

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

AMBASSADOR MAX WALDO BISHOP

Interviewed by: Thomas F. Conlon
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INTERVIEW

Q: Ambassador, would you describe briefly your background, your birthplace and education?

BISHOP: Oh, yes, I'd be very happy to. I was born in Gravette, Arkansas, Benton County, in the Northwest corner of Arkansas, on October 30, 1908. I was born in my grandparents' home in Gravette, which was actually quite a prosperous town at that time, I gather. However, I never lived 12 consecutive months in Arkansas till after I retired from the Foreign Service. My home at that time was principally Kansas City, Kansas. We moved quite a bit--up to the Dakota's, I gather. My brother, who is three and one-half years older than I, has told me that we have a lot of pictures of my early youth.

Probably the best place to start, as far as my early education is concerned, is in Kansas City. We lived on North Seventh St. in Kansas City, Kansas, and I attended the Lincoln Elementary School. We lived there until I was seven or eight years old. My mother was a graduate, surgical nurse. Of course, she had to travel quite a bit because she graduated from--was there a St. Joseph's Hospital in Chicago?

Q: I'm not familiar with it.

BISHOP: Was there a St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago?

Q: St. Luke's, certainly.

BISHOP: She graduated there as a surgical nurse and, of course, was in great demand because she was a very talented and capable, surgical nurse. That's enough about the family itself.

Q: Where did you go to school? You started...

BISHOP: In grade school in Kansas City, Kansas. Then we lived in Kansas City, Missouri. My mother married my stepfather, Julius August Schmidt. She met him because she was the nurse for his uncle, Captain John Hale, a wealthy bachelor in Kansas City. My stepfather was his administrator. Captain Hale lived in an apartment hotel in Kansas City. He had selected Dad as the executor of his estate. That's all I know about him.

Q: Ambassador, you mentioned that you had done some of your school work in Iowa. When did you move to Iowa?

BISHOP: Oh, yes. Mother and Dad [i.e., his stepfather] were married there in Kansas City. Dad's home was in Iowa. He and his father founded the Schmidt Music Co. in Muskateen, Iowa. They had stores in Muskateen and Davenport [Iowa] and in Rock Island and Moline [Illinois].

Q: The Tri-Cities?

BISHOP: The Tri-Cities there on the Mississippi River. First, because Dad had his uncle's estate to settle in Kansas City, we stayed there for maybe a year. Then we moved to Davenport, Iowa, and lived there until I entered the Foreign Service. By that time I had completed college and all of that.

Q: Where did you go to college?

BISHOP: The University of Chicago. I have a Ph. B. from the University of Chicago in 1932. As we said last night, if you mumble it properly, it may sound like a Ph. D. (Laughter)

Q: How did you become interested in the Foreign Service? Where had you come across it?

BISHOP: My first glimmer of a desire to go into the Foreign Service came in 1928 when I was at Exeter. There was an article in what I think was the Saturday Evening Post or a weekly magazine like that.

Q: You attended Exeter Academy in New England?

BISHOP: In New England. In Exeter, New Hampshire. That was after I had graduated from high school in Davenport, Iowa. I took the science course at Davenport High School. By the way, the schools in Davenport, Iowa, were academically at the very top at that time. They taught Latin and ancient history and had excellent teachers. Actually, it was my Latin teacher who interested me in going to Exeter for post graduate study, because I was young--I graduated from high school in 1925, so I was under 16. Then I went to Exeter.

Q: How did you happen to go to Exeter?

BISHOP: The brother of one of the teachers at the high school in Davenport, Iowa, had been at Exeter, where he was an outstanding student. I had never even heard of Exeter until she told me about it. She thought I ought to go there before I went to college. It was actually the best thing I could have done because college was a "breeze" after that. I had learned how to study. One thing I also learned to do was to keep on writing notes when I was sound asleep in class. [Laughter]

Q: A worthwhile achievement, a skill worth keeping. Well, then after some time at Exeter you went on to the University of Chicago and got your Ph. B. there. You became interested in the Foreign Service while at Exeter?

BISHOP: While at Exeter. As I say, there was an article in a magazine--I believe it was the Saturday Evening Post. It described the Rogers Act which set up a career Foreign Service.

Q: That was the Rogers Act of 1924, as I recall it.

BISHOP: Yes, it described how the Foreign Service was a career, based strictly on merit and your ability and so on. Actually, when I was at Exeter, Mother and Dad drove East to Exeter and picked me up. We went down to New York City and wound up in Washington, DC, because I had this idea that maybe I'd like to go into the Foreign Service. In Washington I went into the State Department.

Q: The old State Department, next to the White House?

BISHOP: The old State Department, and, as I mentioned last night, instead of going in where everybody does, I went in the Main [South] Entrance. I don't have the slightest idea who he was, but a man whose name I cannot remember had an office there just inside. I went in and told him that I wanted to get all the dope on the Foreign Service. The official I talked to gave me a pamphlet on the Foreign Service, which stated what you had to do, that is, take the examination, and what not. So I wrote a letter to the Secretary of State

and said that if I take the examination and fail, what happens? The answer was that they would just discard that examination, and I could try again.

Q: When did you take the examination? Do you remember?

BISHOP: It was before I finished college [in 1932]. It must have been the year they put in the new style of examination. Joe Greene was the man who set up the new style of examination--more of an essay type. I was one of seven who passed it out of a group of 277 who took the exam.

Q: Marvelous. How many days did it take? Was it a one-day exam or did it take several days?

BISHOP: I took the exam in December, 1932. It went on for three days. The last day was rather dull, I thought. You know, the various exams were weighted. Anyhow, the examination on the last day was on German. I submitted German as my language. I had studied German every year at the University of Chicago.

Q: Had you spoken any German at home? When you were born, your family name was Schmidt.

BISHOP: Well, of course, my stepfather didn't speak any foreign language. Overall, it was not an easy exam, but I wasn't trying to pass it because I hadn't even graduated from college.

Q: Were you a junior or a senior?

BISHOP: I was in my senior year.

Q: You took it in Chicago?

BISHOP: In Chicago--downtown some place where they had it. As I said, I wasn't too good in German, so I think I got 4% on my language exam, or something like that. I told everybody that was for penmanship, because I didn't expect to pass. The German exam was about doing business in a foreign country. You had to write a letter to someone or then answer it. You composed a letter and then translated it. I walked out of the room where I took the examination and went to see the movie, "Mata Hari." This was probably one of the things that made me as able to...

Q: You were relaxed and not much concerned about it. I notice that various of the pictures you have in your office show military officers--General MacArthur and so on. Did you have military service at any time?

BISHOP: Yes, right behind you you'll see a certificate that after I was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the Military Intelligence Reserve, United States Army Reserve, I

was assigned to duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps--the CCC. I was the second in command at Camp Shady down in Arkansas. There was a First Lieutenant, and I was the Second Lieutenant. He was the boss, and I was the one who did all the work. In other words, he could go home. He was married, and I had to live there at the camp. The CCC was one of the best things that the government did at the time. The CCC consisted mostly of young men, but there were older men in some of the units. Our unit consisted of young men. They sent their salaries home to their parents. The boys were well behaved. They did forestry work in the Quachita National Forest in Arkansas. We clothed, housed, fed and educated them. We also had a teacher available for them.

Q: Did they work there the year around?

BISHOP: Yes, they worked the year around.

Q: Did they sign up for a specific period--a year or two or three years?

BISHOP: Their families were on relief. A certain amount from their salaries was sent home to their families. I remember that we paid them in cash. Gosh, I had a .45 caliber automatic strapped onto my belt.

Q: Well, you took the Foreign Service exam in 1932 and passed it. How long was it before you entered the Foreign Service?

BISHOP: It was several years between passing the exam in 1932 and going on active duty in the State Department in 1935. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected in 1932 and came into office in 1933. There were no appointments to the Foreign Service for several years.

Q: What was your first post in the Foreign Service? Did you have some training in the State Department before you went overseas?

BISHOP: No, I didn't. Ordinarily, we would have had the usual course that every Foreign Service Officer has when he enters the Department--orientation or whatever. We did not have that. I was asked, and so were those who went with me, if I wanted a language assignment. I said, yes, I did. I asked for a language assignment in the Far East, and I got Japanese.

Q: Had you asked for Japanese?

BISHOP: No, I think I just asked for the Far East. They had a Chinese course and, in fact, Edward Rice [later Consul General in Hong Kong] went to China at the same time I went to Japan. There were eight of us who went to Japan--they're in the picture on the wall, the lower picture on the right. Those were the Japanese language students in my group.

Q: Had that program been going on for some years?

BISHOP: Oh yes, it had been going on for a long time and was very well organized.

Q: Did you have any duties at the Embassy or was your whole function simply to learn Japanese?

BISHOP: Learn Japanese.

Q: Did you live with a Japanese family?

BISHOP: No. I had three tutors a day--sometimes only two tutors. They came to the house. We had "Tokuhons" [readers], assignments, and so forth. I never was very good at calligraphy. At one time--I'm probably boasting now--I knew and could read 3,000 characters. Even learning to recognize and read 1,500 characters is a big memory job. All of these characters were on cards--on one side were the characters and their various compounds--and then on the back side was the English meaning. So you'd go through these cards. And those you didn't get right you put to one side and did them again--day after day. You'd get new cards and more and more until--well, you had to know 1,000 characters. I was ultimately able to recognize and read about 3,000 characters.

Q: I recall that in Ambassador [Joseph C.] Grew's memoirs he mentions that no Westerner can really learn to speak Japanese. I know some people who can speak Japanese passably well, but, of course, as foreigners they are not really part of Japanese culture--that must have been what he was talking about.

BISHOP: That's right. Well, it was [Stanley] Hornbeck, I think, or somebody in the Department who said that because my name was Max Waldo Schmidt, I would be excellent at languages. Of course, I don't know a jot of German. For the most part my ancestry is English and Irish, I guess. I learned Japanese as best I could...

Q: This Japanese language course was for about two years, 1935-1937?

BISHOP: That's right.

Q: Then, after you finished the language course, what happened next?

BISHOP: Then I went to Osaka as vice consul. I did everything there, including the accounts. After just a few months I was ordered back to the Embassy in Tokyo as Third Secretary.

Q: What Section of the Embassy were you assigned to then?

BISHOP: I was assigned to the Political Section, because I was a language officer. All of the Japanese interpreters or translators were under me.

Q: Do you have any special recollections from that period--major questions that came to you? After all, this was a period when Japan was steadily moving along the aggressive course that later led to Pearl Harbor, war in the Pacific, and so on. Could you see any clear signs of this in your early days in Japan?

BISHOP: Yes. The biggest translating job I did at the Embassy was the National General Mobilization Law. At that time I told Gene Dooman [Eugene Dooman], the counselor of Embassy, and Joe Grew, our ambassador, that the passage of this law would mean that the Japanese were preparing for a major war. They passed the law. I translated the whole thing.

Q: When did they pass the law? Do you remember what year?

BISHOP: Well, Mrs. Lispenard Crocker [wife of Edward Crocker, Second Secretary in Embassy Tokyo] and I went to the Japanese Imperial Diet to listen to the opening session that year. Of course, she didn't speak any Japanese, so I interpreted for her. There were just the two of us from the Embassy. We wanted to get a feel for the situation. The Japanese were getting ready for a major war. The "China Incident" had just occurred.

Q: That was in July, 1937.

BISHOP: That's right. Anyhow, that was my job as interpreter and translator and head of that unit in the Political Section in the Embassy. I also drafted the monthly Political Report in the Embassy.

Q: How many people were in the Political Section at the time?

BISHOP: Well, let's see. There was myself--I was low man on the totem pole--and Cabot Coleville.

Q: Gene Dooman?

BISHOP: Eugene Dooman was the Counselor of the Embassy.

Q: I see. There was just one Counselor of Embassy?

BISHOP: Yes. We also had an economic attaché. The Political Section, actually, included myself, Cabot Coleville, and Bill Turner. Cabot Coleville left on transfer. And, of course, Gene Dooman was the Counselor of Embassy. Actually, he was perfectly bilingual in Japanese. His family had been missionaries in Japan. He spoke Japanese like the Japanese.

Q: What about Stanley Hornbeck? What was his function?

BISHOP: Oh, Stanley Hornbeck was back in the Department. He didn't serve in the Embassy. I was one of the few people that he really liked and respected, I think. [Laughter] I came back to Washington to serve in the Department on the Japan Desk in July, 1941, though I was not the senior man.

Q: Was Hornbeck the top man on the Japan desk?

BISHOP: Oh, no, Hornbeck was Political Adviser in the Department. He was referred to as PAH ("Political Adviser Hornbeck"). There was a European, a Latin American, a Far Eastern, and a Near Eastern Political Adviser--four of them in the Department, as I recall. They all had assistant secretary rank, I think. There was only one Under Secretary of State.

Q: The Under Secretary was the number two in the Department, the deputy to the Secretary of State?

BISHOP: That's right. Then below the Under Secretary were the assistant secretaries. Each one had an area--Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and the Far East.

Q: You mentioned returning to the United States in July, 1941, about five months before Pearl Harbor. I recall your saying that earlier in 1941 you had a particularly important conversation with the Peruvian Minister in Tokyo which Ambassador Grew then passed on to Washington. Could you give us some of the background to that?

BISHOP: Well, actually, the Peruvian Minister--and I saw him and his counselor after World War II was over. He told me that, according to some of his sources--he did not name them and I did not ask him who they were--the Japanese planned a surprise, all-out attack on Pearl Harbor, if and when they decided to go to war with the United States.

Q: And this conversation with him took place in January, 1941?

BISHOP: Yes, it had to be, in early 1941.

Q: Well, I'm interested in this because I think that it is now well established that definite Japanese planning began with an order from Admiral Yamamoto, the commander of the Combined Fleet, to study the feasibility of an attack on Pearl Harbor. And this order was issued in early January, 1941. If I remember correctly, the Peruvian must have talked to you within a week of the issuance of that order. Now this was a highly secret order, and yet it became known to the United States almost immediately.

BISHOP: Well, I got that intelligence, not only from the Peruvian, but from other sources.

Q: What other sources? Could you describe them?

BISHOP: Mostly American.

Q: American businessmen?

BISHOP: No, the best source I had was a newspaperman. The journalists in those days were very reliable. They were not sensationalists.

Q: They were not investigative reporters?

BISHOP: I'll tell you an interesting story on this. Prior to the Pearl Harbor attack, the United Press correspondent in Tokyo--I think he is dead now--was one of my best sources. In those days we didn't have funds to buy information.

Q: There was no intelligence organization.

BISHOP: No, you were on your own, and you collected information as best you could. Of course, the press had money to buy information. I remember, the name of the United Press correspondent was Tommy Thompson, Harold O. Thompson. I think that he was the best American correspondent out there. He really had access to good information.

Q: As I recall it, the drift of Japan toward war was unmistakable and had been so for many years. But the specific matter of Pearl Harbor as a target was not so clear.

BISHOP: Well, I sent that telegram. Actually, Ambassador Grew sent the telegram to the effect that his Peruvian colleague had told a member of his staff, etc. That was shortly before I went home, on transfer to the Department. Things were getting really hot, and Ambassador Grew wanted me back there. Maxwell Hamilton, on the Japan Desk, also wanted a Japanese expert, if you will, fluent in Japanese and what not. When my ship called in Honolulu on my way back to the US, I met with a number of Naval officers who were following the situation closely. The Navy had been training Japanese language officers for a long time in Japan. Some of these Navy people came down to the boat I was traveling on--I guess the PRESIDENT COOLIDGE. I spent a whole day with them, discussing "What about this," and "What about that?" I said, well, we don't read their war plans, but the story, which I got from here, there, and everywhere--from good sources--was that Pearl Harbor was going to be hit. They told me then that they were flying daylight reconnaissance patrols from dawn to dusk. The patrols stopped at dusk because, of course, they couldn't see in the dark.

Q: No radar?

BISHOP: No radar. So they said they had extended these reconnaissance flights out about 500 miles farther from Pearl Harbor. Well, of course, the Japanese got through these patrols. Also, you can yell for a year, crying "Wolf, wolf, wolf," and here I was recommending more reconnaissance flights. I don't think that the Navy was as alert at the end of 1941 as they were at the beginning of that year.

Q: I think that it was anticipated that war was about to break out. That was unmistakable, but the Navy did not give much credence to Pearl Harbor as a likely...

BISHOP: Well, now here's another matter. We were talking last night about General Marshall. He was out horseback riding on the morning of December 7. The Army sent a final warning. You ought to read everything written about Admiral Kimmel and what they did to him. His son, Tom Kimmel, a brilliant young Navy officer, was railroaded out of the Navy. Not railroaded out, exactly, but he never made admiral. Admiral Kimmel--the attack and then his transfer from his position as Navy commander just broke his heart.

If you think back to the psychology of the American people at that time, the only way that we could be brought into the war was through the Pacific--the Japanese. The Germans didn't really attack us. Our ships went back and forth across the Atlantic. We sank a couple of German submarines. They didn't sink any of our ships, until after we got into the war. Then they littered the whole Atlantic Coast with sunken ships. Anyhow, the only way you were going to get the American people to go to war was through the Pacific, somehow involving the Japanese, the so-called wily orientals.

The Japanese did not tell the Germans in advance that they were going to attack Pearl Harbor. They didn't tell the Germans anything. The Germans were far more frank with the Japanese. The Japanese didn't tell anybody anything. They knew exactly what they wanted to do and they did it. They wanted to liberate the colonial territories...

Q: And establish the Co-Prosperity Sphere, as they called it.

BISHOP: They called it the Co-Prosperity Sphere and so forth. But the Japanese objective was to get the European, non-Asiatic empires out of there. These empires would have died eventually, anyhow--the Dutch, the French, and the British. The Portuguese didn't hurt anybody. They could have stayed there.

Q: The Portuguese decided to leave when they wanted to do so, much later on.

BISHOP: That was it.

Q: Well, then you returned to the Japan Desk, and, as I recall your saying, you were involved in taking notes or otherwise assisting Secretary Hull in the negotiations with Admiral Nomura and, later on, Ambassador Kurusu, in 1941?

BISHOP: Yes, that was my principal job. I kept all of the pre-Pearl Harbor files in my office in a filing cabinet which had a lock on it, the same as almost every filing cabinet in the Department of State and throughout the government.

Q: Was this a combination or a key lock?

BISHOP: A key lock. When you left the Department, you took your keys down to a board near the front door of the State Department and hung them up there.

Q: There was nobody watching the keys?

BISHOP: Oh, yes, there was somebody there all the time, but nothing was well protected. And I don't think that anybody particularly cared. Classified material was protected--it wasn't left out in the open, or anything of that sort. I don't know whether we had Communist agents in the Department at the time. As you know from the "Pumpkin Papers"...

Q: Well, this could have been the time when those documents were taken from the Department.

BISHOP: Alger Hiss was in the Department. Whenever Alger Hiss went on leave, I took his place, in Stanley Hornbeck's office, where he was principal aide to Hornbeck. He was a very fine man, a person you would enjoy talking with. But I noticed that, once in a while, he had some dubious, Left Wing characters in his office. But that's another story.

Q: Then you were a part of the discussions with the Japanese, which were unsuccessful. What were your feelings when you learned that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

BISHOP: I wanted to get out of the Foreign Service and get back my Military Intelligence commission. But the Chief of Personnel said, "Look, you can do that, but I can assure you that you won't get anywhere with it. You can get out of here, but you won't go anyplace else." I had my reserve commission from the time I was waiting for my Foreign Service appointment to come through. I took an examination to get my commission in the Army and so forth. There's my copy of the commission over there on the wall. It was issued in 1935.

Q: Then you continued in Washington after war broke out?

BISHOP: Yes. But I had been married. My first wife became seriously ill. By the way, it was Alger Hiss who arranged for me to take her to Johns Hopkins Hospital. He was from Baltimore. He was the nicest and most helpful person and friend you'd ever want to know. They gave her a complete examination but couldn't find anything for sure. She dragged one foot, and her gold bracelets fell off her arm. The doctor told me that they thought it was "hysteria." Not "hysteria" in a usual sense. He said that hysteria, in medical terms, could cause symptoms of any known human disease or illness, except pregnancy in a male! Anyhow, it turned out to be cancer, from which she eventually died.

Q: What year did she die?

BISHOP: In 1944. She was ill for three or four years.

Q: Did you continue on the Japan Desk during most of the war?

BISHOP: Yes. Actually, it was more than that. I always considered that matters involving U. S. foreign policy were my strong point in the Department. Hornbeck didn't use me so much on that as Hamilton did. We wrote a number of perceptive memoranda on what was likely to happen and what we were planning to do.

Q: What was your next assignment after the Japan Desk?

BISHOP: In 1944 I was assigned as Consul in Colombo, Ceylon. I didn't do much consular work. My principal duties involved advising our military leaders in Southeast Asia Command on the various problems which came up, which have been well described in published histories. I was also assigned as a secretary of the Mission in New Delhi, India, where I was Political Advisor to General Wedemeyer, then the commanding general of the U. S. Burma-India Theater of Operations. I knew General Merrill, who commanded Merrill's Marauders in Burma.

Q: At the end of World War II, were you a part of the discussions about what to do with Japan? In other words, whether to try the Emperor as a war criminal or keep him as a symbol of Japan.

BISHOP: That was absolute stupidity in the Department of State. When the war was over, unless we wanted to act like one of the Balkan countries, there was no reason to try the Emperor. We had fixed Japan. We had burned them out. They knew that they had it coming to them. There was no point to a trial. Thank God that General MacArthur was put in charge in Japan, because he was tough. He purged some of the military leaders, but that was about all. They were finished. I was the first Foreign Service Officer back in Japan after the surrender.

Q: When was this? This would have been in 1945?

BISHOP: Yes.

Q: Were you assigned to SCAP [Supreme Commander, Allied Powers--General MacArthur's office]?

BISHOP: No, I wasn't assigned to his office. I was assigned as a State Department representative. George Atcheson, another Foreign Service Officer, arrived as my supervisor. George hated Japan and the Japanese. He was on the USS PANAY [a gunboat stationed on the Yangtze River in 1937] when the Japanese bombed it. He had reason to dislike the Japanese. He was intelligent and a very fine Foreign Service Officer. He wanted nothing to do with Japan. Fortunately, from my point of view, I was the first Foreign Service Officer to arrive on duty there. Jack Service [John Stewart Service] came out with George Atcheson. Jack and I were the same rank, but I got there first, so I outranked him. [Laughter]

Q: Well, John Service went on to work in China.

BISHOP: Yes. He was a China hand, but they sent him to Japan. George Atcheson was also a China hand. The people in the Department thought that if they sent China hands over to Japan, they would fix the Japanese.

When we were there in Tokyo after the war, General MacArthur, of course, had control of all of the communications. His staff controlled all of the messages sent out. We'd take the messages over to the code room in plain language, and the Army communicators would encode them in the proper code and send them to the Secretary of State. Well, George Atcheson didn't like that. I don't know whether it was Jack Service who put him up to it, but George thought we ought to have our own codes for our messages. MacArthur said no. He said that we could send the messages through the Army message center, which would encode them and send them to the State Department or wherever we wanted. Well, I told George: "Look, either you're going to agree on this and do it their way or you're going to have an impossible situation. We will lose. The State Department will lose." I mean, MacArthur was the Supreme Allied Commander. This was just tilting with a windmill. Why?

Q: How many State Department officers were assigned when you went back to Tokyo?

BISHOP: I was the only one at first. The others came out with George Atcheson from Washington.

Q: How many came out with Atcheson? I suppose they came over a period of time.

BISHOP: They came over a period of time. Alex Johnson (U. Alexis Johnson) and Beppo Johansen came from China. Beppo had studied Japanese at the same time that I did and was junior to me.

Q: What did they call this group? Was it called the American Embassy in Tokyo?

BISHOP: No, we were in the Office of the Political Adviser to SCAP.

Q: Didn't Ambassador [William] Sebald serve there at some point?

BISHOP: He came there fairly early. He was there when I left Tokyo. After I married my second wife, we stayed there for about a year until 1947. I hadn't met her family, and she hadn't met mine. She was my secretary in the Office of the Political Adviser. It wasn't an easy time in some ways because I was the only one in the office who felt that we had punished the Japanese people enough.

Q: The Peace Treaty with Japan was signed in 1951. When was the Embassy in Tokyo as such reopened?

BISHOP: Not until after MacArthur left.

Q: He left in April, 1951, as I recall. The peace treaty came in September, 1951, so shortly after that the Embassy was reconstituted as such. Who was the first ambassador? Was it John Allison Sebald?

BISHOP: Yes, Bill stayed on for a short time and then he went to Australia as ambassador. He wasn't formally Ambassador to Japan, as far as I can recall. U. Alexis Johnson was then appointed Ambassador to Japan.

Q: Then when did you leave Japan?

BISHOP: Let's see. The war was over in 1945. I went back to Washington in 1947 to attend the National War College. I never went back to Japan after that. I was in the second class at the National War College. I recall that one of the children of an Army officer in our class saw the picture which stated that I had graduated as a member of the second class at the National War College. She said with concern, "I don't see why Daddy had to go to a second class War College." [Laughter]

Q: Then you completed the course in 1948.

BISHOP: Yes.

Q: Where did you go then? You were assigned to the State Department after you finished the National War College?

BISHOP: Yes, I was in the Department, assigned to the Policy Planning Staff. George Kennan was the head of it. He was also senior staff member on the National Security Council staff, and I was a working staff member there.

Q: What do you think of the policy planning function? It was a new idea.

BISHOP: It was a new idea. I think it was George's idea. Kennan and George Butler were the senior members on the staff. It was a great place to work. I was proud to have been selected to serve there when I finished at the National War College.

Q: Well, ambassador, you've spoken of the Policy Planning Staff and also of the National Security Council staff. Were they separate and distinct or were they...

BISHOP: They were separate. The Policy Planning Staff in the State Department contributed to the work of the National Security Council staff. But the National Security Council consisted of the President and the Vice President, as ex officio member, the Secretary of State, and, at President Truman's request, the Secretary of the Treasury, John Snyder. That was it. Then they added the Secretary of Defense. Snyder was very close to President Truman. Sidney Sauer was Truman's personal adviser. He carried the President's word around Washington.

Q: How long were you on the Policy Planning Staff?

BISHOP: I was there as long as Kennan was there. Then I was on the National Security Council staff. It was in the West Executive Building--the "old" State Department. I also had an office in the State Department at 21st St. and Virginia Avenue. I was there when General Marshall was Secretary of State. I think I told you last night that the only time I ever had a drink in the State Department was in Secretary Marshall's office. When Dean Acheson came in as Secretary of State in 1949, I worked very closely with him, briefing him on the National Security Council. I was concerned with global matters, rather than just Far Eastern affairs.

In 1951 I went to Saudi Arabia as consul general in Dhahran. I was there for about two years. I was in Dhahran when John Foster Dulles became Secretary of State in 1953.

Q: What do you remember in particular from your time in Saudi Arabia? This was before Arab oil had become so important for the United States.

BISHOP: I wouldn't say "before." It was important then, and, of course, was almost entirely American. I don't think that there were any British companies in Saudi Arabia at all. King Saud was not fond of the British.

Q: Then you left Saudi Arabia when Secretary of State Dulles came into office and you returned to the Department?

BISHOP: Yes, I was initially assigned to the Operations Coordination Board. However, I wasn't there too long, because when Herbert Hoover, Jr., came in as Under Secretary to Dulles, I was assigned to Hoover's office as Operations Coordinator for the Department of State, under the Operations Coordination Board. I was there until I went to Thailand in 1955.

During my time in Under Secretary Hoover's office, we had two particular problems in the State Department, involving homosexuals and Communist agents. Regarding Communist agents, I told a friend of mine in the Department of Defense that if you wanted to dig into this question of Communist infiltration of the government, you have to go back to all of these policies and see who started them. By golly, he did that and he had this list with the names of everybody on it. He came over to the office of the Assistant Secretary for Consular and Security Affairs. We met there with Bob Hill, the security man for the National Security Council, a former FBI agent, and myself.

Q: Did you know the people on this list? Did you think that they were particularly leftist oriented?

BISHOP: He had it all documented. Who wrote what and when and what it was. There were lots of names on it. This was shortly before I went to Thailand as ambassador.

Q: How did it come about that you were assigned to Thailand? Had you had a special interest in that country?

BISHOP: No. John Peurifoy, then Ambassador to Thailand, was killed in an automobile accident. There was a vacancy to be filled in an important post. Under Secretary of State, Herbert Hoover, Jr., arranged for me to be sent to Bangkok. He was my boss in the Department when I was Operations Coordinator.

Q: How did you find Thailand at the time, in early 1956?

BISHOP: We loved it. Well, you know the house and the beautiful grounds around the ambassador's residence. Our two older girls were just barely of school age.

Q: SEATO [Southeast Asian Treaty Organization] had been established, as I recall, at the Manila Conference in September, 1954, following the end of the French War in Indochina. SEATO was getting organized, and it had been decided that Bangkok would be the headquarters of the secretariat. Did SEATO occupy much of your attention?

BISHOP: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I had worked on the establishment of SEATO with Herbert Hoover when I was with the OCB (Operations Control Board).

Q: When you went to Thailand, did we have consulates there--in Chiang Mai, for example?

BISHOP: Yes, and we had a consulate in Songkhla, in southern Thailand.

Q: In terms of U. S. relations with Thailand, the country had a traditional policy of neutrality, of not getting very much involved with other countries. I always felt that its membership in SEATO marked a break with a long established pattern.

BISHOP: Yes, there's no question of that. You see, Pibul Songgram was the prime minister and, I guess, benevolent dictator, of Thailand. He brought Thailand into SEATO, but he was disliked by the royal family and a few political figures, such as Pridi [Pridi Panomyong, a former Thai prime minister].

Q: So you served in Thailand for about four years, from 1955 to 1958. You said earlier that you had decided to retire at about age 50.

BISHOP: Yes. I reached 50 in late 1958. I was 53 when I actually retired in October, 1961. When I returned from Bangkok in 1958, I was assigned as Political Adviser to the President of the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, where I served until 1961. I stayed on longer than I anticipated, although I really didn't have much work to do. The Naval War College has one of the finest libraries. I lectured to the students on foreign policy and the objectives of national policy.

Q: Well, you retired from the State Department, where you had spent most of your adult life, in October, 1961. It must have been a wrench for you, as it has been for many of us.

Looking back at 26 years in the State Department, what do you think of diplomacy as a career for young people?

BISHOP: Not too much today. It was a wonderful thing at the time I went into the Department. The principal problem with a Foreign Service career today is bureaucracy. It's too big. The idea is that you get in there, get in your foxhole, pull the cover over yourself, and stay on until retirement. Unless you're an activist and want to do this or that and have the push and backing from the sources that can control whatever happens. For example, unless you're close to the crowd around President Clinton, you wouldn't get very far now. When I entered the Service, there were people like Ambassador Joseph C. Grew and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Under Secretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr., and President Nixon, to a much lesser extent. Nixon was strange. He was excellent when he was a Congressman, exposing the "Pumpkin Papers" [involving Alger Hiss]. When he became President, he forgot many that he had known. He gathered an entirely new group around him, and did they ever ruin him! I don't think he'll ever really get over the Watergate Affair in its various dimensions.

Q: Well, if some young man or young woman came up to you and asked you if you thought that the Diplomatic Service would be a worthy career...

BISHOP: I would say yes. I would say, don't fall victim to this practice of keeping your mouth shut and going along with the crowd. If you have ideas, express them. If you're proved wrong, so be it. I'm very proud of my record in the Foreign Service. The things that I wrote and said still stand up today. I wasn't 100% right. Who could be? By and large, as I say, I'm very proud of my record. I certainly would recommend the Foreign Service to anyone as a career. It's not as good as it used to be, in the sense that if you were right, did a good job and, as we used to say, "kept your nose clean," by cracky, you made a record. And you were appreciated. Well, I think that that's probably still true, if you are service oriented, that is, if you want to serve. I got a commission in the Army Reserve because I wanted to serve. I entered the Foreign Service because I wanted to serve. I knew that my family would never be wealthy. We had enough to eat and a good home and what not. But I wasn't interested in making a lot of money. I wanted to serve and to have the honor of serving. And, after all, I became an ambassador, and that was the top.

Q: After you retired, what did you do then?

BISHOP: Oh, glory, I told your wife that. I had two or three careers after that. Before I retired, we bought a home in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I love the Ozark Mountains. That's where I first saw the light of day. My mother was there, we had property there, and whatnot. Gravette, Arkansas is about 40 or 50 miles from Fayetteville. It is in the county North of Fayetteville. Actually, our home in Fayetteville was in the same block as the old Fulbright home. Senator Fulbright was from Fayetteville. His mother was the editor and owner of the local newspaper. With four growing children, I realized that this was great for my wife and myself, but we had college expenses coming up.

I had the opportunity in 1964 to become the Executive Director of the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We moved to Pittsburgh and lived there longer than we had lived anywhere, until I retired again in October, 1973.

Q: As director of the World Affairs Council, what kind of programs did you set up?

BISHOP: My idea was to give the people of Pittsburgh entertainment that was educational. Also, we worked through the schools. There was an assistant director for the schools--the high schools and the University of Pittsburgh. It was an educational effort. There weren't very many world affairs councils in the country at that time. There were councils in Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, which were very active. In New York, of course, there was the Foreign Policy Association. That was very active but, in my book, rather "Left Wing." A lot of these world affairs associations tend to be like that. They have a liberal approach. We were not conservative, in a political sense. But I insisted that we remain strictly factual. And we were. We had a very fine reputation. I could have stayed there as long as I wanted to. They raised my salary regularly, but I wanted to go off on my own a little more. Actually, after I retired from that, I went into business with a Nisei exporter in New York. Now I am strictly on my own. We came down here to Ailey in 1974.

Q: You mentioned an appreciation of the world situation which you prepared in 1980. How do you view the world situation as it has developed over the past 10 years or so?

BISHOP: In the appreciation which you mentioned, which I had prepared for a business firm in New York engaged in shipping and worldwide trade, I was speaking of the various aspects of the world situation then current as of 1980. At that time the USSR commanded a world strategic position and an effective, military deployment superior to that of the United States. Most people don't realize that. This unfortunate, strategic development resulted from the fact that the relative strategic power of the United States, over the generation just past, has steadily declined. Obviously, that of the USSR has increased. A lot of people don't realize that the military power of the USSR is still fantastic. All of the starving people in Moscow and all of the Russian peasants are still the way they were, but the Russian military structure, when you see a little of it--and you rarely see any of it--is still in good condition, from the point of view of strength. Anyhow, at the moment neither Russia nor the U.S. has the capability to destroy the other in a first strike and prevent the other side from retaliating. Thus, only insanity would precipitate a direct, US-USSR exchange of missiles.

Q: That was the situation in 1980, but it seems to have changed substantially. How would you assess the present situation?

BISHOP: Well, I said in 1980 that the situation of strategic stalemate at that time would not endure. The USSR has been trying to maintain its position and has even increased its strategic superiority. Its potential is impressive. We--the U. S. and its allies--excel in education, technology, productive capacity, efficiency, and the practical application of

scientific discoveries. Only an insane person would precipitate a Soviet attack on the United States.

Q: Unless there would be a major change within the Soviet Union. First of all, there is no longer a Soviet Union. The Russian leadership surely would not have that intention at all. Their military capability is probably somewhat degraded because of uncertainties in the situation itself, in Russia. On the other hand, nothing is permanent.

BISHOP: At any time they wanted to, even today, they could send hydrogen missiles and hydrogen bombs right over the United States and destroy most of our important cities. Really, we could do the same to them, but that would be insanity. I said in 1980 that for many years the national objective of the USSR since its inception under Lenin had been and remained world hegemony. They want us all to be in their family, if you will. Lenin's principles for success are still controlling in Russia. Among them are: adopt no specific timetable. You never heard a Russian leader say, look, we've got to do this or that in six months or 10 years or whatever. Advance or retreat--in other words, flexibility, as circumstances dictate. Never take unnecessary or avoidable risks. That was always Lenin. And move ahead whenever and wherever possible in the direction of the ultimate goal, employing every effective force and method, political, economic, psychological, or military. To the USSR the heartland of Asia is vital, and the control of the rimland protects the heartland.

Q: Wasn't this one of the problems with Khrushchev? He didn't follow Lenin. Khrushchev was an adventurer. I remember that the Chinese Communists, after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, accused Khrushchev of "adventurism and capitulationism." Adventurism, in risking a great deal, and then capitulationism in giving in to the United States. Well, what do you think of the role of the United States in the world? When you were born, in 1908, our population was probably less than 100 million people. In 1940 it was around 140 million. Now we're around 255 million. We started out as a people mainly of British Western European origin. Over the centuries of our existence as a nation we have received large numbers of people who have come to our country from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. How do you see this as affecting the national interest and the foreign policy of the United States?

BISHOP: Well, I really haven't given that an awful lot of thought, because I think our foreign policy has been one of indecision and wavering, if you will. We have resigned our position of total leadership in foreign policy to the so-called U. N. Security Council. At the same time--not because of our intelligence and strength and whatnot--we are still the top dog. I don't think that, intellectually, we measure up to that position. The leadership and policies exercised by the British are far more intelligently conceived than what we have now. I don't know what President Clinton has in mind. I doubt if his wife knows. I suppose that she thinks she knows--probably from what the press says. I'm not close to any of this.

Q: Yet the role of the United States seems to be crucial...

BISHOP: If you want to do something in the world. Why should we worry about this or that faction in Somalia, if we are able to define our interests? I think we still have a Christian oriented basis, though there are a lot of Muslims here. We also have many other religions. But I think that this is still a Christian nation, although there are a lot of agnostics and atheists. I think that you are beginning to see more power coming to those who are Christian oriented. They were doing nothing 10 or 15 years ago. They are doing more now to give credence to the need for more Christian leadership. I hope they are, at least, although I don't see that in the present administration. What worries me more than anything else is the moral dimension, and morality means life. The moral deterioration of our society, if anything, will destroy us. Look at Rome. The moral decay of Rome destroyed it, just like that, very quickly. And it could happen to us, too. We're the only nation that's trying to hold off moral decay, but we're not doing much in that regard, as far as I can tell.

Q: Well, are there any further remarks you would care to make about the Foreign Service or foreign policy for this interview?

BISHOP: I do think that we need to develop a coherent foreign policy based upon an acceptance by the American people of our own national interests. That would include our self-defense. That is the first thing--the preservation of the nation. I think that it's important that we get back to the interests of the United States and not say that the interests of the United States consist of promoting the United Nations. The United Nations should be interested in a sound, moral United States. And they are, individually, every one of them. But why should we subordinate our interests to those of the U. N. Security Council? In my humble opinion you cannot have an organization of nations determining the destiny and foreign policy of the United States. That should be determined by intelligent thought on the basis of what is best for the nation. What we are and what we should be is all written down in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution of the United States. We should not subordinate that to the U. N. or anything else. We can participate in the U. N. You don't see the British subordinating their national policy to the U. N.

Q: Well, there is certainly a lot of food for thought in that, and I thank you for giving me the chance to sit down and chat with you about your long and distinguished career and your views of the world. I would like to express the appreciation of the Association for Diplomatic Studies for this opportunity to speak to you.

BISHOP: I can say that it is an honor that you came to talk to me.

Q: It has been a privilege to be able to explore this whole period, when the United States emerged from being a relatively isolated, regional power to becoming a world power, in fact the only super power. Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

BISHOP: My pleasure.

(In preparation for this interview Ambassador Bishop prepared a curriculum vitae, including his various appointments over the years. This is attached to the transcript of this interview.)

CURRICULUM VITAE OF THE HONORABLE MAX WALDO SCHMIDT BISHOP,
AMERICAN AMBASSADOR, RETIRED

Born: October 30, 1908, in Gravette, Arkansas

Secondary Schools: Davenport, Iowa, High School; Phillips Exeter Academy

College: University of Chicago; Bachelor of Philosophy, 1932; member of Phi Beta Kappa, Alpha Tau Omega; graduate of the National War College and the Naval War College

1931 - November 2, designated to take the Foreign Service Examination

1932 - July 26, one of only eight of 277 candidates to take and pass the Foreign Service written and oral examinations; placed on the list awaiting appointment as a Foreign Service Officer

1934 - Commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Military Intelligence Reserve, Army of the United States

1935 - October 1, commissioned by the President as a Foreign Service Officer, Vice Consul of the United States, and Diplomatic Attaché

1935-1937 - Diplomatic Attaché and language officer at the American Embassy, Tokyo

1938 - Vice-Consul in Osaka, Japan

1938-1941 - Third Secretary of Embassy and Vice-Consul, American Embassy, Tokyo

1941-1943 - Political Officer, Division of Far Eastern Affairs, Department of State, Washington, DC

1944-1945 - American Consul in Colombo, Ceylon; Secretary of Mission at New Delhi, India; Political Adviser to the U. S. Commanding General, India-Burma Theater of Operations

1945-1947 - Foreign Service Officer, staff of the U. S. Political Adviser to the Supreme Commander, Allied Forces, Japan; Acting Chief, Diplomatic Section; Acting U. S.

Member, Allied Council for Japan; Counselor of Mission, Tokyo; Awarded the President's Certificate of Merit

1947 - Acting Chief, Division of Northeast Asian Affairs, Department of State

1947-1948 - Student, National War College

1948-1951 - Member of Policy Planning Staff, Department of State; representative on the staff of the National Security Council

1951-1953 - Consul General, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia; Chairman, Dhahran Liaison Group

1953-1955 - Operations Coordinator, Office of the Under Secretary of State

1955-1958 - Ambassador to Thailand

1958 - Special Assignment at the Department of State: developed the "Senior Officers' Course" at the Foreign Service Institute

1958-1961 - Political Adviser to the President of the Naval War College

1961 - Retired from the Foreign Service of the United States

1961-1963 - International business consultant, lecturer on foreign affairs

1964-1973 - Executive Director, World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; President of the National Council of Community World Affairs Organizations; private consultant to Pepperdine University and several international business corporations in New York, Pittsburgh, and Bermuda; member of the Metropolitan Club, DACOR, and DACOR House, Washington, DC; member of the University Club of Pittsburgh

1973 - Retired from the World Affairs Council in Pittsburgh

1974 - Decorated by the Emperor of Japan with the Order of the Sacred Treasure

1974 - Present - Tree farmer and President of Maxland, Inc., Ailey, Georgia

End of interview