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

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM TAPLEY BENNETT, JR.

Interviewed by: Horace G. Torbert, Jr.
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is a Foreign Service Oral History interview under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies with the Honorable W. Tapley Bennett, Jr. made at DACOR Bacon House on Thursday the 16th of June, 1988. The interviewer was Horace G. Torbert, Jr.

Ambassador Bennett, I'm very grateful to you for coming in here. You have had one of the longest Foreign Service careers that I know of, your association with the State Department and the Foreign Service combined, and I think it probably will take several tapes to cover all of it. But I would like this morning, if we could, just to get a summary with the high points of your career or anything that you feel that you want to say immediately. I wonder if you'd start out by telling me a little bit about how you first became interested in the field of foreign affairs and then the Foreign Service and how you got into the Foreign Service.

BENNETT: What I had planned to say is that I did not dream of the Foreign Service from birth onward as some have claimed. In fact, I remember the precise moment when it hit me. I had the joys of a simple childhood. I grew up in the rural south on what you might call a cotton plantation although we also had cattle and wheat and other grains. But it was, as I say, a simple childhood by today's standards. And I'm grateful for that. We lived five miles in the country from Griffin, Georgia, a town of about 10,000 people. And my first year at school I was taken to town each day in a horse and buggy which shows how things have changed in my lifetime.

Then I went on to the University of Georgia. I was rather ticketed for a family law firm. Then, after graduation, the following year I had started law school and was suddenly picked up and given an exchange fellowship to Germany just because there was a vacancy. So I went on a week's notice, somewhat to the consternation of my mother. But my family, as I say, was a Southern family. And we were not given in those days to traveling abroad. But my mother had early on in my grammar school and high school days been wont to take me out of school to go on trips. And so I had the joy of travel firmly embedded. Those were meant to be educational travels, and I guess they were.

Well, I went to Germany for the year and that, obviously, was an exciting year, 1937-1938, just the year before the war broke out in Europe when Nazism was rising to its

infamous heights. It was an interesting year with travel as far east as Vienna and down the Danube to the Balkans into Turkey and back through western Europe. So I came home thoroughly imbued with an interest in foreign places. And that obviously had changed my life.

I did go back to law school at Georgia; I had another year there, and then came to Washington on a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship for the study of government. I suppose deep in my mind I had an idea of the State Department. I had found law school rather dull after this adventuresome year of wandering around Europe. I remember going to the college library one day and looking in some of the shelves. And here was a pamphlet about the Foreign Service. And that's the precise moment when it struck me that this is what I would like to do.

So I came to Washington. Actually this was September 1939. The war in Europe had broken out just two weeks before we assembled for our fellowship year with the Rockefeller Foundation's National Institute of Public Affairs. The State Department was not then open to internships which have become so common lately; I actually worked in the Department of Interior as an unpaid Intern, and then had a job in the Department of Agriculture for a few months in 1940, at the salary of $1,620 per year. By then the war was going full force in Europe, and I got a job with the National Housing Authority which was acquiring housing for defense and war industry. We were then arming Europe, and there were a lot of places in the United States where workers needed housing. And that's what I did for that year.

Then the State Department did open up in the spring of 1941. They needed people for Latin America because of the Good Neighbor policy. They were taking in people for what was called an auxiliary foreign service. I was one of the first of those. And we took the full oral exam; the written was waived and we were supposed to take the written that next winter. Well, Pearl Harbor came along and there was never any written exam. I later went into the career service under the Wriston program.

In July 1941, I was assigned to Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic. It was then called Ciudad Trujillo because that was during the reign of the Trujillo dictatorship. I actually had to go and look in the atlas to see where the Dominican Republic was. I had a vague idea that it might be in Central America. It turned out of course to be in the Caribbean on the Island of Hispaniola, there between Cuba and Puerto Rico. So my rather fancy dreams of Rio or Buenos Aires quickly faded as I went to this small Caribbean port in September 1941.

It was a pleasant place, and the people were hospitable. I had a thoroughly agreeable 2-1/2 years there. We got into the war in December 1941 and there came the German submarine campaign of the winter of '42, when we had sailors from torpedoed ships climbing ashore onto the jagged reefs of the south coast of the Dominican Republic. If you get in contact with a coral reef and cut your skin, it's bound to be infected, and we had some rather unfortunate cases. But the main war effort was pretty far away. I was

there in the Dominican Republic when Pearl Harbor came. We were all going down that afternoon to see a French ship which was coming up from Martinique, which had stayed Free French as you'll recall, for some supplies. The Dominican Republic became quite a larder for the Caribbean Islands and our troops who were stationed in Curacao and Aruba to protect the oil fields. A lot of their food came from the fertile Dominican valleys.

Q: What were your specific functions at this time? Were you a Consular Officer or were you an Economics Officer?

BENNETT: I had the title of Agregado Civil, Civil Attaché, which in traditional diplomacy in Europe I believe had been an intelligence title. That I did not do. I was an economics officer, and I was the very lowest man on the totem pole. You'd have had to have everybody in the Embassy swept away with a hurricane before I could have been in charge. But I have friends to this day from those early years. Bill Belton was a third secretary. I used to go and sit with their baby when they were invited out to dinner. So it was a pleasant society. There were a lot of young people and we used to have good times, even though people were suffering mightily in the war elsewhere.

Then in the Spring of '44 it was time to change, and I was assigned to Panama. But I had a very exciting mission in between because the ambassador to Panama, Avra Warren, who had been my chief in the Dominican Republic, was asked by Cordell Hull to lead a mission down to Bolivia to get out some German and Japanese aliens who were causing trouble. You know, the Germans had a geopolitical theory that who controls the highlands controls the region around it. And so they thought if they took over Bolivia that would give -

Q: There was nothing higher.

BENNETT: That would give them a leg up in South America. And they were very influential. I remember Warren and I flew down to Panama - flying was not as swift then as it is today - and joined up there with the General in command in the Panama Canal Zone. We flew with him in his plane down past Peru and up into Bolivia where we spent, I guess, a good two weeks. That was where I first met Bob Woodward, who was acting as Charge in Bolivia at the time. We stayed with the Woodward s. I remember the talks with Bolivian officials, and the wife of the President pleading with Ambassador Warren, please don't send my children's German tutor away.

Well, we did send him away. We had a fleet of ten planes. They were DC-3s but they looked very big as they all landed in tandem at 14,000 feet in the high Andean sun to take away, I believe it was 50 German agents and 25 Japanese.

Then we came back to the States and I went on to Panama in June of '44. I served there for about six months.

I was still single, and most of my contemporaries, all of my college friends, were in the armed services. I felt I was missing a variety of human experience. You could still volunteer overseas; it was all draft at home. But in the Canal Zone and in Puerto Rico and in Hawaii you could volunteer. So I walked over one day and volunteered for the Army after about six months in the Embassy.

Panama, of course, was a very busy place in those days with the war going on and with the trans-shipment of our fleet and forces between Atlantic and Pacific theaters. I remember some of the big ships that came though. The Canal locks are about 110 feet wide, and at the time all of our Navy ships were planned on that basis so that they could transit the Canal. There was nothing larger. The carrier Ticonderoga came through one day and she had about 109 foot width, because there were literally inches to spare on each side as the ship went through those locks. She had been built to that specification, but they forgot about the overhang. And so the flight deck, as it went through the locks, just snapped off the light posts one by one as it rather majestically gilded through the lock. And you heard pop, pop, pop and every light post went down from the overhang.

Well, Panama was a six-month affair for me. Then I was a private in the Army and came back to Washington to serve in Army Intelligence. Came the spring of '45 and they were getting ready for the conference in San Francisco to organize the United Nations. I was borrowed back from the Army to serve in San Francisco as aide in the office of Nelson Rockefeller who was then Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs. And I served in his office during that conference.

But before the conference there was a big problem in that Argentina had sat out the war and in consequence had not been invited to San Francisco. Well, there was a lot of Latin American solidarity and all the other American republics which had declared war - Brazil had sent troops for instance and so on - they all wanted Argentina to be at the conference. There was no way that Argentina could go to the conference unless she declared war. This was the spring of '45, and the war was winding down in Europe. I went down on the special mission, again as aide to Ambassador Warren. And this time we flew down to Buenos Aires on our way to San Francisco. That was the long way around from Washington to San Francisco. Peron was just coming into prominence. He was then the Vice President. An Anglo-Argentine, General Rawson, was the titular president, but Peron was clearly calling the shots. We met with him in the Casa Rosada there in Buenos Aires. Our South Atlantic fleet, which consisted of one cruiser and two destroyers with an Admiral, met us at Buenos Aires. So you had the Ambassador - .

Q: Showing the flag.

BENNETT: We were showing the flag. And we had General Brett, who was the Commanding General at Panama. And then the Admiral. And so the Argentines declared war and were invited a week later to the United Nations conference. The Russians made a great howl about it, and with some reason, because the Argentines didn't deserve to be there on the basis of their war record. But nevertheless, that was the way it was done.

So I had those very exciting three months in San Francisco at the United Nations conference, and the first glimmers of the lack of Soviet cooperation as the war was ending were coming to bear. I remember Averell Harriman, I believe he was Ambassador in Moscow at the time. At any rate, he knew the scene. He came out to San Francisco and warned our delegation that the Russians were not seeing the world as we saw it and to be very careful in our negotiations with them.

There were people on our delegation - Alger Hiss was the Secretary General of the delegation - there were people who took the position that, if we could just bring the Russians in from the cold, they would be nice people and would quickly adjust to civilized western society.

That was an exciting time in San Francisco, and the war in Europe ended while we were there. I remember the day when a delegate appeared on the floor of the conference waving a newspaper with the headline, Armistice in Europe. Of course, it meant a great deal to the Europeans that the war was finally over. But the war was still going strong in the Pacific, and the assault on Japan was being prepared. None of us knew about the atomic bomb, of course, at that time.

San Francisco was a very swinging town in the spring of '45 because people were either celebrating getting home from the Pacific or they were having their last fling before they went to the Pacific to what fate they knew not. So that was an exciting time.

I had to leave the conference before it ended to get home, because I was getting married. A big church wedding had been planned and I was expected to be there.

Q: It's customary.

BENNETT: I flew home. I had been an enlisted man. I'd gone to the conference in civilian clothes but I was an Army corporal. So the invitations to the wedding had gone out, Miss Margaret White to marry Corporal Bennett. I think it rather embarrassed Margaret's grandmother that her beloved granddaughter was marrying an enlisted man, the standards of those days being somewhat different from today. However, my commission came through while I was in San Francisco, and I was married as a resplendent second lieutenant in a tailor-made uniform that I had especially made in San Francisco for the occasion. We've lived happily ever after, I'm glad to say. We're celebrating our 43rd anniversary in the next two weeks.

So we settled back in Washington and began a family. I had another year or so in Army intelligence, which led to some exciting trips in Europe just after the end of the war and ranging around Germany on icy roads in Hermann Goering's old roadster during the height of the winter of 1946, when the Germans were lined up for food rations and every town was more ruined than the town you had just seen.

The Germans very methodically had picked up all the bricks. There were enormous, orderly piles of bricks up and down the streets of Frankfurt and Berlin and Munich. In Austria the music halls were going, but the streets were still full of rubble. You had to pick your way over barricades to get into the Kaertnerstrasse there in the heart of Vienna, as I recall.

I stayed in the Army for this year and then went back to State. That was in 1946. I was back in the American Republics Division and stayed there for a number of years, rising gradually in the ranks. First I had the desk for Panama and Costa Rica, which is awfully good training. Panama then as now was a problem. John Muccio who'd been long in the Embassy in Panama used to say, they call it the crossroads of the world, but I say it's the double crossroads of the world. The Panama desk was very good training for a young officer. Everything is based on treaty there, so you have to be very specific and precise in your work. It was awfully good training for me.

Costa Rica, on the other hand, was a perfectly lovely country, one of the nicest in the world. Everybody there ate honey and drank milk and the girls were beautiful. It was just an ideal country, and seemed to have escaped the storms and stresses of so many other countries. The two countries made a good combination, and I had some nice trips to those two places on consultation during my desk officer days.

I went on from there to being the officer in charge for Central America and Panama. That included the five Central American countries and Panama - again, an active area as it is today. I've always said that, if you can keep your footing in Latin America, you can stand up anywhere in the world. And that's certainly true in Central America.

Then for a brief period I was Director - Officer in Charge, sorry. These terminologies change from reorganization to reorganization in the State Department.

Q: Yes.

BENNETT: This was the late '40s. And then briefly in 1950 I was officer in charge of Caribbean Affairs which meant Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, once again. Of course I'd been serving, served in that area earlier as we discussed.

Q: Could you mention who some of the - who the assistant secretaries were at this time? Because I think ARA of all places the Assistant Secretary is a very important -

BENNETT: Is the key man.

Q: Is a czar kind of. And I think it's historically of interest in any comments you might have about them. How long did Rockefeller stay?

BENNETT: He left, if I remember correctly, pretty soon after the San Francisco Conference in 1945. Now, at that time you had a double layer. He was the Assistant

Secretary. And then Avra Warren was Chief of the Office of Inter-American Affairs, or whatever the title was. But they both had the whole area. At the time there were 20 Latin American Republics and the United States. The Pan American Union, which was subsequently converted to the Organization of American States, was very active in those days. And I remember the -

Q: And was that Avra Warren's job particularly, running the OAS kind of?

BENNETT: No, it was the whole area. As I say, it was a double layer. Of course, Rockefeller had such a great name and was so widely known I guess you could say he was the public affairs man in the operation. He traveled a lot and had enormous prestige, had great investments and a personal commitment to Venezuela, had a ranch there and went there quite often. He was highly admired in those days throughout Latin America. He was - it's terrible not to remember.

Q: I should have made a list of these.

BENNETT: You'd have to get the book and look it up.

Q: That's all right. I just wondered if you remember any particular personalities.

BENNETT: Paul Daniels was very important in Latin American affairs at the time. He may have taken Avra Warren's place because Warren went off to an overseas assignment. In 1949 Eddie Miller was made Assistant Secretary. He came with Dean Acheson.

Q: Yes, I think I remember.

BENNETT: Eddie had lived his boyhood in Cuba, I believe he had a Latin American mother. At any rate he spoke the language perfectly, was very much at home with the Latinos and was a very good Assistant Secretary, very active. He also ran well on Capitol Hill, performed well in the Congressional hearings.

In those days Acheson and the top level of the Department were so obsessed, and understandably so, with the problems of Europe that they had very little time for Latin America. It was quiet. It was not a demanding area in that sense. But we've paid for that neglect since. I remember one occasion when the Guatemalan Ambassador was going home to be foreign minister. Eddie Miller tried for three weeks to get a five minute appointment with the Secretary of State for this man who was going home to be Foreign Minister to be the colleague of our Secretary of State. The appointment never came through. They were very busy with the Marshall Plan, with all the measures to rescue Europe. But I do think there was neglect of an important area for our purposes, for our future relationships.

Q: Was Spruille Braden there about that time? Or was he later?

BENNETT: No, Spruille was earlier. Spruille was there at the very end of the war.

Q: He was a colorful figure.

BENNETT: Yes. I believe he was brought home in '45 from Buenos-

Q: Buenos Aires, I think.

BENNETT: Yes. He'd been Ambassador to Cuba earlier. That's where I remember him. He was Ambassador to Cuba during my first tour in the Dominican Republic back in the early '40s and did a great service there, was a fine ambassador. He went to Buenos Aires, got locked into a personal fight with Peron. After he came home as Assistant Secretary, he tried openly to influence the presidential election. That was, I think, bad tactics in a country as proud as Argentina. What it did was insure an enormous landslide for Peron. That was in 1946.

Q: I just wondered if you had any impressions of these people.

BENNETT: By the time I was beyond the basic desk level, Eddie Miller was Assistant Secretary, and I worked very closely with him. And then, of course, Bob Woodward was Deputy Assistant Secretary a lot of that time and later Assistant Secretary. He was one of the great figures of Latin American policy. Tom Mann became Assistant Secretary later. Jack Cabot served in the Eisenhower Dulles years, and Henry Holland followed him. Henry came up from Houston.

Q: Tom Mann was with Lyndon Johnson.

BENNETT: That was later. Tom was Deputy Assistant Secretary in those days. Tom and I were great friends, and I respect him very highly. But we could have our differences. Once in a moment of frustration he said, I want you to know, Tap, that the only man more stubborn than me in the State Department is you. I took that as a compliment.

Then in 1951 I was made Deputy Director of South American Affairs. That was number two for the whole South American continent. I think there may be thirty or forty people doing those jobs today. But it was much simpler in those days. We had an office of South American Affairs which covered the whole area. Rollin Atwood was the Director and I was the Deputy Director. And then we had his office chiefs for the clusters of three countries each, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador for instance. I remember Maury Bernbaum was there working on north and west coast affairs and so on. All of these people became very prominent later, were important ambassadors in their areas.

So I stayed three years in that job from '51 to '54. And that was the end of the Acheson period, the Truman administration and the beginning of the Eisenhower administration. John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State, Henry Holland became the Assistant Secretary in early 1954, following Jack Cabot.

In 1944 I was assigned to the National War College.

Q: '54.

BENNETT: '54.

Q: Yes.

BENNETT: So I left ARA in 1954 in the summer and went over to the National War College. That was an excellent year of training and broadening. I later was able to gain on that investment of time when I was working on European affairs. So many of our War College graduates, classmates of mine in 1954-1955, had risen to positions of major command in Europe, and they were good friends. It was a very sound training. I hope we're still sending our best people to the War College because you meet the incoming leaders of the Armed Services. I think it's very important, because they need it almost more than we do.

Q: I followed you the next year at the War College. So I have the same knowledge of it.

BENNETT: I came back from that. Henry Holland wanted me back in ARA, but Bob Murphy who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, number three in the department, was looking for an assistant. So he looked over the records of us at the War College and apparently chose me. Then there ensued a tug of war between Murphy and Holland. Holland was a very determined man who went out for what he wanted in the Texas way. I got worried about it so I went to Jack Hickerson who was our State Department advisor at the War College. I said I've got these two offers and obviously I would rather go to Bob Murphy because I could see the broad reach of that office. Hickerson said, just keep your head strictly on your own chest. And, he said, as long as people are fighting over you, don't worry about it.

I've always said the big guy won because he got the man he was after. So I had two enormously interesting and valuable years as assistant to one of the finest career officers that our government has produced. I suppose no one was better known publicly for his contributions in World War II than Bob Murphy. You remember he led that advance mission into Algeria.

Q: North Africa, yes.

BENNETT: To prepare the North African invasion. He was a close friend of General Eisenhower. The only picture he had in his office was of Eisenhower with three stars. It might have been four. But anyway, it was before Eisenhower became President. And that was a relationship which was a very valuable one. He had also known MacMillan who by that time had become Prime Minister of Great Britain. So Bob Murphy was extremely well placed. But he was an enormously humane and humble man.

Q: That was a great job. That's where I first met you.

BENNETT: That's right.

Q: But you had an overview as you say of the whole -

BENNETT: You had all the cables from all over the world. That was my job, to go through them and pick out the ones that he should see, along with other jobs. But that kept you going all day long.

Q: You can't allow it to get ahead of you.

BENNETT: Exactly. If you did something else for half an hour, then you had a pile of telegrams a foot high that you had to race to catch up with. But it was enormously valuable.

I might say in that connection that earlier on I had determined at the end of the war to finish my law. I had only had the one year before I started wandering and had gotten into the Foreign Service. So during those first post-war years in the Department, from 1946 to '48, I was going to law school at the same time. I worked a full day at the Department and then went over to George Washington University, which was only three or four blocks away, at 6:15 for my law courses. Had it not been that it was just closing one shutter of the camera and opening another I might not have gotten through it. But in two full years, including the two summer sessions, I finished up the law and was graduated from there in '48.

Q: I can't say how much I admire anybody who can do that. I think it's fantastic.

BENNETT: I don't know. You just get on the treadmill and keep treading. I was also starting a family. I had two children by that time. I think my wife is the real heroine. But we got used to it. I would get home from the law school around nine o'clock. So it's never meant anything to us since that time as to what hour of the evening that we have dinner.

We're back to, so here I was with Bob Murphy. Well, the time came for me to move on after two years. There was a question of whether I would go to Germany because I had put in for that having studied there and being was interested in the German problem. I still am today. When it came time and I found out - I've always felt that Murphy had a lot to do with this - I was assigned as political counselor to Vienna - to follow you, as you'll recall.

Q: No, no, no. You were to follow me in Rome.

BENNETT: That's later.

Q: I had been in Vienna. You're perfectly right. But not as political counselor.

BENNETT: No, you're right, I followed Dick Davis. That's who it was, because Dick went on to Moscow with Tommy Thompson. But Murphy explained to me. He said, I want you to go to Vienna. Because, he said, you have five children and I want you to have a job that will enable you to spend some time with your children. He had had that tragedy of his daughter. And he said, you can go to Bonn, it might sound more important. But, he said, you'd just be working around the clock. And I'm going to see that you have the extra time to be with your family.

So I went to Vienna as number three. And we were there for almost four years. It was a marvelous assignment. This was 1957 when we arrived there.

Q: It was Jimmy Riddleberger was it?

BENNETT: No. Tommy Thompson was Ambassador when I was assigned there. But he had already left for Moscow. And Doc Matthews, Freeman Matthews.

Q: Ah yes, of course.

BENNETT: Who had been Murphy's predecessor as Under Secretary of State. So he knew what kind of work I'd been doing. We hit it off from the very beginning. But he at the time was the ranking officer in the Foreign Service and was one of the first four career ambassadors, as was Bob Murphy. So I went there. It was the depths of the Cold War. It was also the emergence of Vienna and Austria as a prosperous country. The State treaty had been signed just less than two years before.

The Hungarian Revolution had taken place in the fall of '56. I went to Vienna at the end of the summer in '57. A lot of our work had to do with the refugees who had come over from Budapest and from Hungary. I was there for the foundation of the International Atomic Energy Agency and served as the Embassy's liaison to that. I was on that delegation for two years. That was, of course, in a sense calling on my United Nations experience. I had had another look at the U.N. in 1950 when I was assigned up from ARA to be one of the ARA liaison officers on the delegation for the General Assembly.

That was a three month assignment in New York at the end of the Korean War. We started with high hopes that the boys were going to be home by Christmas, as MacArthur was talking. Then came that ill-fated expedition to the north and the Chinese intervention and our people reeled back. I remember the enormous disillusionment and depression that settled on us. I came home from that session and was physically ill for a few days. It was like the taste of alum in your mouth, what had happened on what had seemed such a promising operation. Then we later regrouped and, as you know, a year or two later got a final, not a final, but a solution and a line which has endured to this day. Although it's still one of the most neuralgic points in the world in my opinion.

Q: And we're not through there yet.

BENNETT: That's what I mean. It still endures as a problem.

Anyway, my years in Vienna were rich professionally. That, as I say, was the period of the Cold War. All of the correspondents, or so many of them, lived in Vienna and traveled behind the Iron Curtain. And we had a remarkable camaraderie. We didn't have the adversarial relationship that now seems so often to characterize the media's approach to the Foreign Service or to our government abroad. And so we had a lot of extremely good evenings together with correspondents of the New York Times and the then-Herald Tribune and Newsweek and Time. I remember all those correspondents to this day. And we also saw a lot of the opera stars. So Vienna was a thoroughly good place to be. Although those who'd been there a few years earlier said, well, you don't know the real Vienna now that the Russians have gone.

Q: That's true. I was there during that period too. But I think I prefer the time you were there.

BENNETT: I remember that fall of '57. There had been no traffic when we arrived. Suddenly the Ringstrasse just burst forth with complete - what do you call this traffic that doesn't move?

Q: Traffic jams, gridlock.

BENNETT: Gridlock, exactly. And you saw Vienna come back to a prosperity it hadn't seen for a generation.

Came the spring of '61 and I was slated to go abroad, I mean, to go to another post. After various fits and starts I was assigned as political counselor to Rome, which was succeeding you. I spent the winter studying Italian through German and was all set. I went down to Rome and three weeks later I was transferred, almost before I'd even gotten there. I went down by train in early April and filled up the compartment of the train with silver so as to beat the weight allowance by taking as much with me as I could. Margaret was coming two weeks later, and she brought porcelain and china with her. The children were to stay in Vienna to finish the school year. She was going back to be with them through the school year and then come down in June for good.

Suddenly there was a vacancy in Greece. The Ambassador, Ellis Briggs, was away and was going to be away for three months with the new Kennedy Administration, escorting Adlai Stevenson around Latin America and then taking some home leave. The number two, Sam Berger, had just been named Ambassador to Korea. And there was a crisis there as usual and they needed him in a hurry. The number three man had been picked up to head one of our new embassies in Africa. So you had the entire leadership of the Embassy away.

Q: All gone at once.

BENNETT: So I was thrown into the breach so to speak. And not knowing a word of Greek and being literally language tired at that stage, having spent my time getting Italian under my tongue for a little bit. I had an enormously active and interesting five weeks in Rome with lots of things happening including Congressional visits and an audience with Pope John XXIII. There was the Rome horse show, to be superficial, set amidst the pines of Rome and one of the most beautiful events of its kind in the world. And my first dealings with the South Tyrol, or the Alto Adige problem from the Italian side, having dealt with it from Vienna for four years. And some of the Middle East problems were coming to bear in Rome. In any event, I was getting underway. It was a lovely Embassy in that handsome palace on the Via Veneto - probably the best office I ever had in the Foreign Service as far as physical splendor and elegance goes. It's rather an over-ornate palace, as a matter of fact, but it looks good. And, the Roman spring is not to be dismissed. But I knew that I would get no sympathy if I complained to personnel about being transferred from Rome to Athens. There was nothing to do but pack up and go.

As it happened, the word came the very day that Margaret arrived. We were being given our opening reception by Outerbridge Horsey, who was in charge. The word came just as we were closing up to go home to this reception. I got home and Margaret was in the tub, getting ready for the party. I said, it's a good thing you're lying down because I have news for you. We've just been transferred to Athens! And Outer with typical savoir faire had said, well, we'll just go ahead and have the party. We'll say nothing about your transfer, and you will leave next week and no one will ever remember that you were here. Which is exactly what happened. But I'll always remember that brief period in Rome. And I've always insisted on listing it in my experience.

Q: One of your posts. The amount of work you put in on it that qualifies. Well, now let's see. In Athens at the time you went there who was Karamanlis?

BENNETT: Karamanlis was Prime Minister. It was a very exciting spring. Mind you, this was May of 1961. It was just the beginning of the Kennedy administration. And the Karamanlis couple, she was a very attractive person, had come over to Washington in March or April. This had been the first visit of the Kennedy Administration. The two couples had taken to each other. That had led to an invitation to Mrs. Kennedy to visit Greece. And so, ten days after I took charge of the embassy, she came on her famous visit which introduced modern Greece to the world and really put it on the map.

I was brand new. But I learned fast. We had to give an after-theater party for her when the Greek theater put on one of the Greek tragedies in the famous amphitheater up on the Acropolis, at the foot of the Acropolis. So we had the top 50 Greeks to a post theater party. Well, that's how you meet people in a hurry. That was an interesting episode.

Greece at that time of year is absolutely marvelous. I only got three or four hours sleep each night. But you didn't need more. It was so exuberant, the whole atmosphere. You

didn't realize until months later that you hadn't had much sleep. Greece is a frenetic place always. Athens was then a city of close to two million. But every Greek expected to be invited to every embassy function. The pace was just electric.

We had real problems with the Greeks, as we always do, on substance. Greece is a principal anchor of NATO in the Mediterranean. And we had a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting while I was there in Athens. It's a place that's just busy all the time. We had some very important installations there, communications for intelligence and that sort of thing. Then the Greek economic situation always needs attention and Andreas Papandreou had just come back from America during that period, the present Papandreou. His father George was very active politically and was elected Prime Minister before I left the country. But Andreas had just come back and had established a macro-economic institute, which was exactly what Greece needed. He was doing fine work. He had, as you know, been head of the Economics Department at the University of California and was very well thought of among American economists, particularly the new economists in the Kennedy Administration. So he had good entree in Washington. And I remember taking Teddy Kennedy -

Q: Side B of Tape One of an interview with Ambassador W. Tapley Bennett, Jr. by Horace G. Torbert on June 16, 1988.

Ambassador Bennett, you were just in the middle of a very interesting story about Greece. Can you go on with it?

BENNETT: Yes, I recall that Teddy Kennedy came out that winter. That was the winter of '62, about February of '62. And he was not yet 30. He was waiting to be 30 so he could be elected Senator from Massachusetts, where he still is to this day, as you know, in the Senate. So I took Teddy and introduced him to Andreas Papandreou, the economist. Then Papandreou père, Old George, became Prime Minister. He was determined to get his son into politics and out of economics with the results that we all know today.

Q: Sometimes to our discomfort.

BENNETT: Yes, it's the chance you take. But I have seen the Prime Minister several times when I was Ambassador to NATO; and he always remembered the summer of '61 when life was simpler and he was working on economics.

As I say, the three top positions of the Embassy were empty when I went there. The Ambassador didn't come back for several months. Had it not been for Ernie Colantonio, who was a very fine Administrative Officer and ran things, I wouldn't have gotten through it. But running a place is not all that difficult if you have good people. It's not knowing the personalities and not knowing the people you're dealing with that makes it difficult. The person who was the most help there and who's gone on to a distinguished career of his own was Monty Stearns, Monteagle Stearns who served, I believe, three times in Greece, including recently as Ambassador. He is probably the best Greek hand that the

State Department has had for many years. Well, Monty was very junior at the time, in 1962. He was, I guess, Second Secretary, might have even been Third Secretary. But he knew the place. His Greek was good. He and his wife, he had just recently married Tony Riddleberger, the daughter of Jimmy Riddleberger, were enormously helpful.

Q: Jimmy, yes.

BENNETT: Who'd also been Ambassador around different places, including Austria. So Monty saw me through the summer. And we had an election going on. And we prevented, were instrumental in preventing, the formation of a popular front between one of the Greek parties, the Venizelos Party and the communists, for which I was denounced on Moscow radio. That was heady stuff at the time, to find yourself on the Moscow broadcast. But we prevented, along with other work that was done, the formation of this popular front with the result that you had a true election there.

And the Karamanlis forces won. They were the most conservative of the two, although they were both pretty conservative, to be frank about it. You didn't have much of a socialist movement in Greece in those days. But anyway, the Karamanlis forces won. And so we continued with a very active political life. Briggs was the Ambassador, Ellis Briggs, at the time I went there. And he again was one of the great figures of our career service.

He was succeeded by Henry Labouisse for the last two years of my stay in Greece. Labouisse was one of the world's great gentlemen with a distinguished career, both in private life and in a succession of government posts. His wife was Eve Curie, the daughter of Madame Curie. And she was a personage in her own right. We had a most happy two years serving as Deputy to the Labouisses.

Time was wearing on, and I came down with a bad case of amoebic dysentery. That was a fairly serious thing at the time. But the doctor said to me at one point, what you need really is a change to another climate, such as a trip to Switzerland; that will kill out these bugs. I sat bolt upright and said, if you mean that, I'm ready to leave tomorrow. Because I love Switzerland anyway. So we did go up midwinter and went to a ski place. Margaret did a little skiing. I sat and watched. I've never had any recurrence. So the doctor was right.

Q: Right prescription.

BENNETT: The Greeks were funny about this; they couldn't believe, they weren't willing to admit that anything bad like that could happen in Greece. So they said that the amoebas didn't come from any of us Greeks. They came from those people who'd just come back in the Greek return from Egypt. You remember Nasser was throwing the age-old Greek community out and they were coming home to Greece. So the Greeks all said, well, that only came from those people, not from us.

Then came on the terrible assassination of President Kennedy. We were at a dinner at the Dutch Embassy, a very stiff and starchy place in those days, and I was suddenly called away from the table to the 'phone. Being fairly junior at the dinner I was embarrassed at leaving the table. It was the Embassy calling saying that the President had been shot, but they didn't know any details. I went back to the table and Margaret at the other end of the table looked at me. I, of course, didn't give any sign. Shortly after that I was called away again. The Dutch Ambassador didn't look too happy, but I got up and went. The caller advised me that the President was dead and asked me to come to the Embassy as soon as possible because books were being opened for people to sign.

We excused ourselves, of course, and went straight to the Embassy. Already people were lining up. They came in streams for three days. President Kennedy was an enormously popular figure and, of course, Mrs. Kennedy's interest in Greece was something that the Greeks were very proud of. There was an official Te Deum at the Cathedral with the King and Queen and all; and I just interpolate there to say that Greece was my first experience with royalty. Royalty adds an extra dimension to diplomacy. It's a whole different level of people you have to deal with, and you sometimes feel it doesn't have much to do with the real world. But it's very real in the country in which you're stationed. It takes a lot of your time. It has both pluses and minuses.

It's also productive of some of the best stories that one tells after you leave the place such as the time that I escorted the King and Queen, in fact the whole royal family including the fiancé of Princess Sophia who's presently the King of Spain, Juan Carlos, on their first visit to a nuclear submarine. I won't take up the time here to go through that. But that's quite a story. There were a lot of other things like that.

Lyndon Johnson was now President. Tom Mann was Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, soon to move up to be Under Secretary for Economic Affairs then the number three post in the Department. In January 1964 I suddenly got a call that the President wanted me to go as Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. In fact, I got a personal telegram from the President. That was very exciting. I left Athens in a hurry and stopped in Spain on the way home for a quick visit with Bob and Ginny Woodward. Bob was then Ambassador in Madrid. Margaret said, as she always does, she pays, packs and follows. She'd rather get me out of the house before she packs up because I like to keep things. And she knows what to throw away.

At any rate, the children were in school. You always have to take that into account on these transfers as best you can. So she followed. And then in March of 1964 we went down to the Dominican Republic to my first Embassy. As you remember, that had been my first post. And so I went back 20 years to the month from leaving the place. That's an interesting Rip Van Winkle experience. Because some people are exactly the same, you might have seen them last week. Others you wouldn't recognize they've changed so. There are both pluses and minuses to going back. You have friends from another period who are no longer appropriate to the new situation and vice versa. People you didn't know are suddenly very important.

Anyway, that was a stormy country. It always has been since it was first discovered by Columbus in 1492. It has varied between strongman government and literal chaos for all those centuries. The Dominican Republic is a country that has natural resources, particularly in the agricultural field, although there were some minerals as well. It has got a sturdy peasantry that works hard by tropical standards. But it has always had an incestuous political elite. And that was still the problem in 1964.

There had been the assassination of the long time dictator after 31 years, in 1961. The Kennedy administration, mistakenly in my opinion, had decided to make the Dominican Republic the showcase for democracy. The elements just weren't there to produce a functioning democracy overnight. The man who was sent as ambassador was a journalist who had no experience whatever with diplomacy. He was a good, decent personal man but, as someone said to me after I arrived, why, this is the first time we've ever had a staff meeting. But he was well known in democratic circles. He later wrote the most devastating book about the failures of the man elected Dominican president, Juan Bosch, who was overthrown in September, 1963. After the overthrow, Martin, our Ambassador, had been brought home to show out disapproval. The post was not filled for six months.

When I arrived in Santo Domingo in March, 1964, as the new Ambassador, the country was in economic shambles. The military establishment was overwhelmingly corrupt. And there was no viable political structure. When a three-legged stool like that is missing all three legs, the seat falls down. That winter of '64-'65, when I'd been there just nine months, when sugar went below three cents a pound between Christmas day and New Years' I knew we were in for trouble. That spring things got worse and worse.

To add to the political, economic, and military problems, the country suffered one of the worst droughts in its history. The capital city was just wearing down. Outbreaks of disorder and riots were breaking out in the crowded poor section of the town. And finally, Bosch instigated the revolution which broke out in late April, 1965 and convulsed the place, leading to our great concern, after four or five days, for the safety of American citizens. So we landed the Marines to help in the evacuation, to organize it. And we did bring out some 4,500 people from more than 40 different countries.

Now, that's an enormous number of people to leave a small place. I remember, some months later, there was trouble out in Bangladesh and 700 people were taken off by the Navy. Well, that was headline news in the New York Times. But somehow 4,500 out of a small place in the Caribbean didn't get the same attention. By then the place had deteriorated into chaos. We finally brought in the airborne troops from Fort Bragg in North Carolina and stabilized the situation.

By this time there was a great deal of criticism in the press over American intervention once again in Latin America. We thought we were saving lives when we landed the Marines. And we broadened it by bringing in airborne troops to stabilize the situation while a diplomatic solution was sought. The Organization of American States sent a

committee down under the leadership of Ellsworth Bunker, with a Brazilian and a Salvadoran member accompanying him. They labored for months to find some non-partisan people, Dominicans, who could form a provisional government and lead the country back to elections. That was accomplished finally. Bunker did his usual very outstanding work. And he was enormously respected by all sides. We got the right man in Hector Garcia Godoy as the provisional President. And I presented my credentials a second time in September 1965. For the next nine, ten months I ran the normal functions of the Embassy.

We resumed our aid program. In fact, we very much enlarged it. We had a very large program going there. At one time we had more people in that Embassy than any other in the hemisphere, including Brazil and Mexico. In fact, I thought at times Washington was sending too many. But it was a major program.

The place did stabilize. There were free and orderly elections the following April. I had departed just before that. Balaguer was elected. The country settled down. And we got the troops out ahead of schedule. In essence, it was a case of trying to help a neighbor who'd fallen off the road of democracy back onto the road. And it has worked. The country has now had the longest period of political stability in its history. Before that time they'd only had one period of about five years of constitutional government in all of that long history since 1492. Then the man had been assassinated, the elected President. Now today we've had in the Dominican Republic more than 20 years of constitutional government and changes of leadership through free elections. Considering what's happened elsewhere in the Central American and Caribbean area it's been an island of stability.

Q: Pretty good. Balaguer was originally a Trujillo man, wasn't he?

BENNETT: He had been, he'd been a puppet president under Trujillo. But he had never been associated either with the corruption - because he was a frugal man, he was a bachelor, he lived very simply - he had never been associated either with the corruption or with the brutalities, the police and army brutalities. He was the man to bring the country back together - all the Dominicans respected him. All through the months of crisis Dominicans kept saying, Balaguer is the man who understands us, we need him back. He was then elected and served two terms as President, which was enough. Then, I'm not sure, he went on to do a third term. That's the trouble in Latin America. Once they're in office, they don't know how to give it up. Now he has recently been elected again after two or three other presidents have held office. The poor man now is blind and ailing, and it's obviously too late in time for him to be there. But that's the way of it. But he served a very worthwhile purpose for democracy and for constitutional stability when he came in 1966.

I had left because I wrote the Secretary of State, who was then Dean Rusk, some months before and said, now, I've been a controversial figure here. Now we've put things together, and we're clearly on the road to elections. I'm ready to go any time you think I should go. Well, the Secretary apparently appreciated that letter, and after a while I got

back an answer. In the spring of 1966 I was named Ambassador to Portugal. I left the Dominican Republic about two weeks before the election so as not to be a factor because Bosch was already making great noises about this Ambassador who brought the troops in is still here to control the election, etcetera. So I think my instinct was right in getting out ahead of time.

It was rough going for a while and there were a lot of ad hominem attacks which weren't very pleasant. But that's the way the game is played. I think to be in American diplomacy you've got to have a thick hide. And today it helps if you have a bullet proof vest. And you've certainly got to have a sense of humor.

Q: As I remember Senator Fulbright gave you a rough time on your confirmation hearings.

BENNETT: Yes, and for years after he tried to hold up every future appointment and with some pretty shabby work at times, I say frankly. Happily, all my appointments went through the Senate despite his opposition. As it turned out, I remained in government service than did Fulbright, since he was defeated for re-election.

No, he really didn't play fair. Senator Russell, who was my senator from Georgia and who was, of course, the highly respected ranking member of the Senate at the time, never forgave Fulbright over the way he played the Dominican case. I remember his saying to me, he said, I went over to Bill Fulbright the other day and I said, Bill, I understand you're going to make a speech on the Dominican Republic. And Fulbright said yes, but don't worry I'm not going to jump on your man. Then he did, of course, and with both feet. And Russell never forgave him for the way he had acted. This is personal, and I probably shouldn't mention it.

Q: No, this is what this all about.

BENNETT: It was too bad because I think Fulbright contributed some of the best legislation we ever had just after World War II. I'm aware that some of our scholarship people don't give him much credit - he was reportedly an unpleasant prima donna throughout the legislative process - but I consider the exchange fellowship and scholarship programs one of the best foreign policy instruments we have. But later on somehow - Fulbright talked about the arrogance of power in the executive branch but I think he became very arrogant after he became chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Of course, he wanted to be Secretary of State and was embittered when Kennedy didn't appoint him. And that seemed to have corroded his soul somehow.

Q: And he was also aided and abetted about it by his chief of staff among other things.

BENNETT: Oh, there were some bad people on his staff. Really there were.

Q: We were just getting you confirmed to Portugal. Now, let's get you to Portugal.

BENNETT: We went over to Portugal. The Department was very considerate during that period. They knew that I'd had a long and hot siege in more ways than one in the Dominican Republic, although it turned out very well in the end. The last months there were very pleasant months. We'd gotten back to the aid business in going around the country dedicating schools and mixing with the people. And it was really a pleasant time. So I left with only the happiest of memories. I have been back once since to Santo Domingo to visit.

They gave me a good long leave and I was able to have some time with my father - not my mother because she had died in the fall of '65. Partly because of all the furor surrounding the Dominican case. She was a very gentle person. She was already ill, and the attacks on me -

Q: Did upset her.

BENNETT: Upset her very badly. So I've always felt very keenly about two or three of those newspaper reporters who wrote with such little regard for the facts. And I remember Katherine Graham of the *Washington Post* coming to Ellsworth Bunker later that year and asking is it true that the reporting of our man there was so inaccurate? It certainly is true, said Bunker in his forthright way. And that man lost his job. So at any rate, that's neither here nor there.

I went on to Portugal in the summer of July of '66 and had three years there, leaving on the very day that our man landed on the moon in '69, July 20th. It was the 20th over there, the 19th here I believe. And that was the final period of Salazar. In fact, he had his stroke and became inactive while I was Ambassador there.

Q: He was already -

BENNETT: He was still alive but out of the picture by the time I left. Caetano had succeeded him. Salazar had done great things for the country. In the early days of his regime he had stabilized the place, brought internal peace and saved the country from bankruptcy. But then, as so often happens, he stayed on too long. Dean Acheson observed at one point that some people talk badly about Salazar, but Plato would have understood him very well. He did give the country good government for a long time. But his government had deteriorated by the time I got there. Then he had his stroke in 1968. Dean Rusk was then Secretary of State, and he came on a visit to Lisbon. We had meetings with Caetano, but he went to the hospital to sign the book for Salazar.

It was a country which still was hanging onto its African territories. So I had fascinating trips to Angola and Mozambique, which stands me in good stead today in having some understanding of what's going on down there. At the time the African Bureau was fairly newly organized and quite evangelistic in its approach. They said, we can't have Ambassador Bennett going down to these colonial places, that would ring very bad in the

rest of Africa, in the new countries. I said, well, you may forget but every time we have a naval ship that wants to round Africa it has to stop in either Angola or Mozambique to refuel. And we have to get permission from the Portuguese because they consider that's their territory. And anytime we want to send an airplane into or over that area we have to go to them for permission.

It had been traditional for the Ambassador to visit the African territories. What people failed to understand was that the Portuguese were not ashamed at all. They were old fashioned and they were behind the times obviously. But they still considered their role in Africa to be that of the early centuries, a Christianizing and civilizing mission. And they went at it with pretty honorable motives.

There were some bad things that happened obviously. Some people, a small group in Portugal, got rich out of sugar and mining and so forth. But the average Portuguese government official was honest and a devoted and dedicated public servant. Really, I saw them working in the boondocks of Mozambique with low salaries and very unpleasant living conditions and trying to improve living conditions for the people in their charge.

But times had changed and it was time for the Portuguese to change. I believe it was Scotty Reston who wrote in the *New York Times* that the weakest of the colonial powers was the one that lasted the longest. But finally the big revolution did come in 1974. However, it was fascinating to go to Angola and Mozambique in 1967 and see what was happening. Angola is a country with great natural resources; if it could only be politically organized and stable, it could go forward in a hurry. Mozambique has more problems in that it's tropical agriculture and not much else. Therefore, it lacks the resources to go forward as much as Angola; however, one hopes for the future in both places.

So that was Portugal. We had three years there. Then I came home after the Nixon Administration came into office. When a new administration comes in, there's always a question of whether a career man will hold his place or not. I had been told in the beginning that I was to stay. Then somebody said, well, if you last 100 days without a telegram.

Q: You're fairly safe.

BENNETT: My telegram came on the 100th day. Actually, a career man succeeded me. So I felt that was appropriate. I finished my three years there, which is par for the course. I had no reason to think I was going to be there indefinitely.

Q: Who did succeed you there?

BENNETT: Ridgway Knight.

Q: Oh, yes.

BENNETT: He had been pushed out of Belgium because of the John Eisenhower appointment. I think the White House was a little sensitive to the fact that the co-in- law had been appointed to Brussels and therefore, they had better do something for the career man who was there. Because Ridge had already thought he was retiring and expected to do so. He'd already begun making his arrangements for his retirement life when suddenly he got the call to go to Portugal. So that was the way that ended.

Q: Meanwhile, you've got a much harder working job I would say.

BENNETT: Well, not immediately. I went down almost two years to Maxwell Field.

Q: Oh, yes. Of course.

BENNETT: As the State Representative to the Air War College, to the Air University which included the War College. I thoroughly enjoyed that. I lectured and had time for private things. Of course, I come from Georgia, and my father was alone at the time and needing some family attention. I have no brothers and sisters. So it was very nice to be in the neighborhood where we could get back and forth to him on weekends. My wife enjoyed Montgomery. It's a very congenial and hospitable society. And so we had a lovely two years. We still go back regularly. And I'm happy to say that I'm on the board of visitors for Air University today as a result of an appointment a couple of years ago. So that takes me back officially once a year.

What comes next after the two years there? Several things were being mentioned, including the job in Berlin. Marty Hillenbrand wanted me to go as the number two in Bonn. Well, that's always a little difficult, if you've been an Ambassador, to go back to being number two. Marty had done that himself. And so I considered it a compliment that he wanted me for the job. He was then Assistant Secretary for Europe.

At any rate, just about that time the personnel people came up with the idea of my going to New York to the US mission to the United Nations. That appealed to us, and that's what I did. I went to New York as number three in the US delegation. You know we have five Ambassadors there. I went as the number three man, Deputy US Representative to the U.N. and Deputy on the U.N. Security Council to George Bush, then US Representative to the U.N. Then after a year and a half there I was made number two, the first Deputy. That's a full Ambassadorship. We have two Ambassadors A, E and P at the United Nations and then three who have the personal rank of Ambassador. Here again Senator Fulbright tried to block both those appointments but was outvoted 15 to 2 the last time he tried it. It was all right with me so long as it turned out well.

Q: Now, to what do you owe that overwhelming vote? Obviously your ability and charm.

BENNETT: Partly to his mismanaging. For one thing, Senator Sparkman, the senior Democrat after Fulbright on the committee, had been on our delegation in New York back in 1950 when I was there at the General Assembly. Actually he would later succeed

Fulbright as Committee Chairman. Sparkman knew me and, I'm glad to say, thought well of me; he was always supportive. At any rate, when the nomination came up for my promotion to Ambassador A. E. and P., Fulbright took the position that since I was a Deputy I didn't deserve to have the title of Ambassador. I could have the job but I was not to be Ambassador. How petty can you get! As number three in the mission, I already had the title of Ambassador; here I was being promoted to number two, and Fulbright proposed to take the title away. His position was outrageous, of course, because you'd had the designation of Ambassador for that job since the beginning of the United Nations. Nobody at the U.N. would have understood the kind of arrangement Fulbright was proposing, to have a US Representative on the U.N. Security Council without the rank of Ambassador.

He and Frank Church were the two. This is the way I understand the story, which I think is correct. The Foreign Relations Committee adjourned its session, and members went to lunch. Fulbright stayed behind and suddenly called a committee meeting. He and Church were the only two who were there, and they took the decision. When other Senators learned of this, there was an eruption in the committee over that kind of underhanded action. Fulbright had hurriedly sent his 2-0 action to the floor for full Senate approval, you see. The committee then voted 15 to 2 to recall it from the floor and to give me the title, as had always been the invariable practice.

Q: I'd totally forgotten this.

BENNETT: It wasn't a big thing to anybody except me.

Q: Oh, no. I think it was.

BENNETT: What had happened was that George Bush who had been the permanent representative had been succeeded by Scali. And so my name was on a list of four appointments for U.S.U.N. All five nominations went up together. That's when Fulbright tried to take the title away from me and confirm two or three of the others. It just obviously was dirty pool - unworthy, in my opinion, of a man in his position. I have never understood why he was so unrelentingly petty about it over a number of years. It only ended when he was defeated for reelection and left the Senate.

Q: Yes, he was certainly a man of great breadth on the one hand and great pettiness on the other.

BENNETT: I continue to feel that his immediate post-war work was outstanding, no matter his personal qualities.

As for me, there followed six years of very active and hard charging work at the U.N. It's an enormously busy place.

Q: I would have thought that would have been a long time on a very -

BENNETT: It was. I don't know of anybody else who stayed six years running. Charlie Yost was in and out for many years. As I say, I think I have more time at the U.N. than perhaps any other career officer, considering San Francisco, the 1950 service at the General Assembly, the liaison with IAEA in Vienna and then six years in New York. I was six years on the delegation to the General Assembly, seven if you count 1950. That is a long time. But I got to like it and it got very mellow in the final years. I had five political "perm reps" during my time, ranging from George Bush in 1971, through Scali, Pat Moynihan and Bill Scranton finally to Andy Young in 1977. By that time it seemed generally agreed that I had earned a major assignment abroad. So I only had two months with Young.

I found the United Nations 50 percent fascination and 50 percent frustration. It's exciting, the issues are important, the pace is urgent - but it has become almost unmanageable. It's a very difficult environment. During my years there the Third World crested in its demands and its, if I may say so, irresponsibility led by the Algerians. They have tempered somewhat now. And the natural centrifugal tendencies in the Third World have asserted themselves. So now it's not the united thrust it was during '73, '74, '75 when we were just on the gridiron every day. The United Nations does so much good work in the obscure or unnoticed fields.

Q: The economic things.

BENNETT: Development and refugees, world health, all those things. And it has such difficult and often unsuccessful work in the political field which is the most dramatic and which gets the headlines. The failures are not really so much the fault of the United Nations as such. Because the U.N. only has the power that individual governments are willing to give it. You may be an Ambassador there but you are tied to your home capital. The Ambassadors of some of the small countries may be pretty free agents. But I've never been in any job in my career where we were more in touch with the White House on a daily basis, almost hourly at times. Because every time you vote you're committing the United States. And you don't want to cast a vote unless you know that the White House approves it. So you're back and forth on the phone all the time. These were the days of Kissinger and Scowcroft at the National Security Council. Then Kissinger became Secretary of State. So that was an interesting association of those years.

At the U.N. you range the issues of the world. As someone wrote, and I think this is a profound statement, the United Nations is an organization that became indispensable before it became possible. If you think about it, that says a lot.

Q: Yes. I always wondered whether on occasion we did not expend too much US political prestige and money getting favorable votes at the U.N. Do you have any feeling on that?

BENNETT: Oh, I think sometimes the issues are built up more than they're worth. But that's the way the US goes at problems.

Q: On the other hand, you can't be in the position of losing them all I suppose.

BENNETT: And we tried. Moynihan began this, Jeane Kirkpatrick has followed it later of trying to tot up the balance of the countries that vote for us and vote against us and how you equate that with our AID program and had to respond to some of those countries that are constantly trying to do us in. But that kind of vote analysis doesn't work either. Because you find that sometimes Canada may have voted against us more than anybody else, depending on the issues. It's just not a thing that lends itself to that kind of an equation. But it's an interesting organization and, as I say, I think a vital one, despite all of its problems. Happily, this past year has seen an upturn at the U.N., a certain reinvigoration

Then I went on, as you know, to NATO. That I regard as the finest job I ever had. It's an important job. You feel you - I don't want to be dramatic - but you feel you're defending the West. And it's certainly a top level job in the attention it gets and the associations it brings. I'm glad to say it has been largely a bipartisan job in this country. So you have good support from the Congress on both sides of the House. In Brussels we received a great many visitors from the Congress, all of whom we welcomed. We had good briefing sessions with them. The Department has always staffed the NATO mission with good people. There's a whole cadre of people who've been trained in that area and they are excellent. Two recent graduates, Mike Glitman who has negotiated the INF Treaty and Steve Ledogar who's now negotiating in Vienna on the conventional side. They were consecutively my two Deputies.

Q: How do you spell Ledogar?

BENNETT: L-E-D-O-G-A-R, Stephen Ledogar. They're both outstanding officers. They've had a lot of departmental experience as well as overseas.

Q: Of course, the great function of your job in NATO is that of consultation with allies.

BENNETT: Exactly.

Q: Did you feel that that usually gets number one priority in the US government? In other words, that you were happy that we were doing adequate consulting?

BENNETT: Yes, and I think we worked very hard at the consultation process. There's always talk about it. The Europeans love to say, well, you don't consult. In the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting at Reykjavik we didn't. But in my time we worked very hard at it. And I think we're very meticulous - and I'm not saying myself. I'm talking about top level government.

Q: That's what I'm after.

BENNETT: The Secretary of State comes to NATO at least twice a year. There are two scheduled meetings. And recently there have been many more. Now he goes and reports after every summit and that kind of thing, as well as those before a summit. The Secretary of Defense has four scheduled NATO meetings a year. Our mission at NATO itself is about 55 percent Defense, staffed with both civilian and military officers. So we have more Defense people than State.

Q: That's interesting.

BENNETT: But it's a very harmonious mission and it works well. I'm the only career man who has served as Ambassador to NATO. Of course, David Bruce held the job at one time. In my own case, I thought it went well. We're dealing there with the top career people of our European allies, because they are much more career oriented than we are. Usually the European Ambassadors to NATO are people who are at the permanent assistant secretary/ Under Secretary level in their foreign offices who either come to NATO from those jobs or go to those jobs from NATO. The present Secretary General of the Foreign office in Norway, for instance, was my colleague at NATO. And I can name you a dozen who've gone in and out that way. The British always have top representation, always career people. Now, we've had some very outstanding political ambassadors at NATO, men of cabinet rank before of after their service at NATO. Generally I think we've sent men of national stature to that job, except in my case as the career man. But we've also had some who didn't turn out so well.

You've got to have some facility with foreign languages in the job at NATO. You've got to have some French because the two languages are interchangeable in daily use. At the most intimate meeting of NATO, which is the weekly luncheon of the 16 Ambassadors with the Secretary General, it just depends on which language starts as the one most used around the table. The talk just flows from one to the other. I've made this tabulation on a number of occasions and the council breaks down time after time just about half and half, eight who are more comfortable in English, eight who are more comfortable in French. It's amazing how regular that breakdown is.

Q: Were you very comfortable in your French when you went there?

BENNETT: My French is reasonably good. I would give it a three level. It ought to be better. It could be. I have no problem in recording. I usually spoke in English, so as to be completely accurate in presenting the US position. But you have to take notes. It's a working lunch. You have a pad by your plate. And you're taking notes all during lunch as the issues are brought up. I had no problem with that. Some of our ambassadors have had to go to the British or the French or somebody and said, now, tell me what happened at lunch. That's unfortunate when that's the case.

Q: But the lunches are strictly only the perm reps?

BENNETT: Yes.

Q: Well, now this is absolutely great. You've got one more very important job to go. And we're almost at the end of this tape. Do you want to just hit on that? And then I hope we'll get some more time to come back for some of this.

BENNETT: I will just say on NATO that we took the landmark decision in 1979 to deploy the Pershing and Cruise missiles in Europe as a counter-balance to the SS-20's already installed by the Warsaw Pact forces. That led on to the success of the INF treaty with the Soviets because we had something to negotiate.

After more than six years at NATO, the longest tenure of any American representative there, I came back home thinking I was going to retire in the summer of '83. I was already in the retirement process when Secretary Shultz suddenly called me and asked me to do the Congressional job, Assistant Secretary of State for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. Because, he said, next year is an election year - this would be '84 - and he wanted to have that job as non-partisan as possible. And, he said, the two people I have to have next to me at all times, one the Public Affairs Assistant Secretary because of the media and the press and the Congressional Assistant Secretary because that's where I can get into trouble. That was a very interesting and rewarding but very demanding job, as you know better than anybody else.

Q: Not better, but -

BENNETT: Things can never go right. If it goes right, somebody else gets the credit - this is as it should be. One of the things I felt most keenly about in that job was the problem of relations within the State Department. I don't know if you felt that in your time at the job.

Q: Absolutely, yes.

BENNETT: I said to the Secretary, it's just like tectonic plates colliding. Because the geographic bureaus - of course I'm a child of the geographic bureaus and believe firmly in them - they are wont to go their own way. And, if an Assistant Secretary for a geographic area is worth his salt, he's going to want to have his own relationships on the Hill. And yet, they're constantly forgetting that you've got to have an overall coordination. Then sometimes even the Secretary's own office staff had very little sympathy for the Congressional office; I thought that was deplorable.

Q: The latter point I don't recall having had trouble with.

BENNETT: Oh, the Secretary, no. Or the Deputy Secretary. It was some of the officers in the secretariat group who didn't have much sympathy with Congressional relations. That is, I think, one of the troubles of the Foreign Service. It does not show enough interest in the Congress or follow it closely enough.

Q: It's very peculiar that a profession that is based on understanding political action abroad, political relationships abroad doesn't really understand the necessity of doing it at home.

BENNETT: But you know there are a lot of our colleagues who say, oh, I don't want to be bothered with the Congress. They get in our hair. And that's the wrong approach. At any rate, I was there for about a year and a half. Unfortunately, I started the job from a case of hepatitis.

Q: I remember.

BENNETT: The day the President announced my appointment was the day the doctor said, you are beginning to have hepatitis, go to bed. So I called the Secretary and said, really, I don't know how long I'll be down with this. I think you ought to get somebody else. Oh no, he said, take the time you need and then come on and take the job. Then I called Larry Eagleburger who was then Under Secretary and a career man. And I said, Larry, there's no telling how long this may take. He said, oh, don't worry about it; I need to lose some weight myself. So I took off a couple of months with hepatitis and then started going back half time. It was not the way to begin an arduous, demanding job, fascinating as the job was. I have never regretted doing it, although I would have liked to be in physical shape to have done it better.

End of interview