

Q: We'll pick this up then.

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Today is January 18, 2000. Let's start in 1979 when you went out to Bonn. You were in

Bonn as DCM from when to when?

WOESSNER: From May of 1979 until July of 1985.

Q: How would you describe German-American diplomatic relations in 1979?

WOESSNER: Very close of necessity. There was a deeply felt mutual dependence, much stronger on the German part than on ours, but they were essential to everything we were doing in Europe. I always used to think of it as an East-West poker game and most of the chips were in the middle of the table and getting piled higher and higher. So, the six years I was there were professionally among the most satisfying I had, not just by virtue of being DCM and charge much of that time, but there was so much going on in German-American relations.

Q: Walter Stoessel was there during most of your time?

WOESSNER: No. He was the ambassador. Frank Meehan, my old friend and former boss, was his DCM. Then Frank was getting his own embassy, so he was moving out. That is when Walter called me and asked if I'd like to be the DCM. Of course, I was delighted. Walter stayed until shortly after the election of 1980. He was called back by Al Haig to be number two in the State Department, which was a great honor for him and a recognition of what an incredible ambassador he was. Then we had a long gap. Reagan was very slow in making ambassadorial appointments. It was not until May or June that he named Arthur Burns to come out and be ambassador. I was charge there for about a six months stint. Arthur Burns stayed as ambassador until 1985. I was still there when he left. I was charge and then Rick Burt was named the new ambassador, but I left before he came out. Jim Dobbins was his DCM and Jim succeeded me.

Q: Let's take the Stoessel period. How did Stoessel operate as an ambassador and use you as the DCM?

WOESSNER: Every Foreign Service officer's dream of an ambassador. No question he was the ambassador. Very knowledgeable. The quintessential diplomatist. Highly respected. But he also was a man who had achieved an awful lot in his lifetime. He had no need to prove anything to himself or to Washington. He gave me an enormous range of responsibilities and a lot of freedom to carry them out. He was very supportive. There was no question about who called the shots on the big things. But it was a very satisfying time for me.

Q: Let's talk first about the management of the embassy. It's a huge embassy with everybody_ You have the Fish and Butterfly Agency, anything you can think of.

WOESSNER: I had no idea of the extent, but I think we counted once. There were as many as 55 different Washington agencies with a senior representative there.

Q: How did you deal with that?

WOESSNER: That is part of the challenge and part of the fun. You have oversight over all these agencies. Many of them are completely autonomous and go about doing their thing without reference to the ambassador or the DCM. As long as they're not running counter to directives or doing something that might embarrass you, that was fine. But in addition to all those agencies that you had at the embassy, there were six consulates general and there was the mission in Berlin, that all important, fascinating mission post which I knew so well from my own time there. The DCM was the supervisor and did the efficiency reports on the senior officers of all these posts.

Q: Did you have any problems with these autonomous agencies?

WOESSNER: No, I would say not. The one I found most challenging, no surprise, but also most satisfying, was CIA. They had a huge operation going on in Germany. Over those six years, I had good relationships with four successive station chiefs. They were very different. When I got there, it was George Carver. There were things that happened where they were doing something out of school, but we got that cleared up and straightened out.

Q: I would think it's always a problem, particularly when you have a large operation like that. At this time, the work ethos of the CIA, particularly the young and mid-grade officers, to recruit agents. This at a certain point becomes almost counterproductive because these are people out there trying to sign people up who maybe we shouldn't be trying to sign up. Particularly in a place like Germany where the East Germans are doing the same thing, you're both working the same field. I would think it would get both embarrassing and there would be a problem of almost traffic control.

WOESSNER: It wasn't that bad. I think I told you that in my days in Berlin, an awful lot had already dried up. Things were not so free and easy as they had been with spies and counterspies all over the place. No, the intelligence relationship was a very important one. Did CIA commit indiscretions in my time? Yes, of course they did. They had to be called on the carpet. That was hardly the rule of thumb and I never sensed an attitude of trying to get away with as much as they could. It was a fairly collaborative effort. I guess the thing that probably caused the most heartburn would be the back-channel traffic.

Q: Could you explain what this is?

WOESSNER: This is when you didn't want things to go through the State Department but get to key people in Washington. There were back channels established through CIA. The extent to which they were used for their purposes and the extent to which they were used for the ambassador's purposes sometimes could cause friction. I wouldn't want to overdramatize any of this. I was struck rather by how good the relationship was. The other thing was the relationship to the big military commands, the Air Force, the Army; they were all in Germany and headed by three or four star generals. The ambassador had a role in what they did. It's hard to convey just how fascinating and satisfying it was. Morale in the embassy was very high, a sense of being part of a team. The country team functioned very well together. Those were good years.

Q: Looking at issues, the first one that occurs to me would be the SS20 verus the Pershing missile. Do you recall that?

WOESSNER: That came a little bit later with the showdown over the deployment and the two-track decision. That really all came to a head afterwards, 1983. In 1979/80, this was the end of the Carter administration. You had things like the gas pipeline, the Germans selling to the Soviets and causing a lot of heartburn and even good friends of the U.S. like Count Lambsdorff lining up on the side of trade with the East. And also our imposition of a grain embargo.

Q: Yes, and the Olympics. This was after the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviets in December of '79.

WOESSNER: Yes. I think that whole range of issues, how one deals with the Soviet Union, the extent of the economic pressure, how much you try to coerce them through economic measures, the Germans felt we were naive and a bit misguided and they had a lot of trouble with that. In the end on the really crucial issues, they lined up with us. They didn't have much choice. But there were frictions over economic issues. I remember when I had to go and break the news about the grain embargo to the state secretary, Lautenschlager, an interesting guy, very soft-spoken, almost diffident but quite a force in the German foreign office for years. He just shook his head and said, "I fear that within a year you'll be back and will have taken this off again but the damage will have been done" meaning to our trade. That is as far as he went to voice his disappointment.

We also had issues with the Germans about the presence of our military and the extent of training activities, the popular tolerance for what we were doing, whether the timing of overflights or the extent of maneuvers. There would be a lot of sore feelings. The military was always arguing for doing everything possible and the civilians said, "Is that really necessary?" But there was that ambivalence in Germany. On the one hand, they knew we were the guarantor of their independence and security and they wanted to give us as much freedom as we needed to maintain combat readiness. On the other hand, it's a small country and densely populated and that was a huge military presence. So, those issues tended to come up again and again.

Q: We're talking about 1979-1985. Was there the feeling that the Soviet Union was a real menace or was there the feeling that they were not going to do anything?

WOESSNER: I would never go that far. There was a feeling that things had settled down. There were spheres of influence. We had indicated what we wouldn't do and what we would do or what we would defend. Berlin was a sensitive point throughout this period. But I don't think the Germans ever discounted the Soviet potential as a threat. If we were to let down our guard or if there were to be serious disunity in NATO. It never reached that kind of complacency under Schmidt and certainly not later under Kohl.

Q: In '79 when you got out there, who was the chancellor?

WOESSNER: Helmut Schmidt.

Q: Was there still a distaste on Schmidt's part for Carter?

WOESSNER: Yes, that didn't change. That characterized the whole four years. No respect, no affection. But the other thing you have to bear in mind is that Schmidt himself was coming towards the end of his useful life. George Bush had no vision? Well, Helmut Schmidt had no vision either. He was kind of going through the motions. He was respected, but there was no great affection for Schmidt in the party as there had been for Brandt in his heyday. There was a coalition government in which the strains became more and more evident that the Free Democrats were growing restive and the possibility of a switch in alliances was there even as early as the time I arrived.

Q: How did we view Genscher? I assume he was foreign minister forever.

WOESSNER: He was. He was the longest serving foreign minister in NATO. I have to confess right up front to a prejudice here. I admired Genscher enormously. I thought he was a true German patriot. He also was a great loyal friend of the West and of the United States but he recognized that there were interests that our two countries had in common and there were interests that were separate. His job as foreign minister was to advance both. He was not for the most part trusted in Washington. This seemed regardless of administration. It was a general distrust of whatever he was up to.

Q: Why was this?

WOESSNER: Because he's devious. He is very clever. He has three pillars to his foreign policy. One of course was the absolute indispensability of the Western alliance and staying close to the United States. Secondly was building up European unity. Thirdly was a very active Third World policy including foreign aid. A lot of Third World issues, especially with people like Qadhafi and things in the Middle East, the Germans were always prepared to be much more indulgent than we and they were reluctant to go along with strenuous measures when we wanted to take them. So, there was always this dual character, but I admired how well he carried it out and how he had this instinctive sense of just how far he could go in pushing Washington and when to pull back. There were people in the embassy – not the ambassador but in the Political Section – who mistrusted him and did some foolish things and had to be reined in.

Q: When you say "foolish things," can you give an idea-

WOESSNER: I mean letting it be known just how much they mistrusted Genscher. Bonn is a small town. Things used to get back to them. They would come and see me and say, "This is not smart to have one of your people going around badmouthing Genscher." I would tell him to stop. No diplomat should be doing that anyway. Part of the thing is, at all levels of the embassy, and especially among the best officers, there was a whole range of contacts with Germans right across the political spectrum in all sectors.

Q: Did you find the atmosphere there_ It's a small town and you're all sort of in bed together. But was it somewhat the way they claim Washington is inside the beltway, that you got so involved in the central government that you were losing touch with what was happening in the lander out there?
WOESSNER: Not at all. It is a cozy town and there were a lot of personal relationships that did a lot to smooth the relationship internationally. But it's a federal state and you can't lose sight of the importance of all the other capitals in Germany, publishing being in Hamburg, business interests in the Ruhr, the critical importance of Frankfurt and Berlin. After all, distances being what they were, for these Bundestag deputies to go home to their constituencies was not like flying to California. They drove down the road. It's all within a couple hours drive. So, no, I never felt that there was an inside the Beltway mentality. Small town, yes, but not that.

Q: How about the embassy's relationship with our consulates general?

WOESSNER: They were very good. The extent of the activity in these consulates general and the consular duties that had to be performed were important, but the extent of the outreach very often was a function of who the consul general was. The really good ones did a lot of political contact on their own. Munich was very sensitive because of Strauss. We had more than one consul general who had a personal relationship with Franz Josef Strauss which fed back into our own. We never tried to restrict relationships there. In Stuttgart, you had Rommel, who was a CDU maverick, but always worth cultivating. He was the mayor. Then there was Berlin. There, especially when you had a strong minister - and this dated back to the days when I was in Berlin - there was a certain reluctance on the part of the minister to take guidance from the ambassador. When you had professionals like David Anderson in Berlin and Walter Stoessel in Bonn, that was not a problem. I'm thinking back to the days when you had somebody like Arch Calhoun in Berlin and George McGhee in Bonn. Arch didn't take any advice from George McGhee. Those were healthy tensions, let me put it that way. But even in my time – and of course it's gotten more acute since – there was a constant pressure from Washington to close down the consulates general one by one for budgetary reasons. These moves were strenuously resisted by the Germans. I remember when Duesseldorf was reduced to a one-man post and then when they wanted to close Bremen in Carter's time, a mayor of Bremen and a whole delegation went to Washington to plead. "It's been here since the 18th century. How can you take it away?" So, they relented that year and the next year they didn't give any notice. They closed it overnight and that was that. But the important ones remained Frankfurt and Munich and to a lesser extent Hamburg.

Q: Talk about Berlin. During this time, particularly after the Soviet move into Afghanistan, which came as a real shocker for everyone. We also had the hostage crisis in Iran, which caused_ We were thinking that maybe the Soviets would move and take advantage of this and move to the Persian Gulf. Were we under particular concern about the status of Berlin during this time?

WOESSNER: No. No fear that the Soviets might do something. I think we had enough

confidence in our own strength and the solidarity of the alliance. Yes, the Russians might bring pressure to bear; you had to be on guard and counteract vigorously. But I never had the sense of the nervousness that perhaps characterized the '60s, that somehow this was a hostage to fortune. Though we were in Berlin, we planted the flag. We made clear we were staying there until the end of time the Russians be damned. The climate in Berlin could be affected by the broader East-West climate. That goes without saying. Things were a little bit more cordial, a little bit freer. But the basic relationship was not affected. The real change came when we'll get onto that other subject, when Brezhnev foolishly deployed SS20s-

Q: We're dealing with this earlier period. By this time, we had been concerned particularly during the latter stages of our involvement in Vietnam and beyond about the American military - too much drug use, problems of authority, troops were not well disciplined, etc. When you got there in '79, what was the feeling you were getting from our military commanders?

WOESSNER: We went through the phase of sensing that the Army wasn't what it had been, but there was a concerted effort to build things back up again. But that didn't reach its culmination until Ronald Reagan and the sense of pride in uniform. That came a bit later. But, yes, there was concern about combat readiness. The real issues in Germany other than the ones I talked about before – namely that our efforts to be combat ready interfered with the growing sense of civilian entitlement on the part of the German population_ The whole range of issues we had with Germans had to do more with the military staying, feeling happy in Germany, and the Germans went to great lengths in small towns and larger communities, wherever we had garrisons, to do things to make the GIs feel welcome. Of course, those efforts suffered from the fact that the very nature of the Army is that there is constant turnover. The Germans would no sooner get to know the base commander and they would get to know all the troops and there would be a rotation and another rotation. There were relationships formed between GIs and Germans over decades that were very important in the long-run German-American relationship. Today when Germans talk about that era, they lament that it's missing. So, it was more of that nature than the decline in Army morale – drugs, the other things you were talking about – that was a worldwide phenomenon and wasn't peculiar to Germany.

Q: Were you noticing a generational change in Germany? The older generation had been involved in WWII. A new generation was coming up.

WOESSNER: Yes. In fact, it was a theme in embassy discussion. I think it was Alex Klieforth, our public affairs counselor, who first heard enunciated this idea of the change in generations and the need to do something about it. It lay behind the development of such things as the Congress-Bundestag program in which the German Bundestag and the Congress - but it was pushed by the Bundestag - said, "We need to invest in our young people." They set up a high school exchange program fully funded by both governments to exchange 300 teenagers from Germany and 300 from the U.S. for a one-year homestay. It was intended as total cultural immersion to forge ties in the new generation. The older generation in which all of this was self-evident was beginning to pass from the scene. The

younger generation didn't have that personal contact.

To come back to the GIs for a moment, another thing that had changed was, in the '50s and the '60s, the income of an American soldier went a long way in Germany. With the great prosperity in Germany, by the time you got to the end of the '70s/beginning of the '80s, you had situations where if a GI had his family in Germany with him, his wife might have to go out and be a Putzfrau to a German family. This is a role reversal. GIs didn't have the disposable income to go into town and do things. More and more, they stayed on base not because they were less interested in knowing about Germany or having a good time but because they couldn't afford it. Again, this gave an impetus to the mayor, to all kinds of German civic organizations, to do things for the GIs, to make them feel welcome here. It was kind of fighting a tide and the tide was pushed by the discrepancy in income.

Q: There was another thing, too. As an enlisted man, I was in Darmstadt and Lunsberg. Although I enlisted, it was either that or be drafted. So, a significant number of young American males had served in Germany in the post-war period, but now we had a professional army and so we no longer had this tie.

WOESSNER: That is part of the weakening of the tie. The GIs who went in the heyday of all this said, "Gosh, the Germans are really not so bad. They're a lot like us." That was the attitude. A number of them married German girls. It was a close relationship. That was changing in the '70s and '80s. We in the embassy were very aware of it. We devoted a lot of time and resources to public diplomacy. One other thing by this period, the generation of '68 was coming into its own. It was the product of the famed "march through the institutions," a left-wing effort to infiltrate and take over the media, especially TV, the church (oddly enough), and institutions of higher education. Among young German intellectuals, self-styled intellectuals, it was fashionable to be highly critical of the U.S. Part of that came from the Vietnam experience, but it was a march through the institutions. We were beginning to see the fruits of that by the late '70s and early '80s. Those who had been the protestors of '68 now were in positions of middle management or other influence in the TV stations. It was a time that called for strong public diplomacy and we were fortunate to have Alex Klieforth. After Alex, Tom Tuch was there throughout the Burns era. That was a marriage made in heaven.

Q: Tourism was picking up around the world. Particularly Americans were going. It's London, Paris, and Rome, maybe the south, but Germany is almost considered to be an expensive place. Was this of concern?

WOESSNER: No. We were not in the tourism business. We were involved in improving the whole range of relationships with Germany.

Q: Tourism is one part of it. When you get a group of middle Americans who were on vacation to go to Germany, they'll come back more favorably concerned with Germany.

WOESSNER: That may be. There are limits to what an embassy can do. We did have a very active public diplomacy campaign and we did push hard for things like the

Congress-Bundestag program. It just made so much sense and the Germans wanted it. The same thing with visits from congressional delegations. All these junkets and boondoggles. I had been in London and know they poured out of the plane and they said, "Okay, boy, where is the money?" They wanted their per diem and they weren't there for any serious business. I dare say Paris and Rome were much the same. When they came to Bonn, you knew they had a serious purpose because there wasn't much nightlife in Bonn. The Germans were always pushing, especially the Bundestag deputies, "Why don't American congressmen come here in greater numbers?" The one event that would attract the stars from Washington would be the Wehrkunde conference in Munich every February. John Tower led the delegation in the early years. That was always a very serious exchange of views among thinkers and policy makers in the various NATO countries. But otherwise, top congressional leaders rarely came to Bonn. It was a source of concern to the Germans. The other side of the equation is that Bundestag deputies would flock to Washington. The poor German embassy here spent a disproportionate amount of its time on the care and feeding of Bundestag deputies and as often as not, they would go home very angry with the embassy because it had not been able to get them the level of high attention that they expected, setting up appointments. It was often very embarrassing. I experienced that from my time in the State Department working closely with the German embassy and I know from the other end in Bonn. Not good. Germany was just one more ally as far as the Hill was concerned. There was no effort to cultivate German parliamentarians or even give them much courtesy. There were notable exceptions such as Lee Hamilton, Richard Lugar, and others.

Q: What about commercial disputes? Were there concerns about too many Mercedes being sold in the U.S. or the flow of goods? Was this a problem?

WOESSNER: No, I can't recall that we would object to German exports to the United States.

Q: We were having problems with Japan.

WOESSNER: Yes, and the Japanese were everybody's favorite scapegoat. The Europeans could complain about that, too. So, we all dumped on the Japanese. But, no, the issues had much more to do with trade to third countries and the political implications of that and using trade as a political weapon. The Germans would resist those efforts and the Europeans in general would. But I can't recall that we ever complained to the Germans that they were sending too much to us. There are trade issues with the EU. That is a whole chapter unto itself. What was a restriction in trade and what was a- (end of tape)

*Q: You were saying that concern about the denial of agricultural markets through the EU_*

WOESSNER: Right. Most of those things would be handled in Brussels. That was not a major preoccupation of the embassy. Depending on the issue, we might have to lend strength to something with a demarche or so, but the embassy's focus was very heavily on political, military, and strategic issues.

Q: Was there a concern that over a period of time the Germans_ West Germany by that time had relations with East Germany, is that right?

WOESSNER: Oh, yes.

Q: That West Germany might be moving more into the neutralist camp?

WOESSNER: No, not really. That was a favorite subject that would appear now and again in some columnist's writings, but the solidarity of the Western alliance was never really called into question. There was no fear that the Germans could or would strike a deal with Moscow, exchanging trade concessions and unification for some form of neutrality.

Q: Also, looking back at the time, was the thought of Germany being unified in your lifetime thought of as a possibility?

WOESSNER: I fancied myself as being something of an expert on Germany and I KNEW that they wouldn't achieve unification in my lifetime. It was as straightforward and simple as that. I think I was still making those kind of categorical statements 12 months before the wall came down and I was out of the Foreign Service. An interesting fact about the East German-West German relationship I don't think was always fully appreciated in the West is that the GDR, East Germany, was in fact getting a free ride on the EU. It had all the advantages of membership without any of the payment. It all came through what they called "Interzonenhandel" (interzonal trade), but that was just part of an enormous subsidization of the East German economy by the West Germans. More and more and more money was poured into East Germany to alleviate the hardships of the population. There were people at the time who questioned why on earth do you want to subsidize this totalitarian regime that is so hostile? But in the end, that degree of subsidization was so heavy that it really weakened the East Germans, so when the fall came, it came hard.

Q: During this time, were we still seeing East Germany as being more of an economic powerhouse than it actually was?

WOESSNER: Yes. Our intelligence was badly at fault here. To an amazing extent, we accepted the East Germans' own claims for their economic prosperity. It always would be listed as the tenth industrial power in the world. It was all fraudulent.

Q: To what would you ascribe the whole – not just the U.S., but Great Britain, France, everybody else – how did we fall into this? It wasn't as though this was North Korea. People could get in there and see the products coming out. We could count, look, and examine.

WOESSNER: Good question. Especially when you think that we had military missions, cars, traversing the GDR all the time. They were primarily looking at military targets and things of military significance, but you're right, there is so much we should have known and didn't. But then I'm not a great believer in the value of all the intelligence we had. We never had anybody inside the Kremlin. We were never able to assess motives. We had all

the external intelligence provided by the things flying around in the sky and when troops would be moved, but real hard intelligence as to motives? No.
Q: We can't do it with our own government. Was the embassy ever involved in getting into Germany being used or letting France be in front but using it for doing things for economic trade, etc., under the guise of the European Union that we felt was not to our best interests?

WOESSNER: The German-French relationship was very special but full of ambivalence. On economic issues, the French usually took the lead and usually dictated the terms. We know that was a big issue with Britain's coming into the Market. But on some things and certainly on agriculture, there was a coincidence of interest. The Germans had their own agricultural lobby that was politically very powerful. While you could count on the French to be loud and strong, on that one, the Germans lined up.

Q: I was wondering whether_ Particularly after Arthur Burns came in_ He was the economist. Did this give a different cast to the embassy?

WOESSNER: Before I do that, I have to mention my own health. I had a dramatic turn in Walter Stoessel's last year there. I had been at post one year. I came in May of '79 and this was in June of '80. Suddenly, I became very weak. It came on rather rapidly and got so bad that one morning I couldn't even lift my right hand to shave. At that point, my wife said, "Enough is enough" and she took me down to a military hospital in Frankfurt. By the time she got me there, I could not walk and even sit up. The doctor couldn't tell for sure what I had without doing some tests. But he wanted her permission to give me some hydrocortisone because he thought he knew what I had, i.e., Addison's Disease, which is the same thing that Jack Kennedy had. He said, "If I don't do something, your husband will be in an irreversible coma within 24 hours." So, there she delivered me more dead than alive to the Army hospital and I had the injection and 24 hours later was running up and down the stairs. That was the beginning. I did have Addison's Disease. It is an auto-immune disease. They fixed me up, put me on a regime of medication, and certain do's and don'ts, all with a caution that there could be further complications. Within three months there were. At the end of that summer, I was medically evacuated to Georgetown University Hospital with the second stage of what is an autoimmune disease called Schmidt's Syndrome. The second part is Hashimoto's disease in which the thyroid sets up antibodies to itself. I was slowly killing myself. I was in hospital for two weeks. Extensive tests were run. Then I got the medication for that. I came back to post but it was very scary. I've lived with that ever since because there is no cure for it; there is only treatment.

Walter Stoessel left the following January, called back as soon as the new administration took office. I was charge until June. In May, Helmut Schmidt visited Washington. He was growing increasingly impatient, angry, at the administration for not naming a new ambassador. While Schmidt was in Washington that May, Reagan announced Arthur Burns. Schmidt was delighted. He knew, liked, and admired Arthur Burns and was just thrilled that he would be coming as ambassador. I did not know Arthur Burns. At that time, he was over at AEI [American Enterprise Institute]. He was no longer with the Fed.

Q: You might explain who Arthur Burns was.

WOESSNER: He had been advisor to several presidents and also chairman of the Federal Reserve System for eight years. He had been a distinguished scholar and wrote the definitive text on the business cycle. He was a very powerful individual, highly regarded in Washington on both sides of the aisle. At that time, he was over at AEI, a conservative think tank. Arthur Burns was certainly a fiscal conservative, but on a number of social issues he was much more liberal. I was asked to go over and call on him. Fascinating experience. I could spend hours with you talking about Arthur Burns, one of the most interesting people I've ever known, somebody whom I certainly respected from the outset and then came to love. I don't want that to suggest it was an easy relationship from the get go, but the more I came to know him and his style, the more rewarding it was. He invited me to call on him at AEI and engaged me in a lengthy conversation. He speaks slowly with a high pitch, and is continually playing with a pipe that is really a prop. He asked me lots of questions and it only slowly dawned on me that this man had a deep suspicion of the State Department, if not an outright dislike for it, because of the way he had been treated or briefed or not briefed when he went out in earlier incarnations on trips to Europe. So, no great respect for the State Department and its intellect. On the other hand, a very high regard for CIA because they had taken time with him and recognized how important this man was and gave him a serious briefing. These things come back to haunt you. Finally, we were well into the second hour of this visit when he looked at me and said, "What about you, Mr. Woessner? What are you going to be doing?" I said, "I believe that depends a lot on you. An ambassador usually picks his own DCM and it's very important that the ambassador and the DCM be in tune, in sync. He said, "I was rather hoping you would agree to stay." I said, "I would be honored to stay" and that was that, the deal was cut. What happened after that was, in the end, the State Department wouldn't let me leave. As long as he was there, they were not going to break us up even if he had been willing and then I was there after he left. That's years in the future. His other question was so revealing. He said, "What happens if the administration has a policy that I'm not in agreement with?" I said, "Of course, all Foreign Service officers are expected to carry out the policies of the government and represent them faithfully. If this is a matter of conscience, and this does happen, and were you to disagree, officers have resigned their post, but if you're asking me to what extent you're just out there as a "yes man" for the administration, I don't think the President would have asked you to go if that's what he was looking for." That is the answer he was looking for. I had early evidence of that. To give you an example, he had only been at post about three months and someone from USIA came to him and said they were putting together a three day conference at the economic institute in Kiel. It would be a joint German-American undertaking and the White House wanted him to be the keynote speaker. The theme was supply side economics. This seemed a perfectly legitimate thing to ask the ambassador to do.

Q: Of course, this was a theory of the Reagan administration.

WOESSNER: Absolutely, at least in that first year. Burns was asked by Reagan to be part of a kitchen cabinet of senior Republican economic advisors. He was flown back to the U.S. four times a year to join with these people in giving advice to the President. But here we are, in the early days, and he's asked to open this conference in Kiel. Without batting an eye,

the old man looked this officer from USIA in the face and said, "You can tell the White House to get its own whore." He was in such disagreement on the supply side economics. His whole life, he had been committed to a balanced budget and had seen these spendthrift Democrats just run up huge deficits. Now finally he had a conservative Republican in the White House and he was appalled to see the budgetary policies.

Q: Which tripled the national debt.

WOESSNER: He was the first in that group that I described to you to raise an objection and he was all alone. Over a period of two years, that group more and more joined with him until a majority of them advised Reagan that this was crazy. Then he stopped calling them back to Washington. That group just disappeared. That was Arthur Burns. He took very seriously his responsibilities as an ambassador and constantly defined and re-defined what they were. I remember saying to him, "An ambassador cannot do everything. You have many strengths and you're in a very influential position here, more than most ambassadors." He had a direct line to anybody in Washington that he ever wanted. I've never seen anything like it. Important committee chairmen in the Senate, key administration figures. A phone call from Arthur Burns went right through. There was nothing about "We'll call you back." He was a perfectionist. I said, "You have to come to some decision after you've been here a while. Identify the things you most want to do, where you think you can have the greatest impact, and then to the extent you trust me, just turn the rest of it over to me. I can administer all these things and if I need something, I'll come to you." It took a while until he felt that comfortable. I remember his first press conference. The press attaché at the embassy was having a cow. Here was Arthur Burns, who was then 79. No experience in doing this kind of thing. So afraid that somehow the ambassador would embarrass himself. The press was clamoring to meet with him. So, they had the first press conference at the residence in his living room. Maybe 20-30 carefully selected journalists were invited. They sat around. It was to be strictly off the record. Arthur Burns, without reference to the press attaché, for whom he didn't have very much respect, stood up at the outset and said, "I've never done an off the record press conference and I'm not about to start now." He then answered questions as completely as he could and with utter honesty. To many of the questions he would say things like, "I'm not sure I even understand the question. But I'll get back to you." The honesty of the man swept them away. A similar thing happened in a public forum a couple of weeks later. A man from a German think tank who was very pro-American, brilliant but enamored of his own brilliance, stood up and as Germans often do, asked a long, long question that was a speech and at the end came the question. People were uneasy with the question because it had to do with arms control, arms negotiations, and very technical details. Burns simply replied that he didn't know and he'd get back to him. People were delighted with this. That was the beginning of a romance. Arthur Burns was probably the most active ambassador that I served in public diplomacy. The speeches he gave really could be collected and were worth reading and rereading. He put an enormous amount of time and effort into his public appearances. He would fine-tune them, hone them. He had a superb command of language and a deep respect for the English language and there was never a word wasted. A lot of time and effort went into these. Frankly, it's one of the reasons that Tom Tuch stayed on as public affairs counselor after what could have been his retirement. He recognized that this

was a man who really made a difference in German-American relations and the speeches were not run of the mill things; they were things we worked on. That was part of it.

The other thing was within the embassy. I do believe his first and lasting love was being a college professor, especially of very bright graduate students. The dominating issue for the four years that he was in Bonn was the arms control and the INF negotiation, the two-track decision that we would continue to deploy the weapons at the same time negotiating for their abolition. That caused a major split in Germany. We had had the change in government by the time that came up. The SPD in opposition went very heavily against these deployments. There were major demonstrations in the streets. It was 1983. But early on, while Paul Nitze was meeting Kwizinski in Geneva for negotiations, Arthur Burns said to me, "I want you to get together the best minds of the embassy and to discuss this. I want to have a seminar on what is the national interest." He called people together and just like a college professor, he started taking us through all the things that were self-evident to us, but of course weren't all that self-evident. We had to define precisely the role of diplomacy, what the national interest was, how it was defined, how you articulate it, how you advance it, etc. It was an experience for all of us. That went on for several sessions. With that as background, we went on to the arms control negotiations. We began with a one hour exposition of the missiles, their range, trajectory, the difference in the missiles and the implications for arms control, multiple warheads, all this kind of thing. Then went on to the negotiations themselves and what were the issues that were on the table. We were getting the cables out of Geneva, 20-page detailed things that would just give you a headache trying to fathom them. Of course, Paul Nitze always came through Bonn on his way to Geneva and on his way home from Geneva. So, the Germans were very much in the picture on all this. It was just daily bread in the embassy. Burns wanted to know all these things. I will never forget the day we were talking about the issue of the British and French systems. The British and French also had missiles, nowhere near the arsenal that the two superpowers had, but we were insisting that these were not on the table in Geneva and the Soviets were insisting that they had to be counted. Finally, Burns stopped and looked up at the ceiling and said, "If I were up there somewhere looking down on this, where the British and French systems are concerned, I'd say the Soviets have a point." Of course, he was absolutely right. That was Arthur Burns. He was very active, very energetic, amazing. He was a workaholic. His staff aide used to say the nice thing about weekends was that they only had two workdays as opposed to weekdays, which had five. Burns would go into the office on Saturday morning and his secretary had to be there, God bless her, his staff aide, and the chauffeur. They were on duty all day until it was time to go home. He had a full round of engagements in Bonn and outside of Bonn. He was not much for the more frivolous things, but being Arthur Burns, he got away with things that others never would. For instance, national days, the bane of our existence. You've got more than 100 national days. Arthur Burns had perfected a system for attending. He would go in the front door, shake hands with the ambassador, congratulate him, and turn around and leave. That was the extent. He never circulated. Their dinner parities were much sought after, but people would eat before they'd go because they had Menu A and Menu B. It was always the same. Arthur Burns didn't know or care anything about wine. There were some diplomats in town who had made their reputation on the hosting of these elaborate dinners. His were very Spartan, but the intellectual meal that was served up was always first rate. Hans Dietrich

Genscher had no respect for ambassadors and no time for them. Arthur Burns and the Soviet ambassador were the two exceptions. It used to drive the other ambassadors nuts, including the British and the French, because Genscher was really bad in that regard. Burns cultivated the Soviet ambassador. He was an older man. They would often have private sessions - two old men talking to one another as world statesmen. It worked well. He also had a very special relationship with Helmut Schmidt. Then came the Wende when the Free Democrats switched sides and Helmut Schmidt left office. There is this famous picture. Burns was there for Schmidt's farewell and he went up and embraced him and the two men were crying. This kind of public display of emotion and affection and the new chancellor coming in_ People were saying, "This is not smart." The first thing that Burns did, he and Mrs. Burns got together with Kohl and Hannelore and they went off by themselves and he developed a good relationship with Kohl based on mutual respect and a fair degree of intimacy. He never had that relationship with Hans Dietrich Genscher. He didn't trust him. It was a correct relationship and it was not an impediment to his working as an ambassador, but there was no love lost there.

Also an interesting footnote. He once said to me about his relationship with the White House, "You know, people think I'm close to the President. I'm not at all, but as long as they think that, that's fine." He also had a passion for detail which could drive you nuts. I can remember times when he'd ask me to do something and I would do it and he'd say, "Was I sure?" I'd say, "Of course I'm sure. I told so and so to do it." He would say, "You'd better check again and go back and see if they've really done it." I had to go back and check. Then he'd say, "You check once and you check twice. I want you to check a third time." Or the time there was a very good officer in the Economic Section and there was something he had to do. Burns instructed him and then asked me "Is that going to be alright?" I said, "Absolutely." He said, "How do you know?" I said, "I trust the man." He said, "You trust him. I have no basis for trusting him." It was that kind of maddening attention to detail. It took time before he was finally comfortable in his role as ambassador. One notable blowup was with Larry Eagleburger. Burns wanted a message to go to Eagleburger that nobody else was supposed to see. Larry had established a special channel for Burns, but as we know, even the special channels go awry. This concerned an economic financial matter, dear to Burns' heart.

Twenty-four hours after he sent it, it appeared on the front page of "The Wall Street Journal." I don't think I've ever seen Arthur Burns so angry. I had assured him that this would go directly to Larry. He got on the blower to Larry and Larry just ate humble pie. It had been through the Op Center and somebody had leaked it. It was one of those NODIS "burn before reading" things. The result of that was Larry then established a yet more private back channel. Burns was zealous in guarding secrecy. He also was zealous in preserving his prerogatives. As he would say to me, "If you let the little things go, soon the big things will slip way, too." The loyalty to him was just fanatic in the embassy, a tremendous sense of pride working for him. He was genuinely loved all over Germany.

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Q: Today is February 11, 2000. You had two footnotes that you wanted to put in.

WOESSNER: One had to do with the time I was on the watch and specifically the night that the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia.

Q: August 1968.

WOESSNER: I had just taken over the watch when I got a telephone call from the UN from Bill Buffum, who was the number two up there. He said, "This is Ambassador Buffum. I'd like to speak to the Secretary." I said, "I'm sorry, the Secretary's not in the building right now. In fact, he's heading downtown to testify before the Democratic National Committee." We were getting geared up for the election. He said, "Let me talk to the Deputy Secretary." I said, "He's on vacation up in New England." He said, "Let me speak to the Executive Secretary." I said, "Actually, he's with the Secretary heading down." "Goddammit," he said to me, "Take this down." He gave me a message saying that the Warsaw Pact had invaded Czechoslovakia and that he had found out from the Spanish ambassador to the UN. Explanation? The Soviets had delivered messages to governments around the world but they had no diplomatic relations with Spain. So, they chose the UN as the forum to deliver the message. Apparently, the Soviet ambassador was just a little bit ahead of schedule. So, Buffum relayed the word to us in the State Department. That is how the news came in. Five minutes later, a CRITIC came in, the only CRITIC during my two years in the Operations Center. After that, all hell broke loose. I just thought it was interesting, a funny way to get the news.

The second one was, you had been asking about the left wing in Britain, especially in the Labour Party. I got a telephone call on the last day before the Christmas break. In Britain, especially England (not so much in Scotland), they take Christmas very seriously. They celebrate both Christmas Day and Boxing Day. My recollection is that this was a Friday, but I may be mistaken. In any event, I was still in the embassy when most people had cleared out. A phone call came through. The operator didn't know what to do with it. It was from Judith Hart. She was a well-known self-styled leftist Member of Parliament, one of those people who fancied themselves. I hate to sound cynical, but unlike McGahey and the communists, who knew who they were, with her there was a lot of posturing. She said that she and Peter Shore, who was another member of Parliament and a very prominent anti-marketeer - both of them were in the Labour Party – and the Bishop of Stepney and other similar luminaries wanted to present a petition to the embassy the next morning, Christmas morning, protesting what we were doing in North Vietnam.

Q: This was Haiphong.

WOESSNER: Right. I said, "Well, there is nobody here now." She argued that if all these important people were prepared to give up Christmas morning to come and deliver a protest, surely the embassy could receive them. I said, "I have no idea who might come to receive you, but if all else fails, I'll come. I'm pretty low on the totem pole here." I think I was first secretary. She harrumphed a little bit but settled for that. Sure enough, nobody else wanted to have anything to do with this crew. My wife was not pleased with me that I had agreed to do this. So, I went to the embassy. I was a little bit early. The police started to put up barricades and a few people were gathering. I spotted Joe Ashton, yet another

Member of Parliament, but real salt of the earth, a great guy who had to curry favor with the left but was all rather cynical about it all. So, I went over, chatted with him. We were standing there between the lines and he said, "Well, Rent a Crowd is getting ready to assemble." Then when we got close to the appointed time, he said, "I guess we should go to our respective positions and get ready for this charade." He later went to the States on an International Visitor Program, a very good experience. Sure enough, two by two, these people proceeded up the steps. I had set up a table in the lobby. The Marine guards were there. Then they presented this petition of protest. Yes, the first few were members of Parliament. Then there were some trade union leaders. Then there was the Bishop of Stepney and who knows who else. Then it started to get rather ragtag. It was a long line. They kept coming, two by two. Soon, I was getting scraps of paper and things written on the back of envelopes. It went on for more than a half hour. It began to get ludicrous. I wasn't sure how to turn this off without giving them a grievance. So, I went out and talked to Judith. I said, "We take your protest seriously and I will be sending all of this to Washington, but frankly, it will dilute your message if the things that go besides the petition from you and the first two include all these scraps of paper and things hastily written and rather poor." She saw the wisdom in that. They agreed to terminate the demonstration and went on their way. A prime example of ludicrous posturing on the part of the left.

Q: Did the Soviet Union ever suffer any demonstrations?

WOESSNER: Not that I remember, not in my years.

Now we bring it back up to the years of Arthur Burns.

Q: These were from when to when?

WOESSNER: I was in Bonn from '79-'85. Walter Stoessel was called back at the beginning of '81 to be Deputy Secretary. The ensuing interregnum irritated Helmut Schmidt no end. It was only during a Schmidt visit to Washington in May that the President announced Arthur Burns' appointment. Burns came out in June for 10 days and then was gone for the rest of the summer. He always went to his home in Vermont in the summer. He came back and really took up office in September. That was September of '81. He stayed until the beginning of '85. The year of the missile was '83. That was an exciting summer. After he left, I was again charge. I was charge frequently during the years Burns was there. I think I told you I added up more than a year and a half of time as charge. Then Rick Burt was named- (end of tape)

I had my farewell party on the Fourth of July reception. It was a grand occasion. Perfect weather. Then Jim Dobbins came. He was the new DCM and was charge until Rick Burt arrived and presented his credentials. I went back to the State Department in the summer of '85.

Q: Were there any things that you recall that we should be talk about about Arthur Burns and German? Then we'll talk about the discotheque problem and the missile crisis.

WOESSNER: I regard him as truly extraordinary and it was a privilege (and I use the word advisedly) to serve under him. I was happy, blessed, to have a number of really outstanding ambassadors during my career. I have never subscribed to the idea that somehow only career FSOs should be ambassadors. Obviously, when they have the qualifications, they should have a fair shot at that, but there are some extraordinary people from private life that come in. I had Elliott Richardson as ambassador in London and Arthur Burns as ambassador in Germany. They were able to do things; they had access to things that career ambassadors very often could not have. I thought serving Burns was a real privilege. I would say he was universally admired and liked in Germany. You asked about his appeal to the intelligencia, the intellectuals, and so on. Like so many in Europe, they tended to have an anti-American bias on most things. Burns was never included in that. He was genuinely respected. His speaking engagements were always very well attended. His speeches and his written things got a lot of high level attention. I may have mentioned that Tom Tuch, public affairs counselor, stayed on beyond the time he could have retired for the sheer pleasure and privilege of being able to articulate things through Burns, not that Burns dealt with other people's material as his own. He really worked everything over. When he gave a speech, you worked on it and you worked on it and it was redrafted and redrafted and he honed it and was very particular about the English language and the words he used and the precise meaning. There were no unnecessary words in a Burns speech. So, for a public affairs counselor, and for all of us to participate in this kind of thing, you knew you had an impact on the public diplomacy in that country. That was very satisfying.

Q: Did we talk about the relationship with Schmidt?

WOESSNER: I think we did, the extent to which they were really close friends. There was a great mutual admiration there dating back to the days when Burns was at the Federal Reserve. Schmidt was absolutely delighted when Burns was named. There was a move in the State Department at the last minute to shift Burns somewhere else. I forget who they wanted to send to Bonn. Burns just cut that off. He wasn't interested in anything else. He was going to Germany and that was that. Burns did have instant access in Germany to anybody who counted for anything in banking or finance. He had instant access to anybody back in Washington. A phone call would be placed to Senator So and So and it was not "He'll call you back." You went right through.

Q: During this time, you were Burns' DCM. Did he have any concerns, disquiet, about both Germany and France and their social support system? As an economist, the social benefits prove to be quite a burden.

WOESSNER: It was not a dominant theme with Arthur Burns. He was far more concerned about the Reagan economic policy. No, he didn't hammer away at the Germans and the French and their social net. He did often talk about the contrast between the work ethnic in Germany in the post-war period and his personal experiences of it and how that had been attenuated in many ways. But that was not a dominant theme with Arthur Burns.

Q: Given your background, were you given any reflection about what Margaret Thatcher

was doing to Great Britain? Was there a compare and contrast? She seemed to be confronting the trade union problem head on.

WOESSNER: No question. She made a lasting change in British politics. You see Tony Blair today and you can see he inherited something very different from what Margaret Thatcher inherited. She was a strong personality. By and large, Arthur Burns approved of the things she was doing in Britain. The interesting take we would get on it in Germany had less to do with the domestic changes vis à vis the unions or the social net and more to do with the role of Britain in Europe and what a very difficult partner Maggie Thatcher was. There was no love lost between Schmidt and Thatcher or Kohl and Thatcher or anybody in the top hierarchy of the German government. Maggie could be a sore trial. It was interesting when you had the Falkland War [1981]. Because of EC solidarity, publicly, the Germans supported or did not criticize what the British were doing in the Falklands, but privately there was an enormous amount of heartburn. It was hard to explain, but the Germans were simultaneously attracted and repelled by the idea of using force to achieve a political objective. Military force was something only to be held in reserve, but God forbid anybody should ever use it. When this was accompanied by a great outpouring of patriotism in Great Britain, which Maggie played to, the Germans found that incomprehensible or distasteful because Germany had had that, had had so much of it, where patriotic symbols, flags, national days, had been misused by a barbaric regime and Germany would be forever tarnished by it that there was a great neuralgia not ever to let that happen in Germany again. When Germans looked on their television screens and saw the flags flying and the crowds cheering, they winced. Then when the Argentine cruiser, the Belgrano went down with great loss of life, there was a tremendous below the surface revulsion that Britain had done this. When the British DCM was posted back to London, Sheila and I hosted a farewell dinner for him precisely in the middle of all of this. I stood up and gave a rousing toast to him and to his country and to Maggie. I realized I was not being very diplomatic. But it was something I felt emotionally. The Germans just found it hard to deal with.

Q: They didn't have a feel for this rather repugnant regime down in Argentina?

WOESSNER: No. There was no latent neo-Nazi sympathy. Nor were they were under any illusion about the Argentine government was. It was just a sentiment that surely reasonable people could find some reasonable way out of this that didn't involve a resort to armed force.

Q: Considering the history, it's just as well that this was the gut reaction.

WOESSNER: Absolutely.

Q: How about Kohl?

WOESSNER: I wondered myself with the departure of Schmidt and the public display by Arthur Burns at Schmidt's retirement ceremony, where he went up and embraced him and both men were weeping. This was all captured by the cameras and was in all the daily

papers. It was never a problem. He and Mrs. Burns cultivated the new chancellor and his wife. They had private sessions with them. They actually had a very good relationship. They did not have the shared experiences or background. Kohl didn't know much about economics or finance that Burns and Schmidt used to love to talk about. But they got on well.

I think we also talked about how Burns reached out to young people. He had sessions both in Bonn and up in Berlin at his residence there, usually on a Sunday afternoon, in which groups of young people - usually each one would be of a similar political orientation – young Christian Democrats or young Social Democrats or young Greens – and he had a rapport with them. Many of these were a young generation in rebellion against their own parents' generation, but they somehow related to the old gentleman and had very substantive discussions. They appreciated it and it was a good way for him to tap into what was going on in German society. He had a special fondness for Petra Kelly. He had a private breakfast with her on several occasions.

Q: She was one of the leading members of the Greens. I heard her talk at the State Department's Open Forum.

WOESSNER: An American GI was her father. She was one of the leading forces in the Greens in the early years. Burns thought her ideas were absolutely nutty, but he liked her and respected her. I think I mentioned that she and her boyfriend, General Bastian, both came to his memorial service here on Connecticut Avenue. It was remarkable. Later, they were a double suicide. But coming to your question about how he related to German society, he did have a knack for tapping into many different segments in society. Being old didn't hurt either. He turned 80 while he was there.

Q: Let's turn to some specifics. The disco bombing in Berlin. Were you there at that time?

WOESSNER: There was the terrorist bombing at La Belle. It was a place frequented by GIs. Our intelligence had evidence that there had been East German collaboration in this. We took it very seriously. I forget the details, but my strongest memories of it deal with my subsequent assignment in Washington.

Q: What are your memories of it from Washington?

WOESSNER: One of the last things I did before I retired (by that time, I was principal DAS in EUR), I went to East Germany, had a session with the East German foreign minister, and that was the top of our agenda. The East Germans had all kinds of things they wanted to talk about, mainly trade. But we kept after that for a long time. It was a real block to any warming of the relationship with the GDR. They were guilty as hell, no question.

Q: Were you there about the time of the Libyan bombing?

WOESSNER: The Libyans had these terrorist outrages from time to time. Libya and Qadhafi in particular was one subject on which we and Genscher were very far apart.

Genscher always took the stand that it was better to keep open the dialogue and to bring pressure to bear subtly whereas we regarded this man as a hopeless outlaw and tried to get the Europeans to line up with us in everything from imposing sanctions to_

Q: Was Genscher what we would call "soft" or "wet," always trying to talk around things, or was he playing the game to put Germany in a different course than the United States or were there other factors?

I wouldn't say Genscher was soft. He was very shrewd, some might say wily. Remarkably energetic and hard working. He would wear out three staff aides at a time. Constantly on the go. He had three foreign policy objectives or courses that he was following. First and foremost was the alliance with the U.S. He was under no illusion that to achieve anything else and particularly to achieve ultimate reunification, to which he was passionately devoted, he needed the U.S. I had no reason to think he didn't believe in that. He didn't think we were always terribly wise. He wasn't the only European who had trouble with our often overbearing attitude and most seriously with our failure to engage in any meaningful consultation. We talked consultation all the time, but too often we simply remembered the Europeans as an afterthought. But for Genscher the American relationship was central to everything else. Secondly was the European relationship. He was absolutely committed to the closest ties with France and with building up a separate European unity and identity. Thirdly was the Third World in which he always pushed for more foreign aid, in which he pushed for more understanding. Perhaps that was soft by some people's views. He was not one to go along with knee jerk sanctions. He had to balance these three things simultaneously and he was very clever in doing that.

Q: There has always been this stand that the U.S. doesn't consult enough with its European allies.

WOESSNER: I would certainly subscribe to that.

Q: But at the same time, you look and when the chips were down and we were trying to do that not too long after your time – in Yugoslavia – it was an absolute mess.

WOESSNER: The consultation was a mess?

Q: I mean nothing happened. If you consult with people, everybody feels good, but_ Did you feel the Europeans were capable of joint action?

WOESSNER: Those are really two separate issues. When I say "failure to consult," there are things in which Europeans had a real stake and on which our action or failure to act would impact them and I think we owed it to them to keep them informed and, as appropriate, to consult and, where possible, to get joint action rather than just go off and do it.

You mentioned Bosnia, Yugoslavia. That was after I left. I'm not as well informed. But from everything I've read and that you've read, it seems to me the problem there was that

not only the Europeans, but also even we never knew what our policy should be. That was understandable. As an informed citizen who was interested, I had a lot of trouble identifying what our real interest was and what we should do. But I would think it's fair to say the Europeans were not capable of unified action. They were going in different directions and had different objectives and were either constrained or encouraged by very different historical precedents from the Germans, who didn't want to use force, to the French, who were sympathetic to the Serbs, to the British, who probably were wanting to be closest to us. Should the United States, could the United States have taken a stronger lead? I had German friends – Ambassador Von Staden, for instance, who was ambassador to Washington and then head of the foreign office and was very highly regarded. He really wanted the United States to take the lead in a forceful way with a huge military commitment to straightening that whole mess out. I'm not sure that that was the right way to go and I'm not sure that it would have been politically salable in the United States. He had no confidence that the Europeans could in fact get their act together. But that was after my time.

Q: You were there during the missile business, the response to the introduction of the medium range Soviet missiles, the SS20, into East getting their act together. Could you explain why this was a problem?

WOESSNER: What the Soviets had done was upset the stability that had been in place for quite a while. Left unchecked, the deployment would have given the Soviets a great, decisive, military advantage that could have led to diplomatic blackmail. Our response was the famous two-track decision in NATO. We got our NATO allies to go along with it. That is, we would negotiate for the removal of the SS20s and at the same time we would prepare to deploy weapons of our own. These were weapons that of necessity had to be deployed in the Federal Republic of Germany. You could see the nightmare there because it meant that should hostilities ever come, Germany would be wiped out in the nuclear exchange. While Schmidt was still chancellor, his government and the SPD with misgivings lined up with us in this two-track policy. But once they left office, once the Free Democrats switched sides and you had a CDU/FDP government, the SPD no longer felt constrained by the responsibilities of office. They went dramatically off course – not Schmidt personally, although he hedged a lot of his earlier positions – but the people who had the responsibility in the SPD came out against the deployment and would eviscerate a two track decision. As the deployment date got closer and closer, the political rhetoric and the climate in Germany got hotter and hotter. Finally, in the summer of 1983, in June, Vice President Bush went to Krefeld to mark the 300th anniversary of German immigration to the United States. There had been ceremonies in the U.S. and these were the counterpart ceremonies. Krefeld then became the scene of a particularly nasty demonstration where paving stones were torn up and the cavalcade was stoned and even Arthur Burns' limousine. I spent that day being rushed to the hospital with the onset of severe diabetes. My medical history weaves in and out of all these things. Those demonstrations attracted a lot of media attention in the U.S. and there was much hand wringing and the pundits were saying, "Is Germany going neutral? Is it swinging back to a Bismarckian policy of alternating between east and west?" I thought that was such rubbish. The Social Democrats, the left wing at least, had an opportunity here to gain support in certain quarters because they were freed from the

responsibility of office. But that is all it was. The remarkable thing about the deployment and the German action was that despite tens of thousands of people in the streets, despite the high feelings that it aroused in certain areas, a democratically elected parliament took the necessary measures to deploy the weapons, the weapons were deployed, and people's constitutional right to demonstrate was preserved. It was a pure example of parliamentary democracy at work. This was Germany 40 years after Hitler died in the bunker. I thought it was a remarkable testimonial to the stability of German institutions. I said as much in speeches back here.

Q: What were you doing this time?

WOESSNER: Besides getting shot with insulin? It was a major theme of our public diplomacy. As we fanned out around Germany, that was one of the themes addressed. But the role of the embassy was clearly in the dialogue with the Germans, while the negotiations were going on in Geneva. The negotiations in Geneva extended over a long period. One constant was that on the way to Geneva or on the way back, Paul Nitze or whoever happened to be in charge always came through Bonn. On that issue, the consultations were as intense as anyone could have wished for. The Germans were always completely in the picture and their input was sought and they did have a role in the negotiation of what was politically tolerable or not, what had to be done. They were rock solid. It was fun to be in the middle of that, although I can't pretend that I always understood all the minutia of those negotiations. That was really arcane. Paul Nitze was just marvelous. I loved sitting and listening to him. He even came and told me about the walk in the woods that got him taken to the woodshed. I knew Kwizinski from when he had been the Soviet DCM in Bonn. Even the SPD came to venerate Paul Nitze. He was a rather conservative figure in relations with the Soviets. I was at a dinner one time and the SPD had a huge crowd. Paul Nitze happened to be in town and they asked him to come along. They gave him a standing ovation.

Q: Were you there when there was the famous_ I think it was Bitberg? What did that mean? How did that come about?

WOESSNER: The real drama of the Bitburg controversy was here in Washington, but in the field, it started with the fact—let me back up—I want to say that there was an economic summit to be followed by a bilateral visit from the President, Ronald Reagan, but it may have been that it was just a bilateral_ I can't remember. But Kohl was still basking in the glow of the meeting with Mitterrand at Verdun, where these two men, the German giant and his French counterpart stood and clasped hands over a grave in Verdun. That had potent symbolism considering the generations of tribal warfare between the Teutons and the Gauls. For whatever reason, Helmut Kohl took it into his head that he wanted something equally symbolic and meaningful with the Americans. Frankly, this was totally unnecessary. But that was the genesis of this. He was looking for something on that order. It was finally agreed that there would be a wreath laying at a military cemetery in Germany. That was kind of the background. In the planning, I remember the head of Protocol. I think his name was Von der Schulenberg. I did not know him as well as his predecessor. He was a very fine man. He came to the embassy to make some preparatory plans. Arthur Burns

and Dick Barkley, who was political counselor, and I sat with Von der Schulenberg and were going over what the itinerary might look like. There was to be a visit to a base to have a meal with the GIs. At a nearby cemetery would be this wreath-laying ceremony. I remember Dick Barkley saying, "You'll make sure that there is nothing at the cemetery that might embarrass us." Dick had long experience in Germany. I don't think that even he knew something we all learned much later, which was that every military cemetery in Germany had Waffen SS buried there. The reason had been to disperse them all over so there would be no one shrine that Neo-Nazis might flock to. Von der Schulenberg said he would certainly look into that. Then Mike Deaver came, a wonderful man. I so enjoyed working with him. He was so good as a PR expert, everything from the time of day when things would be scheduled to what the lighting would be to what the background would be. Make no mistake, a presidential visit was theater. This was going to be theater. They had picked the cemetery because there was a base nearby. We went out there in helicopters and we stressed again to Von der Schulenberg about the cemetery. We visited and all the graves were covered with snow. But one of the last things he said when we broke up was that he would go back and check on all of these things. When we piled into the helicopter, I remember saying to Mike Deaver, "The Germans will check again on all the graves." This is incredible in hindsight. One of the people in his party, one of the presidential advance team, made some joke about, "Well, suppose they find Mengele? They're going to dig him up?" It was just a dumb, stupid joke. Deaver didn't react to that. It was some time later that I got a telephone call from Horst Teltschek to tell me, "It's okay to go ahead with the cemetery. There will be no problems there." I thanked him. I had a good working relationship with Teltschek. He was the foreign policy advisor to the chancellor, a man of extraordinary gifts, very able and very dependable. That was the background. The other things for the trip were also laid on. Then "Newsweek" or "Time" came out with a story – or maybe it was on the radio or television – that there were Waffen SS buried at Bitburg. The shit hit the fan. Great eruption in Washington. A call to me. My recollection is that I tried to reach Teltschek on a Friday afternoon and was told that he had already left town and was somewhere in Bavaria for the weekend. I said, "I need to reach him." Well, they didn't know how to reach him. I don't know whether that's true or not. But he called back Sunday night. He had just gotten in and found the message. I said to him, "Horst, there is a firestorm in Washington and it's about Bitburg and it's precisely about the question of who is buried in those graves. You gave me an assurance on this." He said, "Bill, I got the assurance from the highest authority." I said, "Excuse me. Let me understand that again." He said, "The highest authority." Of course, he meant the chancellor. It turned out later that in effect the foreign office, the protocol people, had been pretty much sidetracked and Kohl wanted to take personal charge of this because his good friend Ronald Reagan was coming and he wanted to be sure everything was in apple pie order. I have no idea why he gave a go ahead. I have a theory that, certainly unlike Schmidt, Kohl was not sensitive to domestic politics or concerns in the United States and would not have understood what a red flag this would have been. I think also he may have believed, as many Germans did believe, that membership in the Waffen SS per se did not imply war crimes because, in fact, in the closing months of the war, many people – old men, young boys, people from the Wehrmacht – were just conscripted into the Waffen SS and so on.

Q: I was a refugee relief officer and we had to look at this back in 1955. We found the

Waffen SS per se did not mean much. There were some really nasty outfits, but basically the really bad ones were the Estonian or the Yugoslav Waffen SS.

WOESSNER: There were some buried there who had been in a group that had executed American prisoners of war. Kohl had reviewed the files and satisfied himself that there were no war criminals there. Hence, he gave the go ahead on this. Well, the real drama was back in Washington, where certainly Jewish groups but not only Jewish groups protested very vehemently. Elie Wiesel at the White House in a very dramatic ceremony begged the President, "Don't do this, Mr. President. Don't go there. Your place is not there." Earlier, there had been talk of visiting one of the memorials to the victims of Nazism, to a former concentration camp, extermination camp. Ronald Reagan hadn't wanted to do that. He said at the outset that he didn't want to rehash those kinds of things. Nonetheless, as a concession, the White House now agreed to look for such a site. But the President adamantly refused to back off Bitburg. Meanwhile, Don Regan got on the phone to Burns and said, "Can't you persuade the chancellor to dis-invite the President?" Burns repeated to Regan what Kohl had told him, which is that these appeals were coming from various quarters to let the President off the hook and the President clearly didn't want to be let off the hook, but never mind, it would damage him severely politically in Germany. That was the position Kohl took. Burns faithfully reflected that in the conversation with Regan. Regan was not pleased. Somehow he wanted to get the President out of this. Well, Mike Deaver came back to Bonn. I had the pleasure of going around with him again and looking at sites that we could include in the program that would balance Bitburg. My regard for Deaver went even higher. At no point did he look for a scapegoat. At no point did he say, "Why weren't we warned? Why didn't you do that or the embassy do that?" None of that kind of stuff. There were people in the White House who were prepared_

Q: This is what they do very, very well.

WOESSNER: At one point, the head of that White House team_ They were grousing among themselves about the goddam furor in Washington and all these people making trouble and specifically referring to Jews and saying, "We don't owe them anything anyway" meaning politically. I couldn't believe my ears. An experience that was not atypical. During my years in Germany in particular – because by that time I had risen to a position where I was privy to a lot more conversations – the things that political visitors from Washington said to one another in my presence would just blow your socks off. It's as if I was a non-person. I didn't exist. I realized after a while, that's true for them. I was of no account. It didn't matter what I heard or didn't hear. There would be domestic political strategy sessions, things about, "How are we going to get her out of the White House," referring to somebody who went to- (end of tape)

*Q: You were taking about getting Ronald Reagan's private secretary_*

WOESSNER: Yes, she had come with him from California. She wound up marrying the head of the Sacher Hotel.

Q: She was an embarrassment there, I think.

WOESSNER: In some ways. A delightful embarrassment. I was long out of Vienna, but the idea that this Maedel, who had no class, comes and is the ambassador... I found that just choice because the Austrians are so class conscious that it was a bit of a glorious joke. She was a lovely person. I had no reason to think she wasn't as good as some of the yo-yos we sent to Vienna. That is neither here nor there.

So, Bitburg, in the end, it went off as scheduled. One of the things they did was, instead of having Kohl and Reagan lay the wreaths, there was a German Luftwaffe pilot who was badly burned during the war, a fine person-

Q: He was one of the first heads of the German air force.

WOESSNER: Right. And in a big position in NATO. Widely admired and respected. He did the honors for Kohl. Matthew Ridgeway came and did it for Reagan. The White House's version was that Ridgeway had called and asked if he could serve his commander in chief in any way. The truth is that they had called him. He and his wife stayed in our home and it was one of the treats of having an official residence that all kinds of interesting people, as well as some not very nice people, come through and you get a chance to sit with them over breakfast and talk and get to know them. He was a real class act. He did the honors for President Reagan. The trip went off. Reagan won enormous respect and gratitude in Germany from for going through with a visit that could have been such a terrible embarrassment. Kohl, on the other hand, although he didn't suffer as much political damage as he would have if the trip had been canceled, certainly was pilloried for his inept handling of this and having put the President in that spot in the first place. That was Bitburg, fun and games.

Q: Is there anything on Germany that we should cover?

WOESSNER: We survived Bitburg, the missiles were deployed, we went on to great prosperity and an eventual unification, but that was after my time.

Q: You left there in '85. Where did you go?

WOESSNER: In July of '85, I had a couple weeks home leave. As a reward for services rendered, I was sent to the Aspen Institute for two weeks of a civilization course, which was great, a lot of fun. My wife was allowed to go with me. I reported into the Department the last week in August. Roz Ridgway had just been named the new assistant secretary for European and Soviet Affairs and I was made her principal deputy. I did not know Roz except by reputation. Her reputation was absolutely tops, so I was looking forward to that part of it, to being her principal deputy, but I did not want to go back to Washington at all, and certainly not into that kind of a pressure cooker.

A footnote on personnel policy. I was asked many times during my six years did I want to throw my hat in the ring for this or that embassy. I learned early on that this is just a game you play. Lists are drawn up and there is no realistic chance that you're going to get it.

Q: These are basically European posts?

WOESSNER: Yes, I believe so. I was asked about Warsaw when I hadn't been in Bonn a year. I said, "No." I had just gotten to Bonn and this was far too important. Then once Arthur Burns was in place, for some strange reason – I had nothing to do with it – they would never touch me to move me anywhere. As long as Burns was there, they wanted me there. Then Burns announced his intention to leave. He left shortly after Bitburg. I have a notion it was May of '85. I left in July. But in the last year, I was offered two embassies. I was offered Nicosia. This was a serious offer.

Q: That is not a political offer.

WOESSNER: No. I turned it down. Then I got a call from Ron Spiers. He had been my DCM in London and was somebody I have always respected and admired. He is a truly committed Foreign Service officer in a way that I never was. We had a good relationship. I believe we're still friends. We talked on the phone only recently. But he called me_ He couldn't believe I had said "No" to an embassy. Then he said to me, "I suppose if you wouldn't take Nicosia, you won't take Sofia either." I said, "That's right." He was offended. He really felt that that was unprofessional on my part and that I had no sense of Service discipline. He was right in a way. We each knew what we had to do. But I had just had six of the most exciting, satisfying, fulfilling years I could imagine and my wife had done everything to make it work. Whatever credit goes to me, most of it belongs to her. Now we were going back to Washington. I didn't want either of those embassies. She was willing to go overseas one more time if it was an embassy I really wanted. But otherwise, she felt 29 years was enough. She was getting ready to pack it in.

And here I'm going back to be principal deputy assistant secretary. It was a fabulous staff, an outstanding group of deputy assistant secretaries. Mark Palmer. These were quality people. Good country directors. Rozanne was just so special. So, I liked the substance of the work, the working relationships, but I have to tell you, being back in Washington just reminded me of how awful it had been when I was there for two years as country director. Nothing had changed in terms of the sterility of the bureaucratic infighting. You wasted so much time. Also the hours were crazy. Nobody went home at quitting time. In fact, the workday begins late in the afternoon because they save up all the papers and then they come pouring in. The White House is coming in with demands at 7:00 p.m. and that sort of thing. A number of times I would walk out and look at Rozanne's secretary and my secretary and I said, "There's got to be a better life than this. This is just nuts." I hadn't been back several weeks when I was the State Department's nominee to go to Vienna as ambassador. I remember Rozanne's introducing me to John Whitehead when he was acting secretary. She took me along to a meeting with the assistant secretaries and introduced me. She said, "This is Bill. He has just joined us a couple of weeks ago as principal DAS, but we'll not have him very long, I fear, because he's been nominated to be ambassador to Vienna." For me, that seemed kind of going back to where I had started. There was a certain appeal to that, although I knew being ambassador in Vienna wouldn't be a patch on being DCM in Bonn. Whitehead said, "Who is the White House putting forward?" It was

Ron Lauder. He said, "Oh, well, no fear there. The job is yours." Wrong. He hadn't reckoned with Estee Lauder. In any event, Lauder got the nod to go to Vienna.

It must have been somewhere around February 1986 – I hadn't been in the job even six months – and I got a telephone call from Tom Tuch, who had been the Public Affairs Counselor in Bonn. He was now retired and was a trustee of the not-for-profit high school exchange organization, Youth For Understanding. Arthur Burns was on the board. Kenneth Rush was the chairman of the board. They had had a search committee going for nine months and they were not happy with the candidates that were being turned up. It wasn't until many years later I found out one of the candidates was Norman Schwarzkopf. Somebody said, "Thank God you didn't go to the Gulf and he didn't go to Youth For Understanding." To make a long story short, Tom said, "They're looking for a new president. Would you be interested?" I said, "I don't know unless I learn more about the job." So, they sent me a description and I thought the job was made in Heaven for me. I talked to Sheila and we said, yes, we would be interested. Then it went very, very fast. I left the State Department in June 1986.

Q: What was the job actually?

WOESSNER: Youth for Understanding is a high school exchange organization founded in Michigan in 1951. I succeeded John Richardson, who had been assistant secretary for Cultural and Educational Exchange the last time it was in the State Department. Of course, now it's back there again. Widely admired in the exchange community. We exchanged 7,000 students from about 40-something countries. It was very similar to American Field Service, but differently organized. But in terms of its animating ethos and its reliance on volunteers and the emphasis on training and quality programs, it was very like AFS and I would say during those years, it finally surpassed AFS in the quality. But those were the two quality organizations.

Q: You were doing this from 1986 to when?

WOESSNER: 1997.

Q: Going back to round this up, as principal deputy assistant secretary for European Affairs, were there any issues that you were particularly dealing with during that six months you were there?

WOESSNER: It's rare that you ever make a difference, really a difference. So much of what's happening reflects historical tides at work. One thing where I did make a difference was on Natan Sharansky, the Soviet dissident who had been imprisoned. It was thanks to advice I got from my predecessor, Tim Niles, who went on deservedly to a very distinguished career. I had a very high regard for him. One of the jobs that fell to the principal DAS was to head up the committee of agencies with an interest in the exchange of spies. State played a coordinating role, but of course, the people with the biggest interest were CIA and the Justice Department. It's entirely possible you could go a whole year and nothing would ever come up. But Tom said to me, "This is one you've got to watch

carefully. I can tell you now, whatever you're able to negotiate by definition will be unsatisfactory to CIA." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because there is a mentality that says that if the Soviets are willing to accept it, you didn't ask for enough. Somehow you've been duped." That's true. I've run into that kind of a mindset. What you had here were certain assets languishing in prisons at various places. Then you'd try to sweep them all up in an exchange. There was an interest in the White House. I'm not sure how great the interest was – but somewhere over there, there was an interest in getting Natan Sharansky out. Of course, his wife was relentless in pressing his case.

Q: Was he a spy though?

WOESSNER: The short answer is no, he was not. The KGB had become convinced that he was a spy. This was based on either erroneous information or information that they had misinterpreted. But the CIA went as far as I've ever known them to go to disclaim somebody. Usually, it's "We have no comment" as a matter of policy. It's a wise policy. But on this one_

Anyway, our old friend, Vogel, from East Germany, was involved. A good friend of Frank Meehan's, he was the master of negotiations going back to Abel/Powers and all that. He got into the act here. There were two Czechs, a husband and wife team, who had been arrested in the United States on spying charges. It turned out the case against them was rather weak. I called a meeting and there was somebody there from CIA whom I knew well. He had been one of four station chiefs I worked with during my time in Bonn. There was somebody from the Justice Department. There was also an assortment of other characters and somebody from the White House, lower level. We cobbled together an exchange in which these two Czechs would be released. Justice really felt it didn't have a case. There were a couple "assets" that would be released from East German prisons, but the big thing was Sharansky. We broke up after reaching agreement that if the Justice Department would chop on this – they had to make the judgement as to whether the case against these people was viable - then it was a go. Amazingly, the next day I got a telephone call from Justice saying, "It's okay with us." I called the White House and said, "We've got a go." Then I got back to Vogel. The thing was on track. Several mores days passed. I got a phone call from my friend at CIA saying, "About this deal with Sharansky, we want to add some names." I said, "Gosh, it's too late." "What do you mean, it's too late?" I said, "We said if Justice agreed, we'd go ahead and the White House is pleased, so we're going to go ahead and send the word out." He said, "Oh, my god, this is terrible." He signed off. The next thing I know one of the big shots from CIA came to call on George Shultz and just tore me limb from limb – so I'm told, that I had exceeded my authority and what I had done was very bad. Shultz just brushed him off. So, Sharansky saw the light of day. The exchange was at the Glienecker Bruecke between Potsdam and Berlin. Fittingly by this time, Frank Meehan was the ambassador to the German Democratic Republic. He brought Sharansky to the border where Rick Burt was waiting with a limousine to whisk him to the airport and then on to Frankfurt and on to Israel.

Q: He's now a power in Israeli politics.

WOESSNER: Yes, he went into seclusion for several years, shunned the public eye. He and his wife had several children. Then quite a while afterwards he came into Israeli politics and was, I believe, in Netanyahu's government. I remember, it was 6:00 am and I got a telephone call. It was a bright, shiny day in June. Rick Burt from the car said, "Bill, somebody here would like to talk to you." Sharansky came on the phone, "Hello Mr. Woessner. I want to thank you. I want to thank the American people. I want to thank the American President. Thank you very much." I said to Rick afterwards, "You can wake me up any morning with that kind of news." It was a nice final chapter to my time at the State Department.

And the farewell was very nice, too. John Whitehead was acting secretary at the time. He came to the farewell. Rozanne arranged that people who had served with me in all those posts beginning with Vienna right up through Bonn and the Department were invited. It was very, very nice.

Q: Nicely done.

WOESSNER: I left with a good feeling. And John Whitehead subsequently became chairman of the board of Youth for Understanding and was a marvelous chairman. He served for nine years and made my work there a lot easier and a lot more pleasurable.

Q: There we are. We'll stop here.

End of interview