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

AMBASSADOR JAMES COWLES HART BONBRIGHT

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INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You were going to give an oral history according to your style and wishes. I think it was January 19, 1903 when you were born. So if you will proceed from there?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that is correct. Perhaps I could say a brief word first about my parents. My father was one of four brothers who came from Philadelphia. He was the youngest and had an unacademic start in life; I think he was expelled from six different schools, so he told me, once for seining the school pond with a tennis net, which I thought was a perfectly good thing to do and very poor grounds for being expelled. His later education was completely self-made. His three older brothers went to Yale, and I think it

was the second or third one--the third one died while he was there. As a result of this tragedy his mother did not allow my father to go off to college. I never felt that this lack of a college education affected him adversely in any way.

He met my mother, I think, in Colorado Springs, which is an odd place to be, but my mother had gone out there to visit her sister, whose husband was dying of tuberculosis and who went out there presumably for his health. There my father was working--I don't know at what--and there he met my mother. After her brother-in-law died, she came back to Rochester, where she and my father were married and lived the rest of their lives.

Q: What year was that, that they were married?

BONBRIGHT: They were married on October 12, 1898. They lived first with my mother's father, James Cowles Hart, for whom I was named. I remember--I don't know why, because I was very, very young--being placed on his bed at one time, just before he died. He was dying of cancer. I can see him, though. I think that's the earliest recollection I have of anything. He was a fisherman, and I think through him and also from my father's side, I got my great love for fishing, which has stayed with me all my life.

My mother was one of two daughters; they were 14 years apart. My mother was the younger.

Q: What was her maiden name?

BONBRIGHT: Her maiden name was Isabelle Hart. She was quite young when they were married, having just turned 20. She was born in 1878, and my father in 1875. So she was 22 when her first child was born on May 29, 1900. That was my elder sister, who was also called Isabelle but for some reason was always known to us as Bin.

We lived at first in my grandfather's house on Plymouth Avenue in Rochester, which was then a respectable old residential district in the city, but which now, I am told, has a number of red lights not connected with traffic control. Shortly thereafter, they moved to East Avenue, where they built a house, and where we lived until after the death of my father in 1934.

As far as my own schooling is concerned, I first went to an establishment known as the Columbia Preparatory School, which took young girls and boys until they reached about the age of eight or nine, I think. I don't remember too much of those years, and what I do remember, I don't remember too fondly.

Q: Why is that?

BONBRIGHT: I just wasn't a very good pupil. I had a great distaste for reciting and speaking up in class, that sort of thing. That stayed with me all my life. I've always

detested speech-making. I'm very bad at it. I really don't remember learning anything much there.

From that school, I went on to a private school called the Kalbfus School. I remember we had a little slogan, "Are we happy? Well, I guess. K-A-L-B-F-U-S." That gives you an idea of the kind of school it was. It was run by a very robust and hardy man. I remember when we had our morning recess, he would come out on the steps of the school, look in, and since the school had no bell, would put two fingers in his mouth and emit the most piercing whistles that could be heard halfway to Albany. I don't think I got too much out of that school either. Certainly as a preparation for going away to boarding school, I didn't get much out of it.

My family decided to send me to St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, mainly because a couple of their friends had gone there.

Q: Were those the early years of St. Paul's, or had it been going for some time?

BONBRIGHT: It had been going for some time. In fact, it was founded in 1856. I first went in the fall of 1916 when I was 13 years old.

Q: Did they have an Episcopal minister as the head?

BONBRIGHT: Indeed they did. The Reverend Samuel Smith Drury was one headmaster, or Rector, for all my time there, and he was a very awe-inspiring man. He was not greatly loved, and some of the parents and students thought he was much too heavy-handed and harsh. On looking back at it, I think he was a very good headmaster and gave the kind of no nonsense leadership that should be given to boys. But I was lucky to get in. The rule was that to get in you had to have a passing grade of 60% on four examinations, which doesn't seem like a very high standard to meet, but it seemed awfully high to me then, because on those four examinations, my highest mark, I think, was 63, and on the other three, I failed. So I can only conclude that at that period--1916--they were desperate for pupils. Anyway, I got in and eventually adjusted, so that while I was never an A or even a B scholar, I slowly improved as I went along, with the result that at the end of it, I was able to graduate and pass the college board examinations for Harvard.

Q: Were there any outstanding teachers at St. Paul's in those days?

BONBRIGHT: There were some quite extraordinary people, I think. The head of the lower school, where I went in as a boy of 13, was a man named Henry Kittridge, who was the son of the great Harvard Shakespearean professor. He and his young wife were really delightful, fine people, and he was very bright. He later served briefly as Headmaster, the first layman to hold the position. Other good teachers were Vaughan Merrith, Willard Scudder and Henry Chittenden.

Q: You must have entered in the first form, didn't you?

BONBRIGHT: No, I entered in the second form. I was there for five years, graduating from the VIth Form in the spring of 1921.

Q: During vacations you'd go home to Rochester?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I always went home to Rochester. Oddly enough, although there were a few automobiles at the time, we always traveled in big horse-drawn carryalls into Concord, New Hampshire, which was a couple of miles away, where we took the train to Boston.

Q: Did you participate in some sports there?

BONBRIGHT: Everybody participated in something, but I didn't participate at a very high level. I was very small when I went away to school, and I still only weighed 120 pounds when I went to Harvard, so in football, I was tossed around by the wind. I learned to like hockey very much, but I never got too good at it. I had very weak ankles, and I wasn't very fast, but I did play on the Harvard freshman team. We were beaten by Yale so that was the end of my hockey career. I also was particularly fond of baseball but that had a very low priority at St. Paul's as everybody was supposed to go in for rowing.

Q: Who was the great rival of St. Paul's then--St. Mark's?

BONBRIGHT: We really didn't have any. We didn't play outside the schools when I was there, only intramural athletics. As soon as he arrived each boy was immediately taken into two so-called clubs. One was for rowing. You were either a Halycon or you were a Shattuck, named for Dr. Shattuck, one of the founders of the school. I was a Shattuck. That was for the rowing side. For field sports and anything on the ground, you were either a Delphian, an Isthmian, or an Old Hundred. I was an Old Hundred. So those clubs, that was the competition; they played all games against each other, or in my time the Delphians seemed to win most matches. I learned later that the master who chose for the Delphians looked for boys with big feet and chose them. When they grew up to their feet they were an imposing bunch. It was intramural completely. I don't think it was a bad idea. The school was big enough--I think they hit the 400 mark when I was there--to provide enough bodies, really, to have several teams going. We never missed playing outside school.

Q: Did they have an annual dance or anything like that, a graduation dance where you'd invite people?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, they had a kind of a prom, if you could call it that, in June for the senior sixth formers. I don't think I ever invited a girl there. Most of the girls who came to the dance were sisters of students. I played in the orchestra, which provided a form of music for the dance. It was imaginatively called "The Rubber Band." I still blush at it. I

played the saxophone, and I mean badly. Our best piece was "The Dark Town Strutters' Ball."

Q: For your graduation, did Reverend Drury give the commencement speech, or did they have an outside dignitary?

BONBRIGHT: I think they usually had somebody from outside that came down for the anniversary, but it doesn't stick in my mind. I think the Bishop of New Hampshire at that time came. It was a good school, and I think it still is. Of course, now they take girls as well as boys, which all those who have been in contact with it, which I have not, seem to think has worked out pretty well. It was an unheard of idea in my time. I must say when I first heard of it, I didn't think it was a very good idea. I still don't see why it isn't good for the sexes to be separated for a little while in their lives. I didn't see any sign of anybody being hurt by not having girls around every day. But then, I was not a precocious boy.

My family had expected me to go to Yale because of father's family connections there. I really was swayed to Harvard because of some of my friends. My earliest friend in Rochester was named Ranlet Miner. He and his sister, Eleanor, were our closest friends. He went to St. Mark's School, so we were not at boarding school together, but he was set for Harvard, so I decided to go over there too. A good slice of my class at St. Paul's was also going there. My family was surprised when I said I wanted to make the shift, but they never put any pressure on me to try to change my view.

I went to Harvard in the fall of 1921, after graduating from St. Paul's. I lived my first year in a place called Gore Hall, along with my old friend Miner and many others. That is now a part of one of the Harvard Houses. They didn't have Houses, so-called, at that time. This was a freshman dormitory.

The following year, about 15 of us moved into a little house at 6 Holyoke Place, which was a pretty run-down place, but we liked it. We lived there for two years, and then senior year we moved into Harvard Yard in one of the houses there.

Q: Was the curriculum, so to speak, rigorous, or could one work his way through with a certain amount of ease?

BONBRIGHT: You had a pretty wide choice of selection. There were two or three courses freshman year that were required--English and history. Otherwise, each one decided what he was going to concentrate on for his time in college, but the concentration wasn't that heavy. I concentrated on French--God knows why, except that we had had a French governess, and I was interested in the language, and I wanted to improve my French. So I got a lot of reading in French done, but with an eye to my future career, as it turned out, I would have been better off if I'd taken history and government and things of that kind for my concentration. But as I say, the French part didn't take up so much time that it precluded my taking other courses of even more interest, although looking back, some of them were odd. I took one, I remember, in freshman year on the Old Testament. I

still think that Professor Kersop Lake, who gave it, had been defrocked or something, but he was a charming man. It was one of the most interesting and fascinating courses I ever took. It didn't do anything for my future, but I enjoyed it thoroughly. There were a number of things like that.

Q: Was there a sort of eeny-meeny-miney-moe approach to picking things out of the catalog, or did people say, "Don't take this," or "Do take that"?

BONBRIGHT: I confess that there was a very general effort on everybody's part to avoid courses that required attendance on Saturdays--not praiseworthy perhaps, but one of the facts of life. One didn't want to have to go to class on Saturday if one had better ideas on how to spend a weekend. Whether that still holds or not, I don't know, but I would place a small bet on it.

Q: What about social life? Was there camaraderie and the clubs and so forth? Were people out roistering and drinking, or was it relatively quiet?

BONBRIGHT: You know, this was a period when Prohibition was still in effect, which did not mean, of course, that we didn't drink. We did; we drank quite a bit but whether more or less than they do today I have no way of knowing. At least there was no drug problem that I ever heard of. Everything, of course, was bootleg, not of the highest quality. I often look back on it and thank God that I didn't go blind, which was a danger in those days. It did happen. Except for the Club system there was no social life in Cambridge at all, but, after all, Boston was just across the river, and we did go to lots of Boston parties, which were very nice, and met some very fine and attractive girls there.

Q: These were private parties of old Boston families?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The club system was still going. There were one or two sort of overall clubs which most of the freshmen joined. The clubs I remember were the A.D., the Porcellian, The FLY, The Gas House, The OWL, and The Phoenix. Those who entered those clubs took most of their meals there, and it was a very close grouping. Everyone in the house I lived in joined a final club his sophomore year. I myself did not enter a final club until my senior year, and this was always a source of regret to me and left me alone and to my own devices a lot. The good part was I had the opportunity to do quite a lot of reading, which I had not done when I was younger. My mother tried to push me towards reading, and I didn't really take to it, but it slowly grew on me through my years at St. Paul's, and by the time I hit Harvard, it was something that gave me great satisfaction and pleasure and has lasted all my life. In my senior year, I joined the A.D. Club, a very fine group of people. In fact, I've just this winter gone back to its 150th anniversary dinner. Before that I hadn't been back, I think, for probably 50 years. About 170 people came to this event, which represented, I think, half of the living members, so it was a very good turnout. The four remaining members from my class still living (we were twelve originally) were all there, so we had a happy time together. The other three are a man named John Finley, who is professor Emeritus of the classics at Harvard and a

really wonderful, beautifully educated, gentle man; Henry Watts, who is a broker in New York, actually lives in Philadelphia but commutes to New York, has been very active in many good things, and also had a very fine war record. He was the harbormaster at Omaha Beach, I think. And the last one, Perry Trafford, a lawyer who lives in Philadelphia. Fine people and good friends.

Q: Was Harvard at that time rather distinctly Eastern seaboard and elitist, or was there an ethnic factor to it, of Boston Irish, or other nationalities and races?

BONBRIGHT: It's firmest base, of course, is still the Eastern seaboard, but it's very large now. I forget how many thousands. It's got a pretty good mix, I would say, from all over throughout the country.

Q: But less so than in your time.

BONBRIGHT: I don't know. There are lots of Irish and lots of blacks, but there were quite a few blacks when I was there, but they didn't mingle very much. Actually, there were two blacks in my A.D. Club that I met when I went back this winter. They were quite young, so probably joined the Club not too long ago.

Q: Since the Twenties were a time of college hoopla and so forth, was there much college spirit, or was that dimmed down and restricted to the Harvard-Yale games and so forth?

BONBRIGHT: I think there was pretty good college spirit in those days. Of course, the Harvard-Yale game was something special.

Q: Did you go back to reunions customarily or not very often?

BONBRIGHT: No, no, almost never. I went back to my third reunion.

Q: At which time you were already in the Foreign Service?

BONBRIGHT: It was 1928. Yes, I'd just been in a short time. It was before I went out to the field. It was a dismal affair. It rained cats and dogs, and the small handful that turned up for it went and marched out to Soldier's Field and huddled on the ground. They had some bales of straw scattered around, and we tried to get in the straw to cover us and keep some of the wet out. It was an awful affair, and that cured me.

Q: Then you were abroad quite a bit after that.

BONBRIGHT: Then I was abroad the rest of the time, either abroad or in Washington. The real trouble was that commencements were always in June, and for me June was devoted to just one thing: fishing for salmon. In fact, when I first was taken to the Grande Cascapedia River in Quebec I was only 7 years old.

Q: Where is that exactly?

BONBRIGHT: It's in the Gaspe Peninsula and flows south into the Bay of Chaleur.

Q: Is that near the Miramichi?

BONBRIGHT: Not too far away, but the Miramichi is in New Brunswick, across the other side of the bay. It's a glorious river and still just as beautiful to me today as it was then. Then after that first visit in 1910 my father and his brother Irving bought a camp which came on the market through the death of the owner, and they had that from about 1912 to the summer of 1932, when they sold out. So I went up there with Father. He was kind enough to take me with him for a week or so almost every year. I could get away after school and that sort of thing. I just loved that place. On July 1 last year I celebrated my 75th anniversary on the river. I missed a few summers, but not too many.

Q: This was exclusively salmon fishing?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. During the war, I missed--1940, '41, '42, but I haven't missed a year since 1943 when I bought my own camp after Father's had gone, and enjoyed that 30-odd years, until after '75 when I had to give it up. It was too expensive; I couldn't run it. The last year I tried taking in guests and that helped reduce the loss, but not enough, and it had drawbacks, which I didn't like. Fortunately, the paying guests were mostly families and friends that fished with me gratis before, but the trouble with it was that there were some outsiders who had never been there before, and I would set the schedule for the week automatically, you know, draw lots for places, different beds. I kept one rod for myself and then I leased two rods out. We put all the names in and the rotation was automatic, so there shouldn't have been any problem, but it got to the point that if I came home one evening with a good salmon and the paying guests didn't have any, I could feel a little tenseness. I said, "This just won't work. It's no good." My wife, Letitia was game about it, but the river never meant to her anything like what it had meant to me. However, she never put pressure on me to give it up.

Q: Could you describe the technique or fascination of salmon fishing as opposed to other fishing? Are salmon so abundant that you're bound to catch one, or are they very difficult?

BONBRIGHT: Unhappily, they're not abundant. They were moderately abundant when I was young and first went there. In fact, you were once allowed to take eight salmon a day for each rod. I don't think I ever got my limit more than once or twice in those early years, but it was always possible. Now you're allowed by law just one a day and only seven for the whole season. So it's no use owning your own camp there anymore and spending the whole summer. I used to go there the last week in May and stay until mid-October. Of course the fishing season didn't last anywhere near that long, but I always found other things to do.

Q: Was the decrease in numbers due to pollution or too much fishing?

BONBRIGHT: The salmon were almost wiped out, and it's still a touch-and-go fight to save them.

Q: From what? From pollution?

BONBRIGHT: No. I think the water of the Grande Cascapedia River is just as clear as ever. I think our problem was mainly due to over-fishing fishermen, and poaching was a very bad problem and the Indians.

Q: Who were the poachers--people with commercial interests?

BONBRIGHT: Local people around in neighboring towns. There was a lot of cheating on the commercial netters, who had nets in the bay along the coast. They were supposed to lift their nets on weekends and that sort of thing and give the fish a chance to get through, and they just didn't. This was very bad. Then you'd catch a flagrant poacher, and he'd only get a slap on the wrist. One year, when I was head of our local River Association, I went up to the county seat 60 miles from the Cascapedia, to attend a trial of a poacher who'd been caught cold. One of the river guardians who caught him had flown down to, I think, New Hampshire or somewhere, for a job he had after the fishing season was over. This was late September or October, and he went down there to get some temporary work. We had to send down for him and bring him up for the trial. I remember we went into the trial room, and the judge came in, and the lawyer for the poacher got up and said, "Your Honor, we ask that you grant us a delay in this trial. First of all, my client was called away unavoidably on business."

And the Judge said, "Very good. The trial is postponed until November." We were furious. The head of our guardian service and I, two or three of us who went up for this thing got into our car and we were out of town headed for home, when we passed the poacher driving the other way merrily along. That was discouraging. Then they fined him five bucks or something. At that time, a 20-pound salmon probably was worth $40 in the market. No deterrent at all. But they're much tougher now and they're charging more, and they can even confiscate a poacher's car.

Q: What about when you have a beautiful salmon, do you put it then on ice, or does everybody have a feast that night? How do you preserve it?

BONBRIGHT: Every camp has a snow house that is filled in the wintertime, packed with ice, actually, cut from the river in big square blocks, and some sawdust put in with it. That ice would last pretty well through the summer. You put your fish in there when you caught them, and they would stay fresh. In those early days, there was also a very good way of shipping them; you could ship them anywhere, practically. They had these refrigerated freight cars that would come down the coast stopping at the different rivers. All the camps would send their fish down to the RR station where they would be packed

in snow and stored at the station till the train came by and they'd all be put on these refrigerator cars and taken overnight to Montreal. There the boxes would be opened and re-iced, repacked, and sent on to anywhere--New York, Boston, anywhere, and the fish would arrive in perfect condition. Then the railroad service got so bad that the boxes would be left in the sun on the platform in Montreal and they'd go bad. Finally, it got to the point where you could only ship salmon on a Monday or Tuesday, otherwise you'd run into difficulty. Then it was just no use shipping at all. Of course, with the limit now of one fish per day, it doesn't pose a problem, because they smoke most of them now. There are a couple of places where you can get them smoked. But you can't send them to friends the way you used to.

Q: You are a gourmet and must have had in some of your favorite restaurants some great salmon dishes, but when you're up in camp and want to prepare the salmon, is it broiled, or can you do anything you want with it in camp?

BONBRIGHT: Pretty much. We had a very good cook at our camp; she wasn't that hot when she first came to us, but she was there 30 years or more and learned a lot from first Sybil then Letitia.

Q: Is salmon fishing a male preserve, or are there women?

BONBRIGHT: There are a lot of women who like it.

Q: What about the Cascapedia salmon? Is there a difference if it were served in a restaurant from Puget Sound or Scottish salmon?

BONBRIGHT: I think so, yes. Certainly it's a different fish from the Pacific Coast salmon, no doubt about that.

Q: Is it superior?

BONBRIGHT: I think it's superior, yes, but it's very much like the Scottish. You can also get Norwegian salmon now, which tastes, I think, very much like it. It's very good. We used to think that Cascapedia salmon was the top and I still do. They even used to serve "Gaspe" salmon on the railroad trains in the dining cars, at least in eastern Canada.

Q: Not anymore.

BONBRIGHT: Not anymore.

Q: You've enjoyed other types of fishing, too, haven't you?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, trout fishing; surf casting for blue fish and striped bass off the beach. But salmon fishing is still my favorite sport.

Q: What about fishing in Europe?

BONBRIGHT: I never did any. When I was stationed in Europe, we usually got about a month's leave every year, and I tried and succeeded to take my holidays in June. So as soon as the end of May arrived, I would take off for the Gaspe. For instance, from Lisbon, where I was stationed for four years, I could take a plane around dinner time that would get me into Boston around 5:00-something the next morning, and there was a flight from Boston to Presque Isle, Maine, and there I would have my head guide meet me in the car and drive the 200 miles to camp. After supper in Lisbon, my next supper was in camp. You couldn't do much better than that.

Q: You did enter the Foreign Service after you left Harvard. There was no recruiting system, was there?

BONBRIGHT: No, no. Basically, I was looking for something to do after I graduated. I did not wish to join my father's firm. He had a brokerage firm in Rochester, a very good one, and my father and I had been and always were very close. I think he wanted very much for me to join him. I was not drawn to it at all. I spent one summer working in it, and I think he was lucky that I didn't bankrupt them, because I had no gift for it whatsoever. The family were good enough to send me around the world after I graduated from Harvard in 1925, and during that trip, I met many people, I read a great deal, I saw a lot of the world, and I became more and more fascinated with the thought of entering the Foreign Service.

Q: Did you go westward on a liner across the Pacific?

BONBRIGHT: No, we went the other way. I went with a college classmate of mine named Lloyd Mann, and we started off not too well. We sailed to England and went up to Scotland, where we spent some time at a lovely place called Pitlochrie. I'm a great admirer of Scotland; I think it's a marvelous country. Physically it has great beauty. The trouble was that as soon as we got to Pitlochrie, my traveling companion fell in love with a Scotch girl, and that almost doomed the trip from the start. We'd have a golf game together in the afternoon, and that evening he'd go out with his girl, and I sat around the hotel, I'd have dinner by myself and was getting a little bored. There were a couple of young English fellows from Oxford there. I met them. One evening I was sitting with them after dinner, having a drink, and they said, "Ah, we know you. We met a friend of yours. He's out courting, isn't he?"

I said, "Yes."

"And you're the tertium quid," which they interpreted as "the third whatnot." I found it an apt description.

Well, I finally got my friend away from there, so we proceeded on our way. But she went out to India, where we ran into her again. She was after him. In the meanwhile, we had

gone to Italy, down to Greece, Egypt, took a P&O liner to India, to Bombay. We had a marvelous couple of months in India, traveling mostly by train, through Udaipur and places like that, Agra, up to the Peshawar and Khyber Pass. Khyber Pass was a little disillusioning. We took this car to look over this view of the mountains, huge, all around, and way down in this valley below us, this little British town right on the border of Afghanistan. There was a British band playing, and up through the air came the strains of "Mary Kelly, I Love You." It was so incongruous. Then we went up and spent Christmas in Kashmir. There was no airplane going in, so we went in on the mail truck. It was just a glorious trip. We spent two nights in guest houses on the way--a glorious, glorious trip.

Then we came back, crossed India and ended up in Madras and Calcutta. In Calcutta I had a friend who was in the consulate general, who'd come from Rochester. He gave us a plug for the Service. At that time, of course, there was no embassy, because India was not independent. So the consulate general in Calcutta was the biggest office. There was a consul general in Bombay, too, and a consul in Madras. Overall, the Calcutta one was the most important.

From there we went on up to Tiger Hill, to get a glimpse of Mount Everest. Then we kept on going around to Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Japan. Japan was where I first met Norman Armour, who was then Counselor at our embassy, and he was very kind to us, full of wonderful stories and interest in things. I think he was the most attractive man I've ever met in the Service, first-rate in every way.

So by the time I got home from this trip, I was hooked. I will say for the family, they never tried to influence me--I know Father was disappointed, but he never again put the slightest pressure on me. As it turned out, my older sister married a Rochester man, John Kitchen, and they lived there all their lives, and he went into business with Father. My younger sister subsequently married another Rochester man (Sherward Smith), who also went into the business. So Father did pretty well with family around him, without having me to gum things up.

So then I went to Washington. I heard about a "cram" school in Georgetown run by a fellow named Crawford, who took in pupils and prepared them for the Foreign Service exams. I went in with a fellow named Vinton Chapin, who was class of Harvard '23, and fellow member of the A.D. Club. We took an apartment together at 2400 16th Street. We went to this cram course, and this fellow was pretty good. He was not an intellectual giant but had made a business of studying previous examinations, so he got to know the type of examination, the type of questions usually asked. So we didn't get a great education, but he gave us a lot of information that was useful to us for our particular purpose.

So finally in the spring, I guess it was, of 1927, we took the exam, and a bunch of us had arranged to go to a famous restaurant downtown; I forget the name of it. But we'd arranged to dine together there after the exams. These exams took two days. We all got together down there and were going to make quite a night of it. The word came in that some cheating had been found, and the whole exam was called off. The cheating was

something that somebody who had been tutoring some of the people in French got a hold of a copy of the exam. That's what it was all about. So the thing was all called off. Actually, after the first disappointment, because we were all tired and had gone through quite a lot and discouraged, most of us thought we'd flunked the damn exam anyway. It was a tough one.

So we all went back to school and another exam was held about two or three months later, I think, and that one went through all right, and that's the one I passed.

Q: This was written. But there were orals?

BONBRIGHT: That's right. Then we had the oral exam, which again didn't really amount to much. We went into a room, five people at a time, and the board at that time consisted of William Castle, Wilbur Carr, an administrative fellow, and then there were a couple of fellows from outside the Department; I forget who they were. Anyway, by that time there really wasn't much time. Each of us would just have a few minutes, two or three questions. They really wanted to see more of how you reacted, I think, than to expect any profound answers.

Q: The cut of your jib.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so. Then we had to take a language exam. At that time we had to have either French or Spanish, I think. I took the French one, which was given by a man whose French--mine wasn't that good, but his was worse.

Q: Were there dozens of applicants in those days?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I think there were several hundred.

Q: Of which they only took a few?

BONBRIGHT: I think in my class there were about 35 out of maybe 750. I think that was about it. They didn't call us up right away; we were passed and then put on ice for the summer. I got called up in September of 1927. I took the oath. Our class was divided. Of course, everybody wanted to go to Europe, and the result was that one out of 35 did. He went as vice consul to Seville, Spain. The rest of us were divided half and half between South America and the Far East. We were asked which we preferred. For some reason, I never cared a hoot or had any interest in South America--none. So I opted for the Far East. Then we were asked whether we preferred China or Japan. I put down that I would prefer to go to China. So finally when the assignments came along, I was assigned to Nagasaki as vice consul.

Q: Maybe somebody thought that was in China.

BONBRIGHT: Possibly, but I don't think so. Anyway, I knew there was some openings in China, so with some trepidation, I went to the fellow who was the head of the Foreign Service school, who had taken care of us, and I said to him, "I'll go, naturally, wherever I'm sent, but I had expressed a preference for China." I wondered why the shift had been made.

He said, "You want China, so we'll fix it." They did; they changed it and sent me as vice consul to Canton.

Q: Which would be much more interesting than Nagasaki then.

BONBRIGHT: I would have thought so. I did think so. So that was that. In those days, you went through the Foreign Service school, so-called, before you went abroad. They had this school in the State Department. We all went in together and we were cut up into groups and would spend a week in different sections. One week we'd spend in the visa office, one in the passport division, one in the economic reporting division, one in the political office, to give you a taste of what was going on in the Department. Actually, I was late. I got acute appendicitis and had my appendix out that spring, so I didn't get out as soon as the rest of my class, but I did finally get underway in late July of 1928.

Date: February 27, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. We will continue. You were approaching Canton.

BONBRIGHT: I sailed for Canton from San Francisco in late July of 1928. It was one of the President lines. It was a lovely trip, found some time to walk and read and stops at Honolulu and Japan, Shanghai, finally Hong Kong, and there a river boat up to Canton, as I recall, about 90 miles up the Pearl River. It was interesting to see the boats. There had been a lot of pirating at that time, as I guess at all times out there, and the engine room had been wired off with heavy bars so that if the pirates came aboard, they couldn't get at the vital part of the ship. I think that probably discouraged them.

In Canton, the consulate general was located, along with the consulates of many other countries, on the island of Shamin. It had not been the garden spot of the East; it was originally a sandbar lying close to the native city. It had undoubtedly been given over to the foreigners to use because of its unattractiveness and lack of value to the Chinese. As so often happened out in the East, western occupation soon deterred even a very poor sight into a garden, compared to the native part. When I was there, there were some lovely big trees, lovely gardens and walks, and it was a very pretty place. The island was about a quarter of a mile across, I think, and maybe half a mile long, and that was it. It was divided into two concessions: the British concession, which took up about two-thirds of the island, and the other third was the French concession. Our consulate general was located in the French concession.

It was a strange feeling at first, because when I arrived it was only two years after the British had been having a lot of trouble with the Chinese--in '26. Things were still moderately tense, so much so that the island was surrounded--not completely surrounded, but the whole side of the island which was facing the canal and the native city was protected with barbed wire and machine gun nests at the two bridges. On the other side of it, on the river side, there were always two or three foreign gunboats, British and French, and sometimes one of ours, from the South China Patrol. At first this gave one a sense of security, but eventually--and it didn't take too long--one got a little restless. It's like the feeling of living on a ship, and you wanted to get the hell off of it. We didn't fuss around with the native city, but we did take trips up and down the river by boat, and then also there was a nine-hole golf course, which was some miles outside the city and on property owned by the railroad company, which ran from Canton to Kowloon. We were able to get there without any trouble, and this provided some recreation for those of us who liked golf, as I did.

Q: Was there a provincial general in charge of the area? Was there a more central government?

BONBRIGHT: There was a civilian governor, but, of course, there was constant fighting in one part or another down there, one warlord or another trying to take over somebody else's territory. In fact, when you went out on the river at one period there, you'd quite often see bodies of soldiers floating by, though they were never near enough so that we heard any gunfire. The nearest thing to a fight that we saw was when the Cantonese Navy, if you could call it that, mutinied. We went up on the roof of the consulate general and watched the proceedings. There were one or two gunboats of very modest size and equipment, and the rest of the Navy consisted of motor boats with a piece of iron stuck up in front with a pole and the gun stuck through it. I think it was only able to move when the tide was favorable. Not very impressive. Then the government Air Force attacked the Navy and started dropping bombs. I was surprised to see a great splash in the water, but nothing was hit. Since there was very little defense and they could fly fairly low, it looked like extraordinarily poor marksmanship, to say the least.

Q: Were these old biplanes?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think they were. Some time later, I was talking to a Chinese official at some function or other, and I remarked about this strange thing. He looked at me with some surprise, as though saying, "You idiot. Don't you know that those were the best ships we had? By no means were we going to hurt them." So it was just play.

The consulate general itself consisted of a moderately large building with the offices on the ground floor, and the top floor was a comfortable apartment for the consul general and his wife and family. The second floor was divided in half: one half was for a married couple among the subordinate officers, and the other side had a mess and, I think, three bedrooms for single officers. We were all very comfortable and very well looked after. I

think we had five servants working for us in the mess, keeping the apartment for us. It cost, I think, 100 Cantonese dollars a month for that. That was the equivalent of about 37 US dollars, which, divided between three officers, didn't come to very much. So we lived well.

Q: Would you say that by that time on the calendar there were already old China hands, or people who were there about your time but became the old China hands? In other words, were there officers who had done several tours in China already?

BONBRIGHT: They always tried to have at least one officer there who had gone through the language course up in Peking. The rest of us didn't know any Chinese. The one who was there when I was, was a man named Newhall from California. He was a delightful companion but didn't stay very long; he retired and went home. This pointed up to me one of the faults of the language system up there. It began with three glorious years of study in Peking, where you became an interpreter for the legation and lived the life of Riley. After those first three years, then you went out to the sticks. You got the cream at the start of the tour instead of at the end, and I think they lost quite a few people because of that process. People were tempted to go into the language school and all because of the pleasant and interesting life. I don't think many of the ones who were at the language school when I was there stayed on, but some of them who had already been through did--John Carter Vincent and John Davies, a number of them. Most of them had been children of missionaries who already had a start and knowledge of China and the language, and just naturally continued when I was there.

Q: Missionaries were still there in strength, different denominations?

BONBRIGHT: Very much so. I remember one coming into the office where I was, and he wanted to check in. I was talking to him about it, and he was going into what seemed a bad part of the country at that time. I asked him, "How are you going to make out? For several days you're pretty much out of touch with anybody."

He said to me, "God will provide." That closed the argument.

Q: With that conviction.

BONBRIGHT: I wished him well but wasn't too hopeful for him.

The language problem was difficult. Most officers wanted to work on language of some sort to get along, but it didn't really make any sense to study Cantonese, because it wasn't understood about 30 miles outside the city--no good. The official Mandarin language that was taught in Peking, that was all right for dealing with officials, but unless you were going to spend your life out there, it really didn't seem too profitable. I thought I'd try to take a go at Japanese, just to study something. I made an arrangement with the Japanese vice consul there; weekday mornings at 7:00 o'clock, I went over to his apartment and took Japanese lessons from him. This didn't last more than a few months, because I

became sick later and had to leave. But at the end of it, my Japanese was very, very elementary, to put it mildly, whereas I thought there was decided improvement in his mastery of English.

In the office we had a consul general who was Douglas Jenkins, a very nice man, with a nice wife. Number two consul was a man, a bachelor, named James McKenna, whom I'm very fond of. I admired him and liked him. He went home on leave fairly soon, though, so he was away for a couple of months. While he was away, the rest of us didn't pay much attention to the servants, except that we did sort of notice that the quarters for the servants, which were separated from our building by about 20 feet with a gangway between, seemed to be getting pretty crowded. We didn't do anything about it. When McKenna came back from leave, the first thing he did, he went out there and saw what was going on. He'd go up to one fellow and say, "Who's that?"

"That's my son-in-law."

"What's he doing here?"

"He's here on a visit."

"When is he going?"

"He's going tomorrow."

And he'd move on to the next fellow. "Who's that?"

"That's my mother-in-law's cousin."

What's she doing here?"

"She's here on a visit."

"When is she leaving?"

"Tomorrow." So within 48 hours, he had it all cleaned out and in ship-shape again. He was wise enough not to just throw them out. He let them do it themselves. A nice man.

For recreation, there were some tennis courts there, too, and then the thing that we all looked forward to was a trip to Hong Kong, which was like going to Paris. The pouch from the State Department would arrive and be unloaded there.

Q: In Hong Kong?

BONBRIGHT: In Hong Kong.

Q: Was it weekly?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think it was about once a week that one of us would go down. We'd take turns, because it had to be accompanied, so we'd take turns going down for the pouch and bringing it back. There was no courier service.

Q: Were those caricatures that you see now and then of them strapped to your hand, did that exist?

BONBRIGHT: No, I never had one strapped to my hand. You'd carry it and you'd keep it with you, and you'd sleep on the boat with it. But that gave us a chance to get a breather in Hong Kong a night or two. We'd get it about once in six weeks, and that was great. There was a certain amount of social life, but mostly the same people that you'd see pretty much all the time, rather formal in its strange way. We used to wear--not tuxedos, which were too heavy, but we wore these white monkey jackets when we went out to dinner, but we always wore stiff shirts still, and it was hot and damp, and all the men would take an extra collar in his pocket, and after dinner he'd go out and change his collar, just soaking wet. No fun, that. Really, it was a miserable climate.

Q: Did you have Marine guards then?

BONBRIGHT: No. The French had somebody, and the British. They did have troops there that were stationed at the bridge into the native city. They must have been English officers or off the gunboats; I forget which.

Q: How long did you stay in Canton?

BONBRIGHT: I was only there about ten months. I felt very poorly all winter; I don't know what I got, but I felt so badly that I'd have to go to bed, and I'd be dragging myself for a week, and then I'd get up and go to the office for a week and drag myself around. Finally, one day I just keeled over in the office. They got a rickshaw and dragged me off to the little hospital on the island. I was in the hospital for about a month under an oxygen tent. They said I'd had some kind of a heart condition, an enlargement of the heart. But I never had any trouble with it afterwards. I was sent home in June of 1929 in a boat, and was met out west by my father and family doctor. They got me home, and I was in bed for six months or more, I guess, and wasn't able to get back to work until the following March of 1930. I hadn't wanted or expected to spend my life in China, but I hoped to last a little longer than that.

Anyway, I was glad, in a way, that I'd been there, and I was glad, too, that I had not tried to make a career out of it, because a lot of those people were very badly burned in the McCarthy era--the ones I know, I think, quite unfairly.

Q: Service.

BONBRIGHT: They reported as they saw things, which we were paid to do. Speaking of pay, my salary was $2,500 a year, with 5% off for retirement. I think it was several years before I got a big raise to $2,750. In fact, when I entered the Service, the entire budget for the State Department and all our offices abroad was, I think, $19 million.

Q: The whole thing?

BONBRIGHT: The whole thing. They collected about nine or ten million in transport and visa fees, so it cost the American taxpayer about $10 million to run the whole Foreign Service. Fantastic.

Q: And now today?

BONBRIGHT: That wouldn't pay for a consulate in Sarnia, Ontario.

Q: The Secretary asked for a separate 2-point-something billion to fortify and strengthen the embassies for security.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I might just mention one word about the actual work which I had in Canton, which is not very interesting, which is not unusual, either, for a very junior officer. All the political reporting was done by the consul general himself. I had the onerous task of sitting at a desk signing invoices of shipments, tea, rice, and what have you, to the States. When McKenna was home on leave, I took over his work with the visas, or rather, what we called section six certificates in those days, a special part of the immigration laws. The Chinese didn't have regular visas; they got a thing called a section six certificate, which was mostly for students and bona fide merchants who wanted to get over. Just to show how greatly a lot of these Chinese wanted to get to the United States, they would buy part of a business in town and would sit there in the office for a year waiting for a consul to come to investigate. He had a set of books made up of the whole thing, to make it look legitimate, when it wasn't at all. I used to go for that, and I was told by the Chinese fellow at the main office, who I went with, he said that there had been a great opportunity for this aspiring crook to make a lot of money. They figured that you could make about half a million dollars by selling visas and these section six certificates, and if you did this for about six months, that was all the traffic would bear, but that would cover the time that the man would actually get over to the States, get set up somewhere and finally get investigated at home, found this thing, and then the thing would come back. By that time, you took your half a million and beat it. I had heard there was one non-career vice consul who did just that, but I don't think he lived to enjoy his ill-gotten gains.

Q: Was there a gimmick where, if they could indicate they had a relative in the States, that entitled them to come?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that helped, too.

Q: That was very hard to trace whether anybody was a relative, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: I think the students were apt to be more legitimate, that they had been accepted by some school or other, as long as the school was in good standing.

Q: Was there an embassy in Peking?

BONBRIGHT: There was a legation at that time, not that there's much difference. As you know, the chief of mission in the legation, the top man can go to the foreign minister, and at an embassy, of course, the ambassador has access to the chief of state of the other country. At that time I think we only had about eight embassies in the world--Argentina, Brazil, and Chile in South America, and then Britain, France, Germany, Italy--I'm not sure that even Russia was. But that was sort of an artificial thing and was resented by some people. Sumner Welles did away with it when he came in. He thought the Latin Americans had been discriminated against and were not being treated as well as they should, so he pushed through, making practically every mission in South America an embassy, including Nicaragua and Honduras. Well, of course, then the lid was off; you couldn't very well refuse anywhere. So now for some time there was only one legation left, I think, in Tangier. Now I think they're all embassies--even Luxembourg.

Q: Was there such a thing as late as 1928 and 1929 of certain countries having professional diplomats? I remember the diplomatic service of the Czar sometimes had an Italian who worked for them with a high-ranking position; he was a professional diplomat. Did any foreign countries have that then?

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember it so. Of course, we always had a number of local offices, but they were never high up on the official ladder. They're indispensable, some of them, very good and indispensable.

Q: So did you recuperate in Rochester or in California?

BONBRIGHT: I was pretty much in Rochester. Finally the doctor said I could go back to work. The question of my reassignment came up. To show how kind the State Department of that time could be, they assigned me to our legation in Ottawa, Canada, in the belief that it would be helpful for me to be that close to my own home in Rochester, New York, and easily accessible to my family. Everything has got too big for that kind of thing to happen very often anymore, I imagine.

Q: In those days, the Department didn't have a huge medical service, did they?

BONBRIGHT: No. I arrived in Ottawa on the First of March, 1930. It was a Sunday, and a wild blizzard was blowing. I didn't know anybody there; nobody met me. I had no place to go, but I had heard that the Chateau Laurier was a good hotel, so I got my bags together and got a porter and asked him to take me to a taxi. He put me in the taxi, and I said, "I'd like to go to the Chateau Laurier Hotel," whereupon the man drove me across the street

and said, "This is it." I learned later that there was even a passage under the street, whereby you could walk from the station into the hotel. But I thought at the time that the people were going to be tough, to take a dollar for this much of a trip.

Q: Did you have just a suitcase and the heavy stuff was coming later, or did you have all your worldly goods with you?

BONBRIGHT: The stuff had been checked in the train. We had had a consulate general in Ottawa for some time, but we had never had a diplomatic mission there until 1927, when it was opened up as a result of the Commonwealth Conference and the different status it accorded to the dominions at that time. The first minister was William Phillips, who had been ambassador to Belgium, went there and opened things up in 1927. He left a couple of months before I got there, so I was sorry I never had the chance to serve under him.

The office consisted of a couple of rooms in an insurance company building, and the legation staff consisted of a charge affaires, Ben Riggs, and myself. So it wasn't a very high-powered outfit. Actually, our government bought a nice property opposite the Parliament building and built a handsome legation on Lincoln Street, which was opened, I think, in 1932. It seemed, after our previous quarters, very luxurious and would last a long time. Actually, I think it became too small shortly after I left, which is the way of the growth of those things.

The first minister to come there in my time was Hanford McNider, who had a terrific war record; I think he was the youngest major in the Army. He was interested in politics and became head of the American Legion, and being made minister to Canada was his reward, a staunch Republican, of course, at that time under Mr. Hoover.

Q: So in effect, he was a political appointee.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he was. He was a fine man and I liked him, and his wife was charming. They got on very well. It was entirely easy for him, because when I got there, the government was still run by Mr. MacKenzie King; the liberals were still in power. The election a few months later in 1930 turned the liberals out and the conservative party came in under R.B. Bennett, a lawyer from Calvary, who was never noted for his pro-American feelings.

Q: Had the Depression struck yet?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, the Depression had indeed struck. Actually, in 1932 they had the Ontario Conference in Ottawa, in which emerged the system of imperial preferences in tariff matters, which were a great thorn in our side. Actually, it was our own damn fault. They were only reacting against our own so-called Tariff Act of the Twenties, which put a lot of their people out of business. So I think we got what was coming to us that time. It was bad.

In 1933, I was married to Sybil Rhodes, whose father came from Nova Scotia and was a member of Bennett's conservative government, first as Minister of Fisheries and later as Minister of Finance. He was always very kind to me, I was fond of him, and he had a very fine career. He was the youngest speaker in the Canadian House of Commons during the war, and later he became Premier of Nova Scotia.

Q: In those days, did the Department require special permission to marry someone of another nationality?

BONBRIGHT: That began just about that time. I think it originated with William Bullitt, who went to Moscow in 1933 and announced that having dinner with his staff was like having dinner with the League of Nations, or something like that. I never had any trouble getting permission, and I don't think anybody did who married a Canadian. I mean, it didn't make a distinction. I think I had to ask for permission, but things worked out. I think some of them, when they asked for permission, had to submit their resignation, as I remember it, which could be accepted or not. But I think what was aimed at was Europe and some of the Latin American countries. I can see the point if you had too many foreign wives in your official family, it could have been an embarrassment and awkward, but the ones that I saw, they were just as good wives as anybody.

Q: Maybe better than some. Was there any evidence in those days in the Thirties of Joseph Kennedy amassing vast quantities of Scotch for when Prohibition was over, or was that sort of a covert business?

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember that at all.

Q: It's alleged now that he accumulated a vast fortune by buying Scotch and taking it to Canada and then pushing it through when Prohibition was over.

BONBRIGHT: Of course, in Prohibition times, every time we crossed the border in a train, that train was taken apart, looking everywhere for liquor. People got quite ingenious, but it was small-scale, somebody trying to take a bottle in.

But the fellow I was talking about, the first minister, Hanford McNider, he was a great character. Not only did he fight in the First War, he fought in the Second War; I think he was a general out in New Guinea. I often thought that if I ever was in a fighting war, I'd just as soon be under him as anybody I've come across. He was real tough and good. He had some good stories to tell about himself, too. One time he went home to Mason City, Iowa, where he came from, and the train crossed the border coming back from Ottawa at Windsor, I think, Ontario, between Detroit. He was awakened early in the morning by the immigration customs officers coming through the train. He was mad as hell at waking up. He was very sore. He was "god damning" it up and down, "Why don't you people leave me alone? and all this stuff. The inspectors finally withdrew.

A few minutes later they came back, and they said, "Mr. Minister, we hope your new congregation likes you."

Another one he told was, shortly after he was made minister to Canada, he was invited back to Milton Academy, where he had gone to school, to make the commencement address. He responded to this invitation by writing a letter to the trustees, saying, "Gentlemen, if you would look back in your records, you will find that on such and such a date of such and such a year, a by-law was passed which forbade one Hanford McNider from ever setting foot again on the school property." As a result of that, they had a special meeting of the board to rescind this offensive article. That amused him enormously.

Q: It implied he'd been fired when he was a student.

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, I think so. One of the things I remember while he was there was Lindbergh and his wife flew into Ottawa on their way northwest, going to Japan, on that trip. It was a very interesting evening. The MacNiders gave a dinner for them at their house and high-ranking military people from the Canadian Government, particularly the Air Force, and much of the evening was spent by these officers trying to persuade Lindbergh not to take the course that he was going to take. There were no facilities.

Q: Beacons and radar.

BONBRIGHT: They, of course, knew that if anything happened to him or he disappeared, with his reputation and all, they'd have to turn out everything that they had that would fly to look for him, and they couldn't afford it.

Q: Was he going to cross Canada and go up around the Aleutians and down that way?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Terrible weather.

BONBRIGHT: Certainly. And he did.

Q: With Anne Morrow.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. She was his radio operator on the trip. She was a lovely person. But he thanked them very nicely but was absolutely immovable. This was the way he was going to go. Now looking back on it, I think they could have said, "You can't. We won't allow it," in which case he couldn't have gone. But they didn't. They were very unhappy and very relieved when he made the trip safely.

Q: And he probably didn't come back the same way.

BONBRIGHT: No, I don't think so.

Q: Ottawa was a lot colder than Rochester, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, yes.

Q: Couldn't it get much, much colder?

BONBRIGHT: Rochester was right on Lake Ontario and created a dampness, whereas in Ottawa, further inland, it was colder but clearer and a better climate. Rochester wasn't as bad as Buffalo.

Q: It's the worst of all, isn't it?

BONBRIGHT: It's right at the end of Lake Erie, where the winds are tremendous. But in Ottawa, I saw it 33 degrees below zero; that's the coldest I experienced there, but glorious, sunny weather. You could hardly breathe, it was so cold on your lungs, but it was bracing, to say the least. I was very fond of it. I had five very interesting and nice years there.

Q: Were there days when cars wouldn't start, or did the people solve all that with heaters?

BONBRIGHT: They had trouble, and, of course, the ruts in the street in the early spring weren't to be believed; they were a foot deep. But they fought the snow pretty well with what they had at that time. Everybody wore chains. I know on my car in the garage I had one of these little electric bug things that you put in and heat it and keep it warm.

Q: So it wouldn't freeze overnight. This is a little bit apart, but since we're on Canada, I always heard, and from what limited observation I have had, the Canadian foreign service is extremely good. They've had some outstanding people, and it's a high quality service. Is that your observation as you went different places in the world?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, very much so. I think they have a splendid service. It is much later now, but when I was there, the Canadian Department of External Affairs--what they call their Department of State--I don't think they had more than 15 or 20 officers in it, but all of them were good. Mike Pearson, for instance, was in it at the time, and he later became ambassador to Washington, foreign minister, and prime minister. Norman Robinson was another very bright man. Charlie Richie from Nova Scotia was ambassador to France and to Germany and high commissioner to Great Britain; he had a very distinguished career, very bright.

Q: Did you ever hear of a man called Leolyn Wilgress?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: I think he served in Moscow.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he did. I knew him--very fine. His first name was Dana--Dana Wilgress. I'll mention him when I get to my next stage.

Date: February 28, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You mentioned that you were in Ottawa almost five years. I was wondering about that. I thought the assignments were three years or four years. Did they vary a great deal?

BONBRIGHT: There never was a firm rule about it. I think the average was about three years. I thought that two was too little and four or five was too much. In my case, I never knew exactly why I stayed so long. I suspect it may have been due to my marriage to the daughter of a member of the government, and that they hoped to get something out of that. If so, they must have been very disappointed.

I might just mention the governor general situation. The governor general when I arrived there was Lord Wellington, who had been Viceroy of India. He was a very aristocratic, intelligent man, and I think quite well-liked by the Canadians. His wife was something else again. She had a way of acting in a more than viceregal manor, and when she went into the home of some Ottawa family and saw something that she liked, she would expect that object. As a result of this, many of the local families were reluctant to have the Wellingtons honor their household by coming, so all the more they enjoyed the following little anecdote. As in London, where their newspapers carry a statement every day about who had the honor of doing what at Buckingham Palace, the Wellingtons also saw to it that the Ottawa papers would carry a daily statement of their doings, their comings and goings at Government House. There was a young liberal fellow named Graham Spry, who was somewhat of a prig, I thought, but he was an ambitious young man and was around town quite a bit. So it was with some surprise that the citizens of Ottawa woke one morning to read the following in their local paper: "Yesterday afternoon at 5:00 o'clock, Mr. Graham Spry had the honor of Lady Wellington at Government House." This, of course, immediately became a collector's item in Ottawa.

Q: Was this a disease like kleptomania or a weird trait?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know if it was quite that far, but she had a very high opinion of her rank, I think.

To go back to events in the American legation, after Hanford MacNider retired as minister, his place was taken by a career officer named Pierre Boal, who was Chargé d'affaires and remained that for well over a year before another minister was sent. Pierre was married to a French woman of some charm and was an intelligent officer. I must say he was a little on the devious side, in my choice, but still, in looking back, he was a good

representative. He had a very good war record, and in the first war was affiliated with Lafayette Escadrille; that's presumed to be by his French wife. He, of course, was in charge of the creation at that time of the Commonwealth Conference, the passage of the imperial preference tariff laws.

He was followed by Warren Delano Robbins, a career man of some charm. He clearly owed his appointment to his middle name of Delano, which indicated his relationship with FDR. He had had a good career, but unfortunately, by the time he got to Ottawa, he was on the way down. To be quite honest, he'd become quite a lush.

Q: That was obvious to other people in the community?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I'm afraid it was. He was married, his wife, who I think was an Argentinian by birth, was a very attractive and very strong-willed woman. I think she saw the fading hours very quickly and this resulted in her intruding into the affairs of state to an extent, which hurt him pretty badly. If we had a problem that the minister was to take up with the Department of External Affairs, we would coach him as carefully as we could in the morning and have everything pretty well lined up. He would then go home for his two- or three-martini lunch, and he would explain everything that had gone on to his wife, who would automatically and immediately take objection to it and get him turned around the wrong way, usually by saying he shouldn't let his "underlings push him around." So when he got back after lunch, there we were, going in the wrong direction, so nothing we could do but just retire, regroup, and resume the charge the next day. But that was not at all satisfactory.

Q: Did she have her own foreign policy, or was she just thwarting advisors?

BONBRIGHT: A combination of both. She was interested in all these things and had very firm opinions. She just confused her role with her husband's too much--not unheard of. Actually, she was the cause of further difficulty. When the Wellingtons left Government House, the successor was the Earl of Bessborough, who was married to a very lovely French woman. The difficulty was that Ilene Robbins had been to school with Countess Bessborough, and therefore regarded herself in every way as the equal of the governor general's wife. She therefore declined to curtsy before her former schoolmate, as was the local custom, and addressed her in the way that was regarded as a little too familiar.

Q: First name?

BONBRIGHT: I think so. So this just added to it. It's a small matter, but small matters can cause trouble.

Q: Especially if you're living with them.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The episode had an unhappy end, as Mr. Robbins went to New York on a visit after he'd been there some time, where he caught pneumonia and died. So that was the end of that interlude.

Q: Was he relatively young? Was he in his sixties?

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember. I think pretty close to 60. After that, Pierre Boal resumed as Chargé d'affaires and remained in charge as long as I was in Canada.

My own tour of duty ended in the middle of 1936, when I was called back to the Department to take over the Canadian desk. So I spent four years on that stint. In all I spent nine years on Canadian affairs, which was enjoyable and interesting, and probably longer than I should have.

Before I left Canada, the Department sent me out west to visit our consular offices to get some picture in the field. I went to such unsavory places as Sudbury, Ontario, Fort William, Fort Arthur, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Regina, Saskatchewan, Calgary and Edmonton and Alberta, Vancouver. Vancouver was the only city on the trip that I ever had any desire to see again. It was quite a nice place.

Q: There still is a consulate there, I think.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so. I was to have gone on to Victoria, but I had the bad luck to fall down on a slippery street in Vancouver and was run over by a T Model Ford that only went over my foot, which was badly sprained. The pain was considerable, the humiliation even more disagreeable. So I didn't get to Victoria, but I did recover enough to take a fast trip up to Prince Rupert, where we had a one-man consulate. I had a lovely voyage up on the Inland Passage, beautiful, but Prince Rupert itself was a horror. The smell of fish was everywhere. The poor consul did nothing that I could see except sign consular invoices for shipments of halibut to the United States.

Q: It was sort of a commercial attaché's job, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Anyway, I was to leave by Canadian National train, which went only every other day. After the first 24 hours, I stayed very close to the railroad station, because that was one train I didn't want to miss. I made it along with one Pullman car and about eight freight cars full of fish.

When I got to Washington to take up my duties, I was under the immediate supervision of John D. Hickerson, who had previously been a consul in Ottawa, and who we always have referred to as "Mr. Canada himself." He was a splendid boss, intelligent, hard-working, very, very nice and understanding. I was put in a room with two other men, John Stewart and--I've forgotten the other man's name. To show how things had grown, the three of us in that room handled the whole British empire. One did the United Kingdom and colonies, another one did Australia and New Zealand, and I did Canada. I had the

assistance of one maiden lady named Clara Borjes, who had been in the Department for many years and was our expert on rum-running. She knew all the famous rum-runners by name and all the famous bootleggers, a most unlikely assignment for a lady of spotless virtue. We never would say the word "damn" in her presence. Actually, by this time, Prohibition had passed, but she was still busy on rum-running cases, left-overs from those days. The famous "I'm Alone" case was still...

Q: That was a ship, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: It was a rum-runner that we had intercepted off the Gulf of Mexico inside our three-mile limit, took off, and the Coast Guard took off after her and finally caught up with her, but well outside our territorial limits. We advanced the theory of hot pursuit, considered legitimate in our eyes. This case dragged on in the courts for many years. Finally it was settled. I think we had to pay $25 million.

Q: It was a Canadian rum-runner?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Did it go to the International Court of Justice in Hague?

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember what court it finally ended up in. There was one other left-over from the rum-running business. The Bronfman Brothers in Montreal, who owned Seagrams, the makers of B&O and other Canadian whiskies, had been running stuff pretty regularly, and this greatly offended our Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. Henry Morgenthau. Morgenthau was determined to hit the Bronfmans hard. Well, he finally made such a fuss over it at the White House, that the story was that FDR called him in one day and said, "Now Henry, you say you're suing this family for $6 million. That's what you think it's worth? Let's write that down on a piece of paper." So he wrote down $6 million. He said, "Now Henry, let's write down what the actual value of this thing is. It's worth absolutely nothing." So he put zeros down and a little line under that, and he said, "Now let's divide it by half. $3 million, Henry." And that's the way it was settled.

Q: This was a suit against the Bronfmans?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Miss Borjes must have known something about Joseph Kennedy's involvement in liquor.

BONBRIGHT: Probably so.

Q: I think he had some relationship with the Bronfmans as well.

BONBRIGHT: Probably so, but I never heard of that connection, although I should have.

Q: It came out later, and it might come under the head of muckraking. I don't know.

BONBRIGHT: A friend of the bureau in which our affairs were handled was Pierrepont Moffat, who was a very intelligent and good officer. I never had too much to do with him in my time. I wasn't there too long. He, frankly, showed little or no interest in Canada, which was my feeling.

Q: As if it were no-account?

BONBRIGHT: Europe was his cup of tea. As a result, more than ever, Jack Hickerson became the top level to me. I always thought it was a little poetic justice when Moffat was in the field. For his first post, they made him minister to Canada. I think I could have helped him, but he never showed any interest. Unhappily, he got phlebitis when he was up there and died.

Q: I guess that was before they had those thinning drugs like heparin, because I think about that time, if they had invented it, instead of taking it in pill form or however they do it, they had to drip it with a needle into the vein in a very complicated, uncomfortable way. But you don't hear of people dying of phlebitis anymore unless there's a clot.

BONBRIGHT: It was a real loss. Among the problems of that time, the most important, I guess, was the St. Lawrence Waterway. We had been negotiating with the Canadians for this since the early Twenties, and it was batted back and forth. The cities of the Great Lakes were all for it, but it was very strongly opposed by the railroads, who felt, quite rightly, that it would take a lot of freight away from them. It was an interesting battle, and it finally went through. If I remember, the treaty was not actually signed until after my time, even though we did a lot of work on it.

Q: Where were you physically when you were in Washington? Were you in the old Executive Office Building? Right next to the White House?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The Navy Building, which was a wonderful building to be in.

Q: I did six years in it. I loved it.

BONBRIGHT: I loved it dearly. It's not pretty, but it looks like what the State Department ought to look like.

Q: High ceilings, fireplaces.

BONBRIGHT: Long corridors with swinging doors like into a bar room into the offices. The only bad rooms in it were some among the inner court; they got pretty hot. Of course, there was no air-conditioning or anything of that kind. Most of the time I was lucky enough, in this particular assignment, I was on the side facing the White House, so I

would see Fala playing on the lawn, the President's scotty, where I would watch with disgust Easter egg rolling by a lot of grimy little children.

Q: Cordell Hull was the Secretary of State.

BONBRIGHT: Cordell Hull was the Secretary of State. He'd come in with FDR. He was an extraordinary man. I don't think he was very happy as Secretary of State. I don't think, on the balance, he was a particularly good one. He was totally committed to the lowering of tariffs and pursued the trade agreement program with great tenacity, which I think was good, but in other respects, he didn't function so well, I didn't think. I was trying to think if Sumner Welles came in at that time. I guess so. Sumner Welles was the Under Secretary of State who was close to Roosevelt, an entirely different kind of mind. He was very brilliant, full of devil and go, we called it, although he wasn't very old. To read his memoranda of conversation was a lesson to all of us. He was superb, accurate and concise, just the opposite of Mr. Hull. Of course, the President leaned heavily on Welles because of these traits, but due to Mr. Hull's strong support on the Hill, he had no choice but to keep the old man on.

Q: Sumner Welles was rather arrogant, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, he was indeed impossible and had a rather bad ending which I won't go into. Mr. Hull detested him.

Q: He did? They were cut from different cloth.

BONBRIGHT: Among his friends in the Department, he referred to Welles as "the horizontal son of a bitch." I never quite knew why that was considered worse than a vertical one, but he apparently did.

Q: I've never heard that expression.

BONBRIGHT: I hadn't heard it either. The other big issue, an issue which was not really an issue, but another big job while I was in there was that we negotiated two trade agreements for Canada which were of considerable importance. The negotiations were about as pleasant as they could be. Our side was headed by Jack Hickerson, and I was his assistant, and then we had David Durand, the head of the entire commission, a man from agriculture with Stewart. On the Canadian side they had the leader, Norman Robertson, a very bright man from external affairs, supported by David Wilgress from the Chamber of Congress department, and Hector McKinnon, who was head of their Tariff Commission. Negotiations were friendly, very informal. In fact, once or twice we adjourned negotiations by unanimous consent to carry them on in Griffith Stadium, where the Washington Senators were playing. While Mr. Hull was a great advocate of tariffs, the American team in the negotiations soon learned that it was a fatal mistake to ever seek the Secretary's approval for a reduction of the tariff on any article manufactured in the state of Tennessee. We remembered that lesson.

Q: Tennessee was exempt?

BONBRIGHT: Tennessee was pretty exempt, yes.

Q: That's not unknown in Congress or people who grew up in Congress.

BONBRIGHT: No, no. It's very common. We should have known better to suggest it.

Q: Cordell Hull had a temper, didn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, quite strong. I didn't get to see him too often; I was to far down the line. But once or twice I would be there when he was having a meeting with the Canadian minister or something and would take notes. I'd write up a summary of the conversation. He was a very difficult man to understand. His speech was very roundabout. The only two officers I knew who could really understand what the old man was saying were Ray Atherton and Jimmy Dunn, but this was in a later period just before the war. When we come to that, I have a little piece of paper I'll read, which shows Mr. Hull's style in a press release.

One smaller matter that came to our work at that time was that we had the Neutrality Act going, and Roosevelt, whatever he may have been trying to do on the side, he was certainly trying to keep us out of the involvement in what soon became the growing danger of war in Europe. He wanted to build up a Navy rapidly, and this involved very small boats, patrol boats. At that time nothing could be built on the Great Lakes of a military nature according to the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1827, or something like that.

Q: Between Canada?

BONBRIGHT: Between Canada.

Q: As if we were going to seize something?

BONBRIGHT: Which provided for the disarming of the Great Lakes. It was all part of that 3,000 miles of undefended frontier which was on the mouth of every orator on the subject of Canadian-American relations. We got very sick of that speech. The Navy wanted to use some of the shipyards in Chicago, Lake Michigan, Detroit, and Cleveland, to build some small boats that were armed. We couldn't do this under the Rush-Bagot Agreement, so we had to get the consent of the Canadian Government to quietly do away with it. I was given the responsibility of drafting the note on this subject, and of all the mealy-mouthed things that I've ever read in State papers, this was one of the worst. It was so bad that Captain Strubel, later Admiral Strubel, of the Navy Department, who was negotiating with us in the State Department, thought it was one of the finest papers he'd ever read. He used to howl with laughter when he saw me ever after.

Q: But it was swept away?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It was quietly put to rest. There wasn't any great fuss about it. We thought there would be more because of the constant references to it as a great statesman-like agreement of its time.

Q: After the war broke out, I think there was one aircraft carrier in the Great Lakes, and it must have been something that was converted. I don't think it was built from scratch. I don't know whether it stayed there during the war or went out into the Atlantic, but I think it was mostly used for training in an aircraft carrier.

While you were there in what they call the EOB, were clouds of war obviously gathering? Hitler was rampaging, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes. I was there from '36 to '39. Hitler was doing all his stuff.

Q: The Spanish Civil War was coming to a close.

BONBRIGHT: That's right. That's where poor Jimmy Dunn used to get hit over the head by the press. The press was awful.

Q: Loyalists.

BONBRIGHT: The government against Franco. Our policy was not in that direction. That's one thing I always held a little bit against Mr. Hull, who avoided getting out in front with great care of this fight, and the President, too. The fellow who really took the rap was Jimmy Dunn, who was a wonderful man and didn't care. He let them cut him to pieces.

Q: Was he chief of the European area?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he was at the time.

Q: He wasn't ambassador in Madrid?

BONBRIGHT: No. This was before he was ambassador. But he took it well. He was a very good ambassador later. Later he was ambassador to Italy for a long time.

Q: He had many posts, didn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Right after the war, he was there during the 1948 election in Italy, in which a few tricks were played saving the country for democracy. He was ambassador to France.

Q: Who was Mrs. Dunn? Was she an outstanding person?

BONBRIGHT: She was an Armour, I think, a very charming woman.

Q: She wasn't Norman Armour's sister, was she?

BONBRIGHT: No, I don't think so.

Q: Since you were connected with the United Kingdom and that area, specifically Canada, was it apparent to people in the Department then, some of Roosevelt's--not covert, but more or less undisclosed getting closer with the British, for instance, Sir William Stephenson being in New York and setting up sort of an apparatus?

BONBRIGHT: I didn't know too much about that until I read about it in Stephenson's book. There was a very close relationship, no doubt, and the destroyers for bases took place in that time, I think, didn't it?

Q: Just about. Roosevelt had a farsighted vision of what was happening, didn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, I think he did. I'm sure he did. But he also was head of the government at a time when neutrality had a very strong appeal.

Q: Isolationism.

BONBRIGHT: Isolationism.

Q: America first.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, no doubt about it. I think he maneuvered himself in every way that he felt he could to help the British.

Date: February 29, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. We've had a brief lapse of a few days here. It's a nice cold Saturday morning in your overlook here on Massachusetts Avenue.

BONBRIGHT: There's one small family matter that I think I should mention here before I leave off with my Canadian experiences. In 1937, I think it was, my wife decided to become an American citizen. This was her decision alone, and I had never asked her or intimated to her in any way that this would be a good thing to do. I know it was not an easy decision for her, because she was very proud of her Canadian and particularly her Nova Scotian background. I was pleased that she decided to do this. It was, of course, a direct result of the problem that the Department had had in previous years when they had made it impossible for Foreign Service officers to marry non-Americans without the Department's permission. Anyway, I was a little worried about it--I didn't tell her so--but

her urges were strictly artistic--painting. Although she came from a political family, she had no interest in politics or history as such. So I wasn't sure how well she'd make out on the examination. But the day came and she came home from the exam, and I was much relieved when I asked her how she thought she had made out, and she said she thought she had done all right. I said, "That's fine. Were there any questions that were put to you that gave you trouble?"

She said, "Only one that really bothered me."

I said, "What was that?"

She said, "They asked me, `Who is Ulysses S. Grant?'" After that I decided I'd ask no more questions. But anyway, she did pass, and I don't think ever regretted it. At times when we were traveling abroad, I think it was useful that she was traveling on an American passport.

My assignment then was to go as second secretary of the embassy in Brussels. Before sailing, I went up to Nantucket to take a final farewell from my father and mother. This was a rather sad occasion. My father was very ill, he'd suffered a heart attack in March, and while he had been improving some over the summer, he was confined to his bed and didn't look right. I felt quite sure that there was very little chance that I would ever see him again. Unfortunately, this feeling proved true, because on September 6 I got a cable from my mother telling me that he had passed away. This was just a few days after the start of the war, so there was no question of my being able to go home, particularly as I'd just arrived at my post a few weeks before.

Q: The Germans had invaded Poland but hadn't started west yet.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. This is the start of the "phony war," so called. When I got to Brussels, the embassy was headed by Mr. Joseph E. Davies, our former ambassador to Moscow and the author of that dreadful book, Mission to Moscow. In brief, he was a dreadful man. He was oily in his unctuousness, the most dishonest man intellectually that I had the misfortune to run across. None of us could stand him. Luckily, it didn't last very long. Mrs. Davies had already gone home and taken the "Sea Cloud" with her. Davies himself put on a bold front and said, of course, he wouldn't leave with the war starting and this sort of thing. He kept up this pretense even when talking to his staff and even when the moving vans were backed up at the door of the embassy. Anyway, we didn't mind his saying these things; we were just glad when he left.

Q: Was he just a major contributor to the Roosevelt campaigns, or was he a close friend of Franklin D?

BONBRIGHT: I think it was mostly her money. I don't think he had much before he married her. She was Mrs. "Post Toasties" or something.

Q: Marjorie Merriweather Post Close Hutton Davies? And there's one more name after that.

BONBRIGHT: That's right. He left us one legacy there which I will mention a little later on in this Belgian episode.

The other officers in the embassy were Orme Wilson, who was the counselor. He and his wife were very good friends of ours for many years. The other second secretary was Frances Willis, a lady who had entered the Service in the same class at the same time as I had. So we had known each other.

Q: She became ambassador to Switzerland.

BONBRIGHT: She was an interesting and hard-working and intelligent woman. There had been women in the Service before her, but most of them had married or gotten out for one reason or another. I think the Department rather hoped that this would happen to Frances. In our Foreign Service school days, one of our other classmates--I won't name him here, it doesn't matter--was very taken with her and courted her. In a most unusual move, the Department sent him and Frances to the same post in Chile, obviously in the hope that they would marry and get Frances out of the way. But she resisted the temptation, if it was a temptation, and stayed behind, and became the first career woman to achieve the rank of ambassador and ended up in Switzerland. A fine woman.

Q: Orme Wilson became an ambassador, didn't he? And then his son was in the service for a long while.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, for a while. Orme was in Haiti or some place in the Caribbean. I'm not certain.

Soon after Davies' departure, the President appointed John Cudahy as ambassador.

Q: Another political appointee, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Another political appointee who, I think, had been in Dublin. I know he loved horses. That's why he asked for Dublin and got it.

Q: Wasn't he a handsome man?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, a tall, good-looking, very nice man, actually, although I never saw any special qualities in him. In fact, I don't know why he wanted to be ambassador to Belgium, but he was not difficult at all to work with.

Q: Hadn't he been in Warsaw, too?

BONBRIGHT: My memory is gone on that. I couldn't say. He could have been. I thought he had been in Dublin.

In those days the ambassador to Belgium and also his staff were assigned to Luxembourg as well. The office in Luxembourg of course, was a very small one, and one man was there as charge. I went up with Mr. Cudahy when he presented his letters to the Grand Duchess, and had a pleasant day or two at Luxembourg, a lovely little country.

The Charge was a courtly Virginian named George Waller, who still believed strongly in the divine right of kings, and if not of kings, of the Grand Duchess. I remember after the ceremony, Cudahy said to Waller on the side, "The Grand Duchess is a very nice, charming woman." I thought Waller would faint that he should speak of her in such familiar terms.

Most of that winter, of course, the winter of the "phony war," was spent responding to different alerts. There was a great fear that the Germans were going to attack in November. There was another bad scare in January and another in the spring before it actually came. Nobody thought that they wouldn't come.

The May 10th attack, my wife and I had made plans to go up to Holland at the height of the tulip season, and we wanted very much to see this, but Hitler spoiled that for us. The morning of the tenth of May was absolutely beautiful, and word came through that the invasion of Belgium and the low countries had started. A few planes came over, but not much that we could see where we were. Incidentally, I lived outside of Brussels in a suburb called Rye St. Genese, 13 kilometers away. It was a lovely farm with a very large house spread out. The owner had lots of interests in the Congo and he was going down there and wanted somebody to live in it, watch over it for him and particularly wanted an American if he could get one from the embassy. So we got this place for very little. It was much too big for us, but we worked over one wing of it, and it was very attractive, a lovely place. From the bedroom on the second floor I could see the line of Waterloo in the distance. Then at that time I took to bicycling into the office.

Q: Thirteen kilometers?

BONBRIGHT: Thirteen kilometers did me good, except in the dead of winter. Brussels is noted for its very raw in winter. The temperatures for days on end will hover between 33 or 34, so you get this drizzle which covers everything in the day and will freeze up at night. You can't move. I haven't seen anywhere that's as bad this way. But when I could bicycle, I did. At the end of the day, Sybil would drive in and we'd tie the bicycle on the back of the car and ride home.

Q: Would you subscribe to the idea that the country of Belgium, with Ghent and Bruges and Antwerp, is prettier than the people?

BONBRIGHT: I'm afraid so.

Q: The people are rather stolid?

BONBRIGHT: I don't frankly feel any warmth about any Belgians. Of course, they have a problem there. It's like Canada. So many countries that have these different races, the differences between the Walloons and the Flemish are constantly bubbling. So it's not something that makes for a happy, easy situation at all.

Q: Is the French spoken by educated Belgians immediately detectable as Belgian French?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think there is a little difference. I'm no expert, but there are some words. I will say for them, bar none in the world, it's the best food and wine I ever drank. I put on 15 pounds in the 11 months that I was there. If that hadn't ended then, I would have blown up, I think.

Q: You would have looked like Henry VIII.

BONBRIGHT: Very likely, because I was making great strides in that direction and loving it. Absolutely marvelous food.

Q: Describe the actual invasion. When did you first see German troops? Were they elite units, armored divisions?

BONBRIGHT: A day or two after that, parts of the British Expeditionary Force came through heading towards the east where the fighting had started, all new-looking equipment and very high-spirited, everybody cheering them on in the streets. It was fine. But each night the sound of the artillery, you could hear it getting closer. The Germans actually arrived, although we didn't see a great many of them in Brussels itself, just a week after the invasion, on the 17th of May. So it didn't take them long to get there. Soon after, everything fell apart. King Leopold (1901-1951) surrendered, which greatly annoyed Mr. Churchill and a few Belgians, too, who compared this very unfavorably with the way his father, King Albert (1875-1934) had behaved in the first war. But he was under pressure, and it was clear that everything had fallen apart. I'm sorry to say that a lot of the officers who were seen back in Brussels looking after their families and trying to get them away some place, had left their troops. Not good.

At about this time when the Germans came in, we were sort of isolated out in St. Genese, and the ambassador invited us to move into his residence where he had lots of extra room, which we did, and we stayed there for a week or two. The electricity was off. It was a little hard to get some things, but on the whole it wasn't too bad in the town. Just before the Germans came in, they hung a sign for Belgian civilians to keep a watch on the embassy all the time. We'd see them standing outside on the street. In fact, we used to play a little game in the evening with them, childish, but it amused us. If there would be six or more of us at dinner, when it was time to go home, everybody would gather at the

door and we'd all rush out together and go off as fast as we could walk in different directions. We enjoyed watching the confusion as to who should they follow, these people.

Q: Did that Quisling--Degrelle--did his name emerge that early, or had nobody heard of him?

BONBRIGHT: I don't think he'd been heard of much before that at all. He was another unsavory fellow.

Q: Pretty bad. Franco hid him for a while. Maybe he still is in Madrid.

BONBRIGHT: I doubt it. I guess he probably died.

One interesting brief visit, my boss went to call on the commanding general of the German forces who had an office there in Brussels for a while. He was a good-looking and talented man and spoke good English. He indicated to me that they were not surprised that they had come through, but surprised that everything went so fast. When we asked him about the future, he indicated that without any doubt there would be an invasion of England and that that campaign would take about six weeks.

About three weeks after Dunkirk, four of us drove down there in my car, my wife and I, Frances Willis, and a fellow named Gilbert, who was a consul. When we got within a few miles of the coast, we were struck by the devastation and damage of all British equipment. The ditches on each side of the road were absolutely filled. They'd just driven all these things right next to each other, right--bang--into the ditch. I think all of it could have been salvaged, though. Then they made their way on foot the rest of the way.

When we got to Dunkirk itself, it was still smoking in spots from the fires. We, of course, went to the beach where that miraculous escape had been made. To this day I can't picture quite how it could have happened.

Q: You mean the successful evacuation.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The only thing that I can see is if the Germans just were so busy and anxious to bypass it, to finish off the French, that they didn't finish off the job. The beach itself had no cover at all. You couldn't hide a mouse on it, let alone 340,000 men. Why the German Air Force couldn't have destroyed the whole thing, I don't know. Certainly the British weren't that strong. The only thing that was left there were some trucks that they drove. The water was very shallow at the coast and slides off very gradually. They drove these big trucks in and turned them sideways and put flags on top and made a couple of piers that went out far enough so that there was maybe four or five feet of water, maybe a little more at high tide, so that some boats bigger than cat boats could get in and take off men. I suppose quite a few went on in. It certainly was a wonderful feat. I think the Germans played that one wrong.

Q: There were no smashing air raids like the Germans did to Rotterdam, were there?

BONBRIGHT: No. The damage was bad at Dunkirk, but nowhere else that we could see along the way. The place was deserted. After looking at the beach, we drove down and crossed the border of France and went a certain distance. We met nobody on the road. We never saw a soldier at any time. The only time we were stopped was when we came back out of France into Belgium. There was a little customs station. I remember one little fellow standing there asking for papers--useless. But otherwise nothing. History had gone by it.

Q: What about streams of refugees? Or did it happen so quickly, there weren't any streams to go?

BONBRIGHT: That was it. Of course, the Germans were pretty ruthless. They fired up the roads pretty well, so people got out of their way fast. I think it was much worse in France than it was in Belgium.

Q: People heading south toward Vichy.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. In fact, there had been quite a few Americans who had not left when the war started, but when the invasion began, then they wanted to go in a hurry. There was nothing that they could do. At the embassy we organized a train with the help of the embassy in Paris, and with considerable effort, we got a large number out of this thing. Unhappily, it never got beyond the border and was forced to turn back with them all. They weren't hurt, but they were not able to get through.

Q: How did you keep abreast of the news, by radio?

BONBRIGHT: There was nothing in the press to speak of. We'd listen to the BBC. There wasn't much for us to do in those days, but it didn't last terribly long. In July, the Germans decided to get rid of us and ordered us to close the embassy and the consulate. They didn't want us around when they were going to put their occupation policies in force, didn't want us looking over their shoulder and reporting. So they gave us a date and time table and a route. The only way for us to go was by car. My wife and I each had a car, and everybody else in the embassy had a car, so we formed sort of a caravan. My wife and I loaded up with our two cars and everything that we could carry or need for our trip, and the rest of the stuff we'd been able to get a warehouse in Brussels to store it. I never thought we'd see any of it again, but as it turned out, not a stick of it was ever hurt. We got it all back after the war, untouched.

Q: It wasn't hidden; it was just warehoused?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: I mean, it wasn't buried underground?

BONBRIGHT: No. Only our shotguns. I buried those for a while under a hen coop. The ambassador, I think, was going back to the States. Frances Willis was reassigned to Switzerland, and I was reassigned to Belgrade. We all started off together and the early part was not very pleasant. A lot of the troops were coming home. This was late July.

Q: The defeated troops?

BONBRIGHT: No, these were jubilant, victorious troops who had been through the fall of France. They were in high spirits, and, of course, through all the villages that we passed, everybody was out cheering them on and throwing flowers at them, which we all found rather offensive. The first night we got to Cologne, spent the night in Cologne in a hotel.

Q: I don't understand. What was your destination?

BONBRIGHT: We were going to Switzerland.

Q: I see.

BONBRIGHT: That way. All except me. We had a decent night at the hotel, except that the British bombed quite heavily during the night and were not too far away from us. They were trying to hit the bridge over the Rhine, which was close by, but they came closer, I'm afraid, to hitting the cathedral, which was also nearby. We went on from there to Frankfurt, I think it was, where we separated. The rest of them all went one way on their way to Switzerland, and Sybil and I went on alone on the route to Belgrade.

Q: On the Orient Express?

BONBRIGHT: No, no. Driving by car. We had our orders from the Germans what routes to take, what roads to take. We were not to deviate in any way.

Q: Did you go over the Gotthard Pass or to Bellinzona and through Trieste?

BONBRIGHT: No. We were further up. Our first night we spent in Heidelberg, and on our arrival in late afternoon--this is the first night after Cologne--we were greeted by the loudspeakers and Hitler was there making one of his big speeches. We got a room in a hotel there and had no great difficulties, but it was an uncomfortable time.

Q: Was your car especially marked with huge white signs or anything?

BONBRIGHT: No.

Q: What kind of a car were you driving?

BONBRIGHT: We had a Chevrolet two-seater, and we had a Buick.

The next night we made Salzburg, I think it was. There were some concerts going on. We kept away from everybody as much as we could. Then the third day we passed over into Hungary. We had to stop in Vienna, because I had to report in and turn in some of the papers that we had been given for the trip. This is rather disagreeable, as you know, bureaucratic harassment. We were still neutral, but not very friendly. They didn't love us.

Anyway, when we got to the Hungarian border and drove across, out of sight, we pulled up off to the side of the road and got down and kissed the ground. We were happy to get out of there.

The next night we spent in Budapest at the Duna Pelota Hotel, which was one of the most wonderful hotels in the world, I think, later destroyed, very pretty. We had dinner with our friends there, Bill and Janet Schott, who were stationed there. And the next day, on to Belgrade.

Q: And King Alexander was still king, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: No.

Q: Had it been invaded?

BONBRIGHT: No, not yet, but there was a Prince Regent, Prince Paul. Alexander was assassinated in Marseille.

Date: March 10, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. Here we are on a beautiful Monday morning in pre-spring, on March 10th.

BONBRIGHT: The trip down to Belgrade was uneventful. I must say the countryside looked very burned out and dull, very dirty and dusty, no water to speak of standing anywhere. It was a rather grim countryside at that time of year.

When we got to Belgrade, the city itself had a rather forbidding look to it. The most impressive thing about it, of course, is its location at the confluence of the Sava and Danube Rivers. Somewhere somebody had told me that the best hotel in town was one called the Serbski Kral, or Royal Serb. So we headed for that, and I signed for a room. When we went upstairs to our room, we walked into a place which was about as dirty as I've ever seen anywhere. There must have been a quarter-inch of dust on every bit of furniture, all over the place. It was impossible. I knocked the dust off one straight-back chair, asked Sybil to sit quietly on it and not to move until I came back. Then I went out

and finally got through by telephone to Bob Joyce, who was the only officer of the legation in town. He gave me the name of another hotel to try. This we did, and this wasn't much better, but it did us for the short time that we had to have such quarters.

The minister at that time was Mr. Arthur Bliss Lane. He had been, I think, the youngest man in the Foreign Service to be made chief of mission somewhere in Central America, I think, so he was still young and bright and active. I might say now, though, while I'm on the subject, he was an extraordinary man to work for. He was quite erratic, had a violent temper, and would go into fits of despondency and annoyance. Sometimes he'd go for two or three days without speaking to anybody. He also had his time as a pretty heavy drinker, which didn't help. Anyway, he and his wife Cornelia, a very nice woman, were then taking a brief holiday in Bled, a lovely resort place in Croatia, up high enough to be cooler and lots of greenery.

Q: Aren't there lakes or waterfalls there?

BONBRIGHT: There's a lovely lake there.

Q: Wasn't that Tito's favorite redoute?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know. If so, I think he chose pretty well, but I don't know that there were all that many choices.

Anyway, the minister suggested that we drive up to Bled to spend a few days and get acquainted and get a little rest from our trip, which was nice of him, and we accepted with alacrity. So we had four or five days up there looking at this beautiful lake, and playing a game of golf with the minister and a couple of Americans who were staying there briefly.

Going back to Belgrade, the legation staff was pretty small. Bob Joyce, the second secretary, was shortly to leave. I was to take his place. Another second secretary, Homer Byington, was already on leave, and he only came back to pack up and go off on another assignment. So shortly after I got there, I was the only diplomatic secretary in the legation. There was a consul named Macatee, and also my friend from Brussels, Carl Rankin had come down after we did to become commercial attaché of the legation.

Finally, we were able to obtain a house in the suburb of Dedinje. It was about a mile or so out of the main part of the city up on a hill. Macatee had a house there and so did Rankin. It was up near the royal palace and a nice part of the town to live. The house that we rented had belonged to an American who had gone home on leave and, of course, never came back.

Q: Because of the war?

BONBRIGHT: Because of the war, yes. It was not a thing of beauty, but it was well-built and a comfortable place to live, and we felt lucky to have it.

Q: How much in the atmosphere was there that war was inevitably descending?

BONBRIGHT: It was pretty evident all the time. All winter the pressures kept mounting. The atmosphere was very bad. The government of the Prince Regent was leaning more and more towards the Axis, despite all our efforts and the efforts of the British legation.

Q: Had Italy invaded Albania, and they hadn't attacked Greece? Wasn't that about that time?

BONBRIGHT: I think so, but you know, I draw a blank there. Things came to a head in March, I think, on the 25th. To our dismay, they signed the Axis Pact. The reaction, however, rather surprised us, it was so strong, and two days later a revolt took place under the leadership of an Air Force General Simovich, who threw out the previous government and canceled the adherence to the Axis Pact. In all my life I don't think I've ever seen such a spontaneous roaring reaction to any event. The people poured into Belgrade from the towns all around it. Everybody in town was out on the street. I've never seen such jubilation. This was obviously very deeply felt. Unhappily for them, it was the death warrant for them, and Hitler made it perfectly clear that he wasn't going to accept this.

Q: It was, in a way, an intense expression of nationalism, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so. These were very active days for us, and we were doing our best to keep in touch with the government and give them such moral support as we could. But in the end, April 5th, I think it was, the British legation informed us that the German attack was expected on the next day. This information came, I think, from intercepts made of military messages.

Q: And that would have been launched from Austria, wouldn't it?

BONBRIGHT: And Hungary, too. But actually, the troops came in the other way around the corner. The British, of course, packed up in a hurry and took off for the coast. Cy Sulzberger, who was The New York Times man for the Balkans and made his headquarters in Belgrade, was there at that time, and he left for Greece. Many others got out as quickly as they could, but time was pretty short. Our own plans for dispersal had been made to be used in case of need. Mr. Lane had decided on his own to stay in the city. He asked Rankin and me to stay there with him. Macatee, as consul, was to follow the government if they left the city, and the military attaché, Colonel Louis Fortier, was to follow the general's staff wherever they might be.

Q: The British went to the coast because they could be evacuated by naval ships?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, a destroyer picked them up down there somewhere. I don't think they were able to stop in Greece; I think they went on to Egypt. If they got to Greece, it was for

a very brief time. Yes, the Germans must have been down already towards Greece and Crete.

The next morning the British news proved to be correct. Around 7:00 o'clock the first waves of German bombers came up and down the Danube and flew over the city. There was practically no defense. There was a little anti-aircraft firing for a while, a handful of fighter planes went up and got into some dog fights, but they were put out of action in no time at all. I can't say it was really any defense. Of course, as soon as any air defense was dissipated, anti-aircraft was inconsequential. There was nothing to prevent the German planes from flying as low as they pleased. The whole city was a sitting duck. A day or two before the invasion, the government, I think, had declared that Belgrade and Ljubljana and Zagreb as open cities in hopes that they would not be bombed. This was a gesture which many Germans ignored. The only real meaning it had was in connection with Belgrade. There was never any danger of either Zagreb nor Ljubljana being bombed. The Croatian Ustashi movement was already going strong, and they, of course, were far from being a danger to the Germans.

Q: Ardent collaborators.

BONBRIGHT: There was a heavy bombardment in the morning and another one around 11:00 that same morning and a third one around 4:00 that afternoon, and then one more the following morning, and that was it. It was plenty.

Q: It was indiscriminate, or were they aiming at certain...

BONBRIGHT: No, I don't think so. The height that they had come down to, most of the bombing was in the residential and business sections. There were no possible military targets there. A few large bomb shelters had been dug, and some of these were hit. Of course, many, many people were sheltered. The whole city was on fire practically, and there was a very strong wind blowing, which looked as though the fire would do even more damage than the bombs. Oddly enough, the fires didn't spread all that much after the first day or so.

Q: Are you talking of hundreds killed or thousands?

BONBRIGHT: Everybody was guessing. The guesses ranged from 3,000 to 20,000; we thought that the first one was too low and the second one was too high. The German legation themselves, I think, estimated about 7,000, which may have been about right. They ought to know.

Anyway, as far as the first attack, we were all pretty well confined to our homes. When things eased off momentarily, we all headed for town to the minister's residence, where we found him and Mrs. Lane safe, but it had been a close call. They lived in a row of townhouses, and the house on one side of them had been hit, and the explosion pulled the wall out of part of the minister's house. It was still habitable, but not really in very good

shape. It was decided then that that was a poor place for them to be, and they went out to Dedinje and took up residence in the Rankin's house. Some other staff went to the Macatees' house, and my wife and I took in a mixed bag of members of the Turkish legation, Ray Brock, Cy Sulzberger's assistant for the Times, and a couple of others. It was a good time to move, because the morning after that, in that one attack, the house on the other side of the minister's residence was hit, pulling out that wall. So he would have been in a bad way. It looked as though they were aiming for him, we thought.

Q: This was April of '41?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It was on Easter Sunday, April 6th.

Q: This was eight months before Pearl Harbor.

BONBRIGHT: After we got the minister started packing up and out, I drove down to the middle of the city to have a look at the damage, and it was very, very considerable--tangled wires, poles in the streets, a lot of fire, a lot of broken glass. I was luckily able to help a few people move away from the center out further to the outskirts of the city. I also wanted to see what was going on in the foreign office, to see if there was anything there we could do. I ran there into Stoyan Gavrilovich, who had been a good friend of ours, and he was the top sort of political career man and well-liked. But the place had gone crazy. Nobody was in charge; everybody was going his own way as best he could.

Q: When General Simovich deposed Prince Paul, did he leave the country or was he jailed?

BONBRIGHT: I think he got out, but I don't remember where he went. He may have been given shelter by the Germans.

Q: When did infantry appear or Army?

BONBRIGHT: About a week, I think. Oddly enough, they had expected the drive to come down over the Hungarian plain in the northern part of the country, but the actual breakthrough was south and east of Belgrade. Troops came in from Bulgaria. This had been presumably a strong part of the Serbian defense, but it didn't prove so. As I say, the military were badly disorganized and so were the civilians. For example, Francis Smith, the local representative of Standard Oil Company, they had enormous reserves of gasoline and oil in the north of Belgrade, which he had immediately released to the government right after the revolt, and they never took advantage of it. They never touched the stuff. It's still there. The Germans just took it over on a platter. So they weren't very well organized.

I had gotten to Dr. Gavrilovich, and I was happy to give him a ride. I didn't tell anyone this at the time, but he did not ask to be taken to his home where his wife and children were. I took him to the home of his girlfriend. We got her out of her house, and she had

some family out on the outskirts somewhere. I took her out there and we dropped her off. As a result of this--I can think of no other reason--long after, I received a commendation for aiding the government, obviously written by my friend Gavrilovich.

Everything pretty well stopped of a normal time and for a few days there we spent most of our time scrounging around for food and water. Electricity, of course, was out. We all had put in our houses a limited supply of dried beans and rice, those sort of staples, and luckily there was a roadside spring which was only a couple of miles from our house. There we filled up these big five-gallon demi-jugs of good water and filled all our tubs and anything that would hold water for the houses. So that helped. For greenery and vegetables, of course, we had nothing, no meat, nothing. So for quite a while, we lived on these dried beans and rice and a salad made of dandelion greens, which were all over our garden by the thousands. They were a welcome addition to the diet, but I've never looked at one since with any desire to taste it. They're not my favorite.

Q: At this time were roads south and west clogged with people fleeing in anticipation of the Germans, or were they just staying there?

BONBRIGHT: They were out in the country. They didn't have much warning. There was no place for them to go. At the end, when the troops got closer, of course, people from towns in the way, there was some influx of refugees, but I don't think it was anything like what it was in France.

The Germans did a little harassing. They never stopped trying to take our automobiles away from us, even though we had the American flag and had papers attesting to the source. But by screaming loudly and demanding to see a superior officer and constant protests to the German minister in the town, they finally let us alone pretty much.

Eventually--it wasn't too damn long either--it was about a month we were there like that, then the Army disintegrated in the field, so Colonel Fortier came back after only a couple of days from the staff. The government, they got down to the coast and some of them, including my friend Gavrilovich, were evacuated by the British destroyer. So Fortier came back, and there we were. Not much to do. I used to go every day to the meeting of these colleagues, where there was a lot of talk and absolutely nothing accomplished. Finally, the Germans got sick of having us around.

Q: As they had in Brussels.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. They wanted us to get out. This was quite understandable, I think. I should say here that I've wondered many times since what would have happened if General Simovich had not led a revolt that overthrew the Axis Pact. In the long-run, of course, he would have lost the war, just as other countries of that area did. But physically, they would probably not have taken the beating that they took from the German Air Force. From our point of view, there is one very clear and definite advantage that came out of it; the Yugoslav uprising upset the German time table. They launched their

invasion of Russia, I think, about June 11, June 21, something in that area, and we always thought that they had planned to start it sooner. This diversion created delays for them, not only the troops that were sent in to Yugoslavia, but when they came in, they had to be taken out again and got into the pipelines, so to speak. That following winter, that delay may have been an important gain for the Russian defense.

Q: It took a while for Tito to emerge.

BONBRIGHT: Quite a bit longer. At first we weren't for Tito at all. The British were much more for him, in fact. We opposed it for some time, I think.

Q: Did Colonel Fortier join Mikhailovic?

BONBRIGHT: He finally came home when the rest of them all came out, I think. But thereafter, I know I used to see his name in the paper. Whenever a Yugoslav military man came to Washington, he was always appointed an aide for his attractive officer.

Q: That raises a question. Maybe it's a bit premature. But nowadays, military attachés go to something like a Foreign Service school to learn something about the country and have some language training, and it's pretty intensive, but between the wars, I always understood in general, or even after World War II, that people would scratch their head and say, "What are we going to do with Major Brown? Let's make him an attaché," and that a lot of them were pretty inept characters. What was your impression in your career of military attachés?

BONBRIGHT: My impression was better than that. I worked with some good ones, and, of course, I've been exposed to Letitia. Her father was military attaché at the Hague, you know, and in the Philippines in the Thirties when he was killed. He and Eisenhower were both advisors to General MacArthur.

Q: But your experience was rather favorable?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Of course, like every other service, there are some poor ones, and some are better than others.

Q: Now they seem to make a major effort to select good people.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I think it's a good thing. I think most of them that I met didn't want to make a career of it all their lives; an assignment or two was welcome.

At that time there was no way for us to get out, even if the Germans wanted us to. After the lines and telephones were hooked up, we got in touch with Budapest. At that time the embassy decided to send me up there to help make arrangements to evacuate the rest of the legation. So around the twelfth of May, I think, I took off in my little Chevrolet. I took

Ray Brock, and we headed for Budapest. As luck would have it, we made it by that evening.

Q: Without anybody stopping you much?

BONBRIGHT: Not much. Of course, all the bridges were down. That was a problem. Over the Danube and Sava, everything was down. So whenever we had a river crossing--and we had quite a few--we could always find pontoon bridges operating or military ferries. But they gave us no problem. Of course, we had papers for the journey which helped us some.

When we got to Budapest, I reported to the legation and met the crowd that was working on the scheme which finally evolved to send a boat down the Danube to pick up all our people and bring them back up.

Q: Would this be a chartered boat?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. So that's how Mr. and Mrs. Lane and my wife--they had time, of course, to pack up some things, had them loaded on, too, so they weren't refugees with just a handkerchief over a stick, and they got up there, I guess, by the end of May or something like that.

Date: March 13, 1986
Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You were in Budapest, I think, when we last broke off--en route or there?

BONBRIGHT: I had got there by car with Ray Brock a few days before. The boat which we had arranged to charter to pick up our people in Belgrade took off on the night of May 13 down river and picked everyone up and started back up again on the 18th, arriving on the 23rd. Most of the others, including the Lanes, stayed in Budapest for a few days and then went off in different directions. Sybil and I settled in.

The legation was in the hands of Mr. Herbert Claiborne Pell at that time. He had previously been minister to Portugal and had only just presented his letters of credence in Budapest.

Q: The father of Senator Pell?

BONBRIGHT: He was the father of Claiborne Pell, who was still at that time a young Foreign Service officer, but he was proved correct, because as of this day he's still a United States Senator from Rhode Island and a rather senior one at that. Mr. Pell was known around the legation privately as "The Vanishing American." This was only partly due to the fact that he had a rather large shaggy head and looked a little like an American

bison, but he was a nice man, a good man, but seemed to be quite oblivious to what was going on in the world around him at that time.

Q: By "vanishing American," you meant an American of an ancient breed?

BONBRIGHT: Like the bison, yes. For instance, his daily staff meetings were quite incredible. It seemed to me, just having come from two countries overrun by war, we would sit around the table while he would give a little talk on some subject of no relevance. I remember one particularly he gave on the history of the old French coin, the Louis d'Or. In any other place or time, it might have been quite interesting, but for those of us having to sit there at that time, it made us restive.

The number two was a man named Howard Travers, known as "Purse." His main interest was in the administrative field; in fact, he was overline (sic) [as a] consular officer. I guess this is my day to say catty remarks, but he used to remind me of the old adage that "you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." We kept that very quiet, because one of our officers who had been there the time before got into quite bad trouble by being a little too open in his comments. He was serving under a Mr. Montgomery, who made his fortune out of Carnation Milk, and this officer used to go around saying, "All I have I owe to `utters.'" Of course, this was too good to not spread around, and it eventually got back to Mr. Montgomery himself, and our friend was quickly recalled and, actually, it pretty well ended his career. He never got over it. So much for liking to wisecrack too much.

The next man in the office was Bill Schott, who did the political reporting.

Q: You had stayed with them en route to Belgrade.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. We had known them before briefly, and they're a very nice couple and good friends while we were there. Incidentally, he was the only one in the group who could speak any Hungarian and, at that, not very much. All I remember, though, was that he took lessons from one of the most beautiful Hungarian girls you ever would lay your eyes on.

Q: To digress for a moment, of all the countries you'd been in before that and since, wasn't there a plethora of stunning-looking Hungarian women?

BONBRIGHT: They seemed to me to have more than their share, very, very good-looking and very attractive, plus they're all wonderful linguists, which comes from living in a country with seven or eight borders with different countries and being overrun in war for centuries. The Poles have the same gift, I think, in language; they all can speak with great ease and fluency.

Q: For the record, would you define the Balkans? Are the Balkans only Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and so forth? They don't include Hungary and Czechoslovakia, do they? What are the Balkans?

BONBRIGHT: In my thoughts and the way the geographical divisions in the State Department went, we considered Hungary as part of it. Czechoslovakia was sort of a borderline case. Albania, of course, but not Greece. Greece was separate.

Q: Romania would be Balkan.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Definitely.

Q: It has sort of a pejorative or mocking sense, "Oh, that could only happen in the Balkans." And you really have to leave Hungary out of that, wouldn't you, because they were a cut above the other countries in discipline?

BONBRIGHT: In some ways, but they were the subject of the same terrible historical movements. I left that area very pessimistic about the future of the Balkans. They'd all done such terrible things to each other for so many centuries, and these were always just below the surface, boiling up. Whenever one of them got a chance to get even a little bit, they immediately took advantage of it with relish and kept the feuds going. That's why I thought the Hungarians were unwise to follow the Germans into Yugoslavia. I couldn't see that the Yugoslavs had anything much that the Hungarians needed or would have easily assimilated, but we rather looked at them as a pack of jackals at the time, those of us who had been in Yugoslavia.

Q: But for a population of roughly 9 or 10 million, there's an awful lot of talent in that.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, yes, there was.

Q: Musical.

BONBRIGHT: Very musical.

Q: Writers and athletes.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, they're a strange people. They have a very strange language; it bears no relationship to any other European language, except that it's somewhat like Finnish.

Q: A different family of languages. They use that term "Finno-Ugrian" for that body of languages. But Budapest was a lovely city, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: It was a gorgeous city. In normal times, in peacetime, it would have been a delightful post, as all my friends who ever served there under those conditions told me, but this time it was not at all agreeable.

Q: Did you like Hungarian food and wine, or is the food a bit heavy?

BONBRIGHT: I thought it was pretty good. It was better than the Serb food. We drank a good deal of a kind of champagne which they made there, which was quite good, and they had some sweet wines that we used to taste. But there were some, like Slivovitz, which was really more of a Yugoslav drink made of plums, sort of a plum brandy, and Baracs, which was Hungarian, made of apricots. After Belgrade, I couldn't look that stuff in the face, still can't and don't try.

Bill Schott was doing the political work. The only other career man was a vice consul who was burdened with the name of Outerbridge Horsey, which I thought was a very dirty trick by his parents. He was quite a popular young man. By dint of hard work, he persevered and overcame this great handicap and ended up as ambassador to Czechoslovakia and had a good career.

As in most legations or embassies, there are always lots of local people who were hired in various jobs and some of them are practically indispensable. In Belgrade, the man most useful to the legation was a man named Stolypin, who was quite Russian, related, I think, to a former Russian prime minister. He was our interpreter there, and without him, a lot of things just couldn't happen. In Budapest, the same place of importance was occupied by a man named Juhasz, who did everything for all our contacts, a very nice man, very good.

Q: Hungary at that time was under the Regent Admiral Horthy.

BONBRIGHT: Admiral Horthy, yes.

Q: Was he a musical comedy figure or a fairly substantial person?

BONBRIGHT: No, he was very substantial, very substantial, had a good reputation.

Q: He tried to fend off the Germans, didn't he, as long as he could?

BONBRIGHT: He held them off just as well as he could. Of course, he must have gone back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire days, but in Hungary in its present quarters, the admiral would have been confined to Lake Balaton and thereabouts. He was a fine man and revered, and helped keep things together. Of course, they finally did have to join the Axis. They were under heavy pressure all the time.

After Hungary joined the Axis, the British and the Belgians, among others, had to pull out, of course, and we were asked to look after their interests there. That turned out to be my job. It had been decided before that while most officers get both diplomatic and consular commissions in a post, because it permits them to be shifted back and forth in jobs wherever they should be most useful, the idea behind this was that no one knew how long it would be before relations with Hungary would be broken as they had been with the other countries, but there was always a chance, even if diplomatic relations were severed, that a small office of one consul or something could be left to take care of certain

interests. This was an unlikely scenario at best, and it turned out, of course, that it never happened, which was just as well, in my opinion. I had a desire to be home, not there.

Q: Were you authorized to expend US funds on behalf of British citizens and then bill the British Government back home? How did that work?

BONBRIGHT: There weren't any British citizens left hanging around. We kept a set of books on expenses that we were put to on their behalf. Both the Belgians and the British afterwards wanted somebody to stay in their legation minister's residence, and that being part of my job, Sybil and I moved into the residence of the Belgian legation and lived there for a while. It was a rather unhappy experience, and we were ultimately ousted. There was an old Hungarian woman there. She had Belgian connections, I think, through marriage or something. She didn't live in it, but she stayed there, and all our time she was busy buying and packaging a great deal of food and other things, which were sent off in cars.

Q: To where?

BONBRIGHT: This was ostensibly to charities, but I got the very firm impression after a while that she was dealing with the black market. Anyway, I couldn't prove anything, but she felt me breathing down the back of her neck and complained to the Belgian minister, who was then living in the United States, and without asking for or receiving any report from me about it, he asked that we leave, which I was happy to do. The lady in question, I'm sure, was delighted to see us go and went on with whatever she'd been doing before. I could care less.

Q: Amassing slightly less money than the Marcoses.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, quite a bit less. We then moved into the British legation and lived there very happily and comfortably until the end of our time there. It may sound a little grand for a junior officer to be living in the house of these ministers, but it was far less grand than it sounds. In both of the houses, everything had been put away and packed. In the Belgian legation, we took the covers off a couple of chairs in the living room and were able to use it, and we slept in the servants' quarters upstairs. It was comfortable, but it was not anything of great luxury. And the same way with the British; we didn't jump into the minister's bed or use their private things. We just opened up where we could sit and be comfortable. I think we took all our meals out, as I remember. I don't think we even cooked there; we didn't have any servants.

Q: This tour lasted until Pearl Harbor?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Then everybody had to leave. Did you ever meet that legendary Swedish gentleman Raoul Wallenberg, or was he there at that time?

BONBRIGHT: No, I never met him.

Q: Was he there then?

BONBRIGHT: I forget when he disappeared.

Q: After the war.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, it was after.

Q: He worked in the Swedish Embassy.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. No, I never ran into him. It's a curious case, isn't it?

Q: It probably always will remain a mystery.

BONBRIGHT: I would think so.

The only time that we got away from Budapest that summer at all, we were given four or five days' leave to take a trip to the Hortobagy, part of the Great Plain of Hungary famous for its goose-shooting. I was very fond of shooting in my younger days, ducks and geese, quail, whatever. We stayed at a delightful hunting lodge there which had been a favorite place of the Prince of Wales, and I could see why. The actual shooting didn't amount to anything, which didn't bother me too much, but we would set off when it was still very dark in the morning in a horse-drawn cart with piles of straw in it to make us a little more comfortable, and we drove for several miles in the dark with our guide walking beside the carriage. As far as we could see, there were no landmarks of any kind. We weren't on a road. I could see no change in the contours of the plains. But after a certain time, he stopped in the pitch dark, got out a shovel and dug a pit, put in some straw, and there we were. That was our blind. He drove off somewhere. Then just as the light began to come, these great wavy lines of geese started to rise up out of the plains, the sun behind them, honking, going off in all directions. Nothing came near us, but it was an absolutely glorious sight.

The evening flight we moved, and this time, of course, we could see where we were going. We drove up to a fairly largish pond--there weren't too many of them around--and to my amazement, the guide went up to it, and less than a foot at the edge of the water he again took out a shovel and dug straight down three or four feet, and set us up again. There was the purest clay in the earth.

Q: The water wasn't seeping through?

BONBRIGHT: Not a drop came through, and we were that far from it. I've never seen anything like it. There again, the flocks, some of them, came pretty close to us, came over

our heads as the sun went down. It got pretty dark. I let fly a couple of times just to let them know we were there, but we never hit anything. I'm just as glad. If we'd hit something in the dark, I don't see how we'd have ever found it. We had no retrievers or anything. So that was our goose hunting experience, very enjoyable. I liked it.

The other thing that I got most out of in Hungary was the music. I forgot to mention that when we were in Washington in the late Thirties, I had taken up at the tender age of 35 the piano, which I had been forced to study a little when I was young, hated it and was no good. Rather than face my disagreeable looks, my mother finally gave up. But it suddenly hit me again, and I liked it very much and took lessons when I had a chance at night and all when we were in Washington. I didn't have any in Belgium; I gave it up. But the wife of our coat clerk in Belgrade who was a good pianist, gave me some lessons while I was there. Here in Budapest, we met an engineer and his wife Agi Yambor, who gave glorious concerts, and she used to come and play for us in the legation. She gave me lessons, too--a very nice woman. Her husband died at that time, and they were both Jewish and obviously very much worried.

Q: Rightly so.

BONBRIGHT: Rightly so. We were able to get visas for her and she got out, finally, through Sweden, and got over to the States, where we saw her some after we got back. She had a miserable time. She ended up marrying that movie actor Claude Rains, who beat the hell out of her and mistreated her just shamefully, a terrible thing.

Q: Claude Rains usually took roles in films in which he was a menacing, sinister fellow.

BONBRIGHT: He was. She finally disappeared from our lives, and I don't know what happened to her.

Q: This is Agi Yambor?

BONBRIGHT: Agi Yambor. The rest of that fall slipped along with nothing special or of interest to report until Pearl Harbor, which we heard about on the radio. We knew things had been tense for us, but this really came as quite a surprise to us. We, of course, declared war right away, and the pressure was immediately put on the Hungarians. As members of the Axis, they were required to declare war on us, too. They clearly didn't want to do it; it didn't serve their interests in any way. It was all political pressure. I think they had to. As a result of their ambivalent feelings, they went out of their way to be as nice as they could. Our internment was a joke; we were not restrained or confined in any way. The only thing, we were discreetly asked not to appear too much in public, to avoid being seen at the opera, things like that. Since Sybil and I didn't care for the opera, it was no hardship at all. This could have gone along indefinitely, I guess, but the Germans got fed up with it. They didn't like to see that we were free to move around and out loose, so they put great pressure on the Hungarians to turn us over to them for "safe keeping." The thought of being lugged off to Germany wasn't too agreeable to us. Well, it was

disagreeable to the Hungarians, too, because they felt, quite rightly, that we were their prisoners, not the Germans'. They had declared war, and they regarded it as undignified and a slur on their sovereignty if they turned us over to them, but they wanted to get rid of us, to get rid of the problem. So the deal was finally made, and it eventually involved a lot of people in Romania and Bulgaria as well, that we would all be shipped out to Portugal in a sealed train, and there we would not be allowed to work or to take any other assignments, we had to sit there and wait until the exchange with the Axis diplomats in the United States and South America would all gather together and went on board a ship. The Swedish liner GRIPSHOLM was used for this. This was going to take time, so we had quite a wait.

Q: In Lisbon?

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Which must have been filling up with refugees and emigres.

BONBRIGHT: It was lousy with them. The so-called sealed train--I always thought it a great honor to have been in a sealed train.

Q: Does that mean the windows were painted black?

BONBRIGHT: No, we could look out. I think it was about the 22nd of January of 1942, after first starting with our Romanian and Bulgarian people, arrived in Budapest, and we were put aboard. It was really a joy ride, much more like a deluxe ride on the Orient Express in the old days. There were two or three Hungarian protocol officers on board who were supposed to see that we didn't escape, but who spent their time trying to think of things that might please us, so that we were spoiled brats if there ever were any. The only restriction was that we were not allowed to get off the train at any stops, even to stretch our legs on the station platform.

Q: What route did this train take?

BONBRIGHT: We took off to the southwest and went through Ljubljana and Slovenia, then to Trieste, across northern Italy to the French Riviera and Marseille. There an important event occurred. Mrs. Pell had a dog that had been suffering from constipation, and she was in great agony over this and upset that she couldn't take the dog out and walk it. Well, the Hungarian protocol officer agreed to do the honors for this, and on the Marseille platform, in full view of everybody, the dog's ailment was cured. Everybody cheered and clapped.

From there we went on down to the Spanish border north of Barcelona. There we had to get off in the middle of the night and change trains. In fact, the Soviet Union Spanish railroad tracks were made wider than in the rest of Europe, which causes some inconvenience to peacetime, but it's a useful dodge in wartime to keep the enemy from

moving quite so fast over your border. Anyway, we got moved into the other yard and took off. We stopped the next day in Madrid briefly, where people from our embassy came on to greet us and see if everything was all right. Then we went another night and arrived in Lisbon, a sight to see. As I remember, the trip took about three days.

We were all taken out to Estoril.

Q: I thought you had to have a title to be in Estoril.

BONBRIGHT: A hardship post. We were placed in a large hotel. I think it was called the Palacio, I don't remember, where we all began to get a little on each other's nerves. There was a Dutch couple there who Sybil and I had known in Belgium, and they kindly invited us to spend a couple of weeks with them in Cintra at a lovely resort just north of Lisbon on the other side of the mountains. Cintra is noted for its beauty and glorious trees and flowers and bushes of all kinds growing in profusion in the summertime, when all the rest of the country is baked hard. What is nice in the summer is not necessarily so in the winter, and that February I think it rained--and not just trickled, it poured every day that we were there, so the dampness got into you pretty badly.

After that, while it was a pleasant visit we had, then we went back to the hotel, but we were anxious to get out of it. There was no sign of the boat coming in or anything, so we looked around and were finally lucky enough to find and lease a little fisherman's cottage on the shore, on the rocks in Cascais, just beyond Estoril. This had been bought by a Portuguese man, very simply made up with enough beds and chairs to be able to be comfortable, and a kitchen. We moved in there and had a really very pleasant time in it. Friends would come out and visit us there. Sybil went out on her painting, did a lot of it, and there was a piano in the house. I played a little golf. It sounded idyllic. It also got on our nerves pretty much. Frankly, we all felt we were slackards. The world was on fire, and everybody else was working, and here we were just sitting, not that there was anything we could do about it; it was just part of the deal. On the side we got debriefed by people in the embassy, but by that time there wasn't anything much in the debriefing to produce anything of any use to them.

Q: You would listen to the BBC?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, indeed. Occasionally we'd go up in the evening back to Estoril to the casino for dancing and a little gambling. Of course, the place was crawling with spies of all nationalities and refugees, both Jewish and non-Jewish, but the Jewish were in the most trouble and most anxious to get away, because this was really the hot spot in Europe; it was open for anyone with any hope of getting out.

We finally got the word that the boat was coming, and it did. I'll look up the date for you. It arrived and unloaded an unsavory bunch of German diplomats. As soon as things were cleared away, we were all put aboard.

Q: Was that the DROTTNINGHOLM?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It was a comfortable boat. Actually, there weren't enough of us to fill it, so they added a fair number of refugees. It's not very nice. I was unfavorably impressed by the way a lot of the refugees behaved. While in Lisbon, they were wailing and wringing their hands, going around with long faces. As soon as they got on the boat outside the three-mile limit, a lot of them became arrogant, dissatisfied, rude, and demanding of the officers, a complete turnaround. Outrageous.

Q: Were some of these well-to-do people?

BONBRIGHT: Not particularly. But it was eye-opening. One of our games in the evening aboard ship, which, of course, had a huge red cross painting on its side, lined with bulbs so that we were all lighted up at night like a Christmas tree, we used to go up in the evening after dinner and peer over the side and make sure that none of the bulbs had burned out. We had a good trip across, nobody bothered us, and we never sighted any other ships or submarines or anything. It was all very uneventful.

Q: You didn't have to rescue any torpedoed ships?

BONBRIGHT: No, not a thing. We arrived in New York on the second of June of 1942.

Q: Pearl Harbor had occurred on December 7, 1941, and it took all that time.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Date: March 15, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You were on the DROTTNINGHOLM. You were going to mention something about assignments which followed.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I should have mentioned this in its proper place. Two or three days after Pearl Harbor, the legation received a telegram from the Department, reassigning me as political officer in Istanbul. In normal times, I would have found this a very interesting assignment, but I had been sort of pushed around for the last two or three years, and I wasn't too anxious to go. I, of course, would have gone and applied for visas to go through Bulgaria and/or Romania on the way. As it turned out, luckily for me, they refused to let me go through, since they'd also declared war on us, as had the Hungarians. So nothing ever came of that assignment. This has nothing to do with the assignment to Constantinople, but it shows the way my mind hops off in crazy directions. The mention of the name reminds me of a story I heard of there when I was passing through it during my trip around the world in 1925. It seems that after the First World War, Admiral Mark Bristol was named High Commissioner to Turkey, and I think he was there for some time, at least a couple of years, until the peace terms were completed, I think. Mrs. Bristol was

there with him, and during their stay she made quite a name for herself doing good deeds, charitable and otherwise, so that when he was transferred away, the Turkish governor of the day wished to do something for Mrs. Bristol to show their appreciation for what she'd done. It was a nice thought, but they came up with a rather inappropriate answer, we thought. They bestowed upon her the Order of Chastity Third Class, a left-handed compliment if I ever heard one.

Q: Is that a translation of the Turkish?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know. That's the way it was told to me. I wouldn't have thought that the Turks would ever have such an order.

Q: Turkey remained neutral during World War II, so you would have been in a hotbed of intrigue.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, it would have been another listening point at the other end of the Axis. But as I say, I just wasn't particularly in the mood for it and was glad that it didn't work out, although I'm sure if I had gone, I would have found it interesting and challenging.

Q: Who was the ambassador? Was it Laurence Steinhardt?

BONBRIGHT: I can't remember for the life of me. I suppose by then the embassy was at Ankara, so I think there was a consul general still in Istanbul, at Constantinople, as they called it then. So I would have been in the consulate.

To get back to the boat ride, we landed in New York on a date which I'll have to give you later. I think it was the end of May 1942. There was quite a crowd at the dock, including my mother and my two sisters, who had come down from Rochester to meet us. It was a rather sad reunion, since it was our first since Father had died, but it was good to see them again. Although I'd had nothing but leave of absence, really, for some months now, the Department finally gave us a week or ten days more so that we could all visit with our families. So I went up to Rochester and stayed with my mother for a week, then went back to Washington to go to work.

I had no idea when I got there what I was going to do, and I don't know that anybody had given it much thought. As it turned out, the man who was on the French desk, an old friend, Samuel Reber, had been sent down to Martinique to negotiate with Admiral Robert about the fate of a French battleship, the JEAN BART, which was in France. It was thought that this would take a very short time, and so they stuck me in Sam's job to hold it while he was away. Like so many departmental assignments, the temporary sometimes becomes permanent and vice versa, and I remained in it for the four years that I was there. Admiral Robert proved to be rather difficult to deal with.

Q: That's what I remember.

BONBRIGHT: It took Sam quite a long time. I don't remember the exact details that were worked out, but it was satisfactory enough.

Q: The ship wasn't sunk or anything?

BONBRIGHT: No, not sunk, but they may have done something to the guns.

Q: Spiked them or something.

BONBRIGHT: So when Sam came back, they had other things that they wanted him to do, so he just went on elsewhere.

Q: He later, I believe, was a political advisor to John McCloy when he was High Commissioner in Germany.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think he was. I'm not sure he didn't serve briefly in Algeria. He also had the distinction of being one of our white ministers to Algeria.

Q: Oh, really?

BONBRIGHT: They used to rotate them, you know. They'd send a white man and then send a black man, then a white man. I imagine that nowadays they're all black.

I might just insert in here before I talk more about the Department of a couple of family things that happened during this period. Sybil's father died on the 15th of March.

Q: Suddenly, or had he been ill?

BONBRIGHT: In Ottawa, where he had lived. He had a very sad ending. He was a very bright man. I was very fond of him. But after his wife died in 1934, I think, he threw himself more than ever into his job as Minister of Finance. He was wearing himself out. I think it was the spring of '35, I leased a bit of fishing on the Grand Cascapedia for a week, and Sybil and I took him up there with us to give him a bit of rest. Unhappily, it was too late, on the second morning that we were there, he had a massive stroke, from which he really never, ever recovered. He was ultimately able to get around some with a cane and some of his speech returned, but neither anything like the normal. So I think it was rather a relief for him. He was a lonely, sick man.

My mother only lived another year, too. She came down to Washington for Christmas of '43 to spend with me and with my younger sister Barbara and her husband. He had joined the Navy during the war, although a little old for it and had bad eyes, but he had a desk job there and was doing his best. We had a nice visit, but that was the last time I ever saw Mother alive in March of '43. She was operated on for cancer and never came out of it.

Q: Had she been suffering a long time, or was it a sudden discovery?

BONBRIGHT: She'd been troubled for some time. Actually, I didn't know anything about it. She telephoned me the night before the operation and said she was going to have it.

Q: In Rochester?

BONBRIGHT: In Rochester. I could tell from her voice that she was pretty sure she was in for it. I got there the next morning, but I never was able to speak to her again; she was unconscious and died that morning.

I might add a word about the river at this point before I get back into the State Department.

Q: The Cascapedia?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. In the spring of '43, I got a chance to buy a camp which had belonged and was built by an old fellow from Saginaw, Michigan, named William B. Michon, built in 1887-88, around there. It was a nice spot on the lower stretch of the river where fishing was not of the best, but I was happy to get the opportunity. So I bought it and I bought also at the same time a camp that my uncle had had, consequently owned by Thomas Lamont. I stripped the latter of its pools and added them to the Michon beat, and then was able, luckily, to sell the camp minus any fishing to a gentleman from Montreal, who enjoyed it chiefly as a place to take his blonde friends. Fishing was strictly secondary.

Q: Were these sort of rambling log...

BONBRIGHT: They were shingled.

Q: One floor?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, everything one floor, several cottages. For instance, the one that I lived in, one cottage had a kitchen, dining room, two double bedrooms, a couple of baths. The next big one was a living, fireplace, and two single rooms and a bath. Then we built for ourselves a small cottage with just a bathroom and bedroom. This gave me great joy. For 32 years I had this camp, and I think from that day in '33-'34, I never missed a year. Some years I only got there for a few days, come years for as much as two or three weeks. Of course, after I retired, I spent whole summers there from late May and stayed until the middle of October until blown out by the cold winds.

Q: Was it far enough north so that even on summer evenings you sometimes has a fire?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, often.

Q: In August?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes. The evenings were usually pretty and always had a nip.

Q: Were there dirt roads, access roads?

BONBRIGHT: I was only about a mile away from the railroad station, my camp. Our little driveway up on the hill was perched up on this hill looking out over the valley, up and down it. It was a lovely spot.

Q: There was no central heating, so one didn't go in winter?

BONBRIGHT: No.

Q: When was it penetrable--by about April or May?

BONBRIGHT: No, we went around the 20th of May. As I say, in the middle of October we were driven out. I'd sit at my desk and I'd feel the wind blowing through the shingles on my back, and I'd know it was time to go home.

Q: What was the railroad?

BONBRIGHT: It went out to the town of Gaspe. The other end of it was the junction at Matapedia, Quebec, across the river.

Q: Was it one train a day?

BONBRIGHT: No. This was the regular Canadian National Route. They ran what was known as the Ocean Limited, Montreal to Halifax, and we would get off at Matapedia when we were motoring and would take this little train up the Cascapedia about 65 miles out. That was one of the bonds that held Canada together, that railroad. It was part of the deal in the time of confederation. Otherwise, the Canadian Pacific route went through the state of Maine; they didn't have a railroad that was only on Canadian territory. So they built this to cement the maritime provinces to the rest of the country.

Q: Which was very important, considering separatism.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I'll put that all back on to Canada, I guess. I don't know.

Q: I'd just keep it rolling chrono-wise. Reber was in Fort de France, and you were "French-desking it."

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Of course, the big problem at that time with the French and a long time after was our relations with de Gaulle and his Free French. We got off on a very bad start. This was before my time; I think it was around Christmas of '41. Without consulting

us, General de Gaulle ordered an admiral, who was loyal to him, to take the two French islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, two ratty little places off the coast of Newfoundland, of no importance except they'd been a thorn in our sides all through the Prohibition era, a haven for jolly boating. This infuriated FDR and Mr. Hull, on reflection a little bit more than it should have, but it did, and caused Mr. Hull, I think, to refer to the takeover as "by a group of so-called Free French." That, really, we never recovered from.

Q: That slur.

BONBRIGHT: I'm not sure that it was meant with quite the sense that it sounds. The name "Free French" hadn't been in use all that long. I think he was using it more as a descriptive, and not in the sense as "so-called but not really Free." But who knows?

Q: Yes.

BONBRIGHT: He may not have. But this upset things. We were upset fundamentally, I think, because we still had maintained relations with the French Government in unoccupied France, in Vichy, and we didn't want that upset. Of course, it was a very unpopular policy at home. All the papers practically were all for de Gaulle, and people like Walter Lippmann went around basting the President and the Department for keeping on this connection. But we thought it was important to have people still in unoccupied France and keep an eye on Petain and try to keep him from going overboard, and also as a sign that those French were loyal and hopeful, and at no time did it ever allow to appear that we approved or loved them, the Vichy government.

Q: Keeping channels open.

BONBRIGHT: Keeping channels open, I think very valid. Of course, that blew up when we invaded North Africa. The Vichy crowd broke diplomatic relations with us. The French fleet, too, had all scuttled, which we would have preferred to get it intact, as indeed we should have; I mean, before the fall of France. That fleet should have been ordered to sail the hell out of there. It wasn't. But it was better sunk than in the hands of the Germans.

Q: Didn't the British bombard?

BONBRIGHT: They had hit them at one time, yes.

Q: In North Africa.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Was Ambassador Murphy operating out of the Department or secretly for FDR? I mean, with his maneuverings around Europe.

BONBRIGHT: He did go through the Department. I'm not too clear about the details of the preparations for the landing. There was a special group that was formed with military and State Department people to do that. So that was separated from the normal work of the French desk. I was aware of a lot of it, the work of the vice consuls that we had in North Africa had helped make preparations for the landing, but not in detail. Murphy had carried a good deal of clout when he reported in those days. Of course, the big fight was over Admiral Darlan, whom we sort of recognized as the controller. It became enormously unpopular in our press, but it was designed to save American lives and cut down the military opposition to our landing, and which I think was pretty successful.

Q: Casualties were minimal.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Then he, of course, was assassinated shortly thereafter. Of course, the Gaullists all wanted to move right in on that, but we had brought out this General Giraud in France, who had been a prisoner of war in Germany, I think, a fine man with a good military reputation. He was dating a civilian, Ruth. Actually, I don't know who picked him. It turned out to be a pretty poor choice. He had no political savvy, he had no stomach for the end-fighting. In fact, finally he just threw in the sponge. He wasn't a viable opponent for de Gaulle; he wouldn't have lasted one round with him and didn't. Of course, we were all criticized then for not being more forthcoming with de Gaulle, for whom there was great sympathy. Everybody appreciated what he'd done. His stand at the independence and to keep on fighting and so on were all very noble and appreciated everywhere. But after things like the St. Pierre and Miquelon episode, they refused to commit themselves to having this man going to France as the French Government without the French people having a chance to express their opinions of what they wanted after the war, because while there were all sorts of rumors coming out, de Gaulle claimed that he had enormous support. It was hard to judge.

Q: You couldn't take a poll.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, you couldn't take a poll. So basically, I think our Vichy policy and our holding off on running 100% out for de Gaulle was sound. What wrecked it was the public relations job. Even when we did something for de Gaulle--and we did many things--we seemed to do it reluctantly.

Q: Or it was painted reluctantly.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Or under pressure, or it really didn't mean anything, anyway. Some of us in the lower ranks of the Department were bothered by this, and we tried to push the vine further up, but if you're going to do something, for God's sake, let's do it gracefully and try to see if we can't get a little credit for it. But that didn't work with the President and Mr. Hull.

Q: Wasn't there a factor also in there that General de Gaulle was not an unbending back-slapping type; he was a very arch-imperious person?

BONBRIGHT: Indeed he was. First, the British, you see, agreed with us privately. That was the difference. They agreed privately. In fact, Churchill used to say that, "The cross of Lorraine (which was de Gaulle's logo, so to speak) is the heaviest cross that I have to bear." But he didn't say it out loud, publicly. Everyone had heard it, I suppose de Gaulle himself, but it wasn't the public sphere. So the British got away with much more just by that attitude than we did.

Fundamentally, too, the French group that was allowed to set up business in London, they were just too damned unreliable. There was a sieve. We all found, the British, too, by bitter experience, that you couldn't pass on anything of a confidential nature to the French in London that didn't go back to Vichy and eventually to the Germans. Any military planning was out; you just couldn't do it. That's really, I think, why de Gaulle was not drawn into any of the planning for the invasion. I don't think he even knew about it until maybe the boats were already on the way. Anyway, it was last minute. They were taking no chances, and they had to, no question about it. I've often wondered, and many people have, if things might have been better after the war if we had treated de Gaulle differently. Surely, I think, in our own interests we could have done some things a little bit differently, but I honestly don't think it would have made any difference. I think he was a great man, no question about it, but he wasn't on the same wavelength with us. I mean, he got plenty of support from us once he was accepted by the French. We did all sorts of things for him, like letting French troops lead the way into Paris at the time of liberation, when they had had nothing to do with liberating whatsoever.

Q: They let General LeClerc or somebody move in with the division.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Of course, the French in the town, the underground, was not without its importance in the liberation and turnover. Then at other times de Gaulle would go right against direct orders and move his troops sometimes right in front of where we were going, things of that sort, just for political reasons. When NATO came along, he supported it all right, but then he wouldn't let his troops serve under the NATO command. Always the grandeur of France. I think this attitude, particularly during the war, was important in helping to maintain French morale after the disaster, and up to the point of getting them back on their feet after the liberation. But I think he overdid it; I think maybe he got the French to feel that they were stronger than they really were. Anyway, we had trouble with him always to the day he died.

Q: Was his French in writing and oratory superb?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, yes.

Q: An American general in English couldn't match his eloquence?

BONBRIGHT: I don't think so. He was very, very intelligent. He was something, great contradictions. Of course, he had that enormous height up above most people.

Q: Would you say one of his great accomplishments was fighting all those right-wing generals and everything and getting Algeria to be independent? I mean, realizing the handwriting on the wall.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so. He's the only one who could do it. I don't think anybody else would have got away with it. I don't know. That's a pretty messy place still, I think. I look back with some nostalgia to the days of the French and British empires, I confess. They were galling at times, and a servant of British crown colony in the old days could be personally very humiliating, they were so patronizing and arrogant, but it was a far, far better world when they were top dogs. They ran pretty tight ships.

Q: Africa, with all its multiple little countries, was pretty much a disaster area as far as not being able to manage things themselves economically.

BONBRIGHT: No. Perhaps they can work themselves out.

Some time in 1943, I think it was, we gave a form of recognition to the French Committee of National Liberation, the de Gaullist group. It agreed to certain powers that we would deal with them, but it was, of course, short of their ultimate goal, which always was that they wanted to be recognized as the future government of France; nothing else was good enough. But when this recognition took place, it was carefully worded, and we thought it was doing them a pretty big favor. Mr. Hull had a press conference after the announcement of this recognition. I give this as an example of Mr. Hull's ability to obfuscate a question.

"Mr. Secretary, when the Allies reconquer France, will the administration of the recaptured territory be turned over to the French Committee or the Allied military government?"

Mr. Hull: "You mean metropolitan France?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Hull: "If you will read these terms of recognition, you will find where those phases will be taken up and dealt with as each comes up or as they come to them, or if they should to do so earlier, they may do that."

I don't often sympathize with gentlemen of the press; I think they're spoiled brats, a lot of them. But I did feel pity for the man who was covering this press conference and how to write about that announcement.

Q: There must have been similar obfuscations.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: About some of the others in the Department that helped with the problems or didn't help.

BONBRIGHT: My real boss through all this period was H. Freeman Matthews, known as "Doc," who was head of the European office. He himself had been in Vichy, I think, and had been a French hand for some time. He also worked in South America. He was a wonderful man.

Q: He still lives in Washington, doesn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I believe so. He sits in a chair all day long and doesn't recognize anybody. But then he had a mind like a steel trap and a tenacity that a bulldog would admire. If he once got his teeth into an opponent, he never, never let go. I owe a great deal to him. He really got me started by arranging for me to go as number two in Paris at the end of my time in the Department. I remember the day he called me in and put this before me. I was greatly flattered. I was only a Class 3 officer at the time, pretty far down still. Of course, the end of the war saw an explosion in the number of people. Everybody who was already in was apt to go up pretty fast because they needed bodies in all directions. I had not particularly looked forward to being in any really big embassies, and I told this to Doc that I'd like to think about it. I could feel his cold eye on me as I left the room.

The next morning he called me in again and looked at me coldly, and said, "With regard to what you said to me yesterday, if you don't want to go to Paris, if you prefer a small post, I'm sure I can arrange to have you sent to Bulgaria."

At which I said, "Doc, I'd be pleased and honored to go to Paris." So he laughed, and we talked about it often afterwards. He was a great friend and a pillar of strength in that department, I always thought.

Others that I worked with not too long were Woody Wallner, he had been in Vichy, too, and Doug MacArthur, the general's nephew, was also a Vichy veteran, both very good officers. I always held it in Doug's favor that he leaned over backwards to ignore the relationship with his famous uncle. He wanted to do it on his own, and he did.

Q: He wasn't like Warren Delano Robbins, waving "Delano"?

BONBRIGHT: No, no, not in the least, which was pretty good. His wife was the daughter of the vice president, Senator Alben Barkley, and that didn't do him any harm either. But the thing that really rocketed him up was that after being in the Paris Embassy for a while, he was sent to SHAPE as political advisor to General Eisenhower, who got to depend on him greatly. When he came home after this tour with Eisenhower, when he first became President, Doug was slated to go to Saigon as consul or something, and Eisenhower refused to let him go, and kept him in the State Department as counselor, which is an old

slot of many years standing and has no exact place in the hierarchy, but it had always been influential. You could make anything out of it that you could. So he served in that.

Q: It isn't correct to say that as there are so-called Kremlinologists in the Department who devote much of their lives to the Soviet problem, there was not a similar corps of French specialists, were there? They kept shifting around?

BONBRIGHT: No, but there were several of them who did different tours of duty in that area. Wallner, I thought, of all the officers I ran into, knew more about France than any of them. He had the ultimate fate of being number two to Mr. Kennedy's brother-in-law Shriver, who didn't like to have people around who knew more than he did and made life pretty miserable for Woody. So I think Woody pretty much retired after that; he never got another mission, which he richly deserved.

Q: But there wasn't a "Mr. France" as Hickerson was "Mr. Canada"?

BONBRIGHT: No. We regarded Matthews as our guiding light. Of course, Murphy in a way had his own entourage. Basically he was, to me, an Irish Catholic politician.

Q: An operator?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. He got his start under Bullitt in Paris. He was a consul general in Paris at the outbreak of the war. He hadn't had anything to do with the political side before that. He knew how to cut the butter. He was very highly regarded and had a good reputation, but I wouldn't put him in the same room as Bob Matthews.

I'll talk a little about that later when I come back to my last assignment with the Department. Perhaps I can comment about the Russian boss.

Q: So you had a laugh with Freeman Matthews and accepted that assignment.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Before going to the embassy, I was assigned to the Peace Conference, which took place in Paris in the spring of 1946. I went over first for that. Mr. James Byrnes was Secretary of State at that time and head of the delegation. Those of us from the Department, career people, were scattered around in different jobs, but Matthews was the guy who pulled our strings. We all lived in the Hotel Maurice, which was comfortable but not gaudy. The food was not up to our standards at that time right after the war, as you can imagine.

My particular assignment was on a couple of the peace treaties with the Balkans, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. My boss was General Bedell Smith, who I had never met before, a very impressive officer and strong-willed, and had, unfortunately, one of the worst tempers I ever saw.

Q: That was purportedly induced by ulcers from which he suffered during his life.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he did. He did have bad ulcers. I'll describe my run-in with him later back at the Department. Here everything went all right. Everybody helped with the difficult job of negotiations. I fought a little bit with the general. He thought he could win points with these ardent communists by small gestures. He used to hand out fountain pens, things of that sort. I remember when the Czechs sent him back a case of Czech beer; he thought he had it made with these fellows. I found that naive. I guess he got over it when he went as ambassador to Moscow at that time and felt that you could maneuver these things on a personal basis, which you couldn't, nobody could.

At the end of the conference, then I moved over to the embassy. My boss there was Jefferson Caffery, who had a long and distinguished career mostly in South America, Cuba, Brazil. He was a very strange man. He worked with only a handful of people. Although I was his number two and I got on all right with him, I was never his favorite. His favorites were Douglas MacArthur, who he had worked with him, and in his whole outer office he had a man named Elim O'Shaughnessy, a Foreign Service officer.

To digress a little bit, Elim's history is amusing. He was the son of a Foreign Service officer, educated abroad, and he had acquired very British mannerisms and accent, wore his pocket handkerchief in his sleeve, like Mr. Roosevelt, smoked a long cigarette. He gave the impression of being a real striped pants-lah-de-dah, which the press would love. Actually, he had a very tough mind and a good one. He took exams for the Foreign Service and two or three times he passed the written, and every time they turned him down on the orals.

Q: Too effete or what?

BONBRIGHT: Finally, he went to somebody on the board and said, "What's the matter?" He was told very frankly that his manners and everything were too European and too un-American, and there wasn't room in the Service for all of this. This fellow suggested to him that he take the orals once more, but that before doing so, he go out in the Middle West somewhere and spend six months in any old job, sort of rubbing elbows with the great American people. So he went out to St. Louis, actually, where he got a job in a gas station, and he worked there for almost the required six months, I think, and never a peep of complaint from him. Finally, an officer from the Department who was going out west to give some exams out there stopped off. He had been instructed to stop off and see O'Shaughnessy.

Q: Was he on a leave without pay or a sabbatical, or what?

BONBRIGHT: No, he wasn't even in the Service then.

Q: Oh, I see. He hadn't been accepted yet.

BONBRIGHT: No, he hadn't been accepted. So this fellow stopped off to have a look and see if O'Shaughnessy had really tried to do as had been suggested to him. When he got back to the Department after this trip, they said to this fellow, "Now how about O'Shaughnessy? Has he changed?"

He said, "I'm sorry to have to report that O'Shaughnessy hasn't changed in the slightest, but everybody else who worked in that gas station was walking around smoking cigarettes out of a long amber cigarette holder."

Q: That's a wonderful story.

BONBRIGHT: A nice fellow. They took him, of course, and never regretted it. He was very good.

Q: Mr. Caffery also had been in Egypt, hadn't he, in Cairo?

BONBRIGHT: He went there afterwards.

Q: He could be described as an eccentric, couldn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Very much so. He was a bachelor for most of his life and married just before he came to Paris. She was a nice woman, his wife, but on the mousy side. He treated her without any consideration whatsoever. I think she had money and that helped. He was a stickler for protocol. I have seen him walk into somebody else's dining room and go up to where he thought he should have sat and see that his name card was somebody else's, take it up and tear it apart and throw it on the floor. Talk about arrogant.

He had a large supply of these little tiny pads on his desk, and he'd write these messages all day to different people. I once got a letter from a congressman or something, he had sent for me to draft a reply, and five minutes later I got a second follow-up: "Mr. Bonbright, how about that letter?" Well, hell, I hadn't had it for five minutes. I finally went in and said, "I'll do my best for you, but I really can't do it this fast." He started laughing. He'd write you three or four at a time and then just feed them into the "out" basket and his secretary would get these.

I remember he was a devout Catholic and used to go to church every morning and read all the papers at home. He got to the office at about 10:00 o'clock, and then he'd stay all through the day. He never ate lunch. He'd go home and run in his garden. But one day he came up to the office at 10:00 with Elim O'Shaughnessy, and he didn't say anything to Elim. A few minutes later after Elim got to his office, he found a note from the ambassador, saying, "Mr. O'Shaughnessy, don't you think that you are exaggerating when you get to the office as late as I do?" He wasn't a man who was greatly loved, I mean, like old Herrick, they said, who couldn't speak a word of French but who was greatly loved there. He was all business.

Q: What did the diplomatic corps think of him? Did they get along with him?

BONBRIGHT: His relations with the British were poor, I think. The British were much more sociable. Duff Cooper was there at the time and Caffery didn't care for him much. O'Shaughnessy and some of the boys used to see a lot of the British but they didn't talk about it in front of Caffery. They had to be a little careful. On important matters, his instincts were good, nothing frivolous about his approach. A strange, strange man.

Q: You've mentioned a number of people who had certain odd quirks and so forth, as all of us do, but time and again you have found career Foreign Service people, when you get right down to it, they really were extremely intelligent and able. Do you attribute that to picking the best of the best in the selection process or to training within the Department and just the learning process as you go from post to post?

BONBRIGHT: I think it was that.

Q: And serving under other good people.

BONBRIGHT: Good men pick good people, as a rule. I think that's how the better officers got ahead. God knows the Foreign Service had lots of people that are not what you would call top-notch. Others have certain qualities that are good, some that are not so good. But it's how the machinery works in contacts. When you're in a job with a bunch of people under you, you instinctively seek the ones who you think can deliver and see that those people move up. One result of that is, I'd say, a lot of people who didn't serve in the Department were at a disadvantage because they never served under the people who were in positions of influence. A lot of them didn't want to be in the Department, but I think they suffered on that account.

Q: I thought of all places, somewhat like the Army, a general will get maybe a couple of people he asks for, but the rest will just come out of the computer or what existed before, and in the Department, an ambassador might get the DCM he wants but the others are just assigned there.

BONBRIGHT: Absolutely. That happens a lot, particularly in the smaller posts. By chance, for instance, I had what I consider a good staff in Lisbon, and what I consider a good staff in Stockholm. I had nothing to do with picking any of them.

Q: I see. That makes it difficult.

BONBRIGHT: Except my counselor in Stockholm, "Livy" Merchant was in the top slot in those days, I got a letter from him saying that I could have my choice of three men, and he suggested strongly that I choose this fellow. Well, if I had really known any of them well and thought one was really much better than the other, I wouldn't have hesitated to, though contrary to his recommendation, but I didn't. In fact, the one he named was the

one that I knew most about and would have picked anyway. Otherwise, I had nothing to do with that.

Q: There's no such thing as surrounding yourself with the eight people you know best?

BONBRIGHT: Everybody tries. They try, and they're lucky if they can get one or two good ones.

I'd like to quote here from a letter which my friend Woody Wallner sent me as I was taking off for Paris.

"Dear Jamie,

This is to say Bon Voyage and to add a word on a threadbare subject, one worn thin by self-appointed Panegyrist from Transylvania, Rosario, and Nebraska. Paris is Paris, has a life and being of its own and a beauty that quite apart from what can be captured on a photographic plate, grows out of that almost autonomous life and being. It doesn't seep in all at once, but it seeps and stays quite independently of the quantity or quality, success or failure of the things one does while living in Paris."

Q: That's very nice.

BONBRIGHT: I always kept that. It was very true. I liked it.

Q: Very nice.

Date: March 20, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You were about to say something more about Elim O'Shaughnessy.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, there was one other rather nice story about him, I think. When he was through with the present assignment in Paris, he was assigned back to the State Department, and he shipped all of his belongings home ahead of him. What was unusual was that among these belongings that he shipped were 20 cases of champagne, a drink of which he was very, very fond. The high figure, however, caught the notice of the customs officials in Washington, who eventually asked him to come in and either explain why he charged rather heavy duties. He then came up with the explanation that under the present Paris law, a worker entering the United States is allowed to bring in, free of duty, the tools of his trade. This so enchanted the customs people that they let him have all the champagne and charged him nothing, but they did give him a warning not to try it again.

He and a Lieutenant Commander John Williams worked in Mr. Caffery's outer office. Williams was his sort of social secretary, and O'Shaughnessy did more substantive jobs for him, as a rule.

I have before me, however, a copy of a memorandum which was addressed to Mr. O'Shaughnessy and Lieutenant Commander Williams, April 1947, which reads as follows:

"As I was accompanied on my Alsace trip by only one secretary, one aide de camp, two Marines, and two chauffeurs, it will be necessary on the next trip to take someone along, especially to see that my luggage does not get lost."

Q: Incroyable! And that was in dead seriousness.

BONBRIGHT: He was joking, but he usually had a barb in it.

Another of the best officers was Doug MacArthur. I think I might have spoken about him. I think I did.

Q: Being married to Alben Barkley's daughter.

BONBRIGHT: That's correct.

The other principal officers that I thought well of were Norris Chipman, who was a Russian hand and had an encyclopedic memory about members of Communist Parties in France and elsewhere. He and Richard Eldridge, the labor attaché were very helpful in combating communists who were in control of the labor unions pretty much at that time.

Q: Is Norris Chipman the officer who many years later went back and was fired on by some terrorists in recent years?

BONBRIGHT: No, I don't think so. Norris died not too long after this time.

One officer who, frankly, I didn't care for was Graham Martin, who was the chief administrative officer, very able, ambitious, as slippery as a cold basket of eels. He was intimately acquainted with all the laws and regulations which administrative officers are left to play with, and he was able to turn them to his own use and the use of anyone who was working for him particularly. He was always trying to ingratiate himself with the ambassadors and also getting his own position in the embassy raised. This was pretty well stopped by Caffery, but I'm sorry to say that when David Bruce took over, as much as I admired him and his father, he let down the bars and helped Martin, gave him almost anything that he wanted. This boost eventually started him up the ladder to being ambassador to Italy, I think, at first.

Q: And also he had the rank of ambassador at Geneva to the European office of the United Nations. He didn't lack self-confidence, did he?

BONBRIGHT: No. I thought he was a particularly bad choice for Italy. The Italians liked sophistication, and Martin had no social graces at all. I thought he was a miserable appointment just on those grounds alone. I don't know enough about his handling of things in Saigon to know that he was just the victim of the inevitable. I can't say whether he was good or bad out there, but he certainly was there when the curtain came down.

Q: I understand that he's an embittered retired person in Virginia or North Carolina now. He hasn't written a book, I don't think.

BONBRIGHT: After the war, our government had purchased a number of houses with so-called counterpart funds. One of these was set aside for the deputy chief of mission, a nice house near the Champs de Mars. But I had already rented a nice house which suited me perfectly; it had belonged to the Count Charles de Noailles on Rue Nitot, just off the Place des Etats Unis, not far from the Etoile. It was a charming place, and I preferred it to any of the government housing properties I saw. I was glad that I stayed there. My only objection to it came later, in accordance with the habit of the French of continually changing the names of the streets, and after a while they changed Nitot, which was simple and easy, to Rue de l'Admiral D'Estaing, which I had trouble pronouncing and trouble spelling.

Q: As in Giscard d'Estaing?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It was the admiral who fought in our revolution in support of the French troops.

Q: What is the origin of that switching names? When somebody sort of becomes obscure? Who was Nitot--a person?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know. I don't remember. I don't know that I ever knew. They like to pay the compliment to somebody who has just done something for them, and then after he's been dead long enough, if they want to honor somebody else, they ditch him. I mean, one of the bigger streets there in Paris was named for Roosevelt--I forget what the name had been before, but it must have been a fairly prominent name because it was one of the big avenues.

Q: That would cause havoc here, wouldn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Absolutely! Perfectly terrible.

Q: You would not be living at 4200 Massachusetts Avenue, but Avenue Cordell Hull or something.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, quite possibly.

The foreign minister at the time when I first got there was Robert Schuman, an Alsatian, a tall, homely man, but a man of great character and strength. He was really a good one. He and Jean Monnet were more or less the fathers, from the French side, of the coal and steel community, which led to the other steps pointing toward greater European integration. We were all sorry when he stepped down.

He was succeeded, I think, by Georges Bidault, who for all of my time there was in and out of the government as either prime minister or foreign minister. He was an unattractive man and he had gotten his reputation for having done great things during the Resistance. But I confess I never saw any evidence of either moral or physical courage. Maybe he did, but you can't prove it by me. Actually, it was a very hard time, because everybody, whether they were collaborators or whether they were loyal, or whether they were working actively for the Resistance or just sitting out the days of the occupation, everybody was trying to get on the bandwagon after the liberation. It's understandable, but there were really no records to go by, and you had to rely on word of mouth and reports from different people, which weren't always unbiased.

I know I inherited from Doc Matthews a loathing for one particular Frenchman named Rene de Chambrun. His father, General de Chambrun, was a fine old gentleman, and everybody liked him. He had a fine career in life. He was a direct descendent of Lafayette, and Rene, his son, tried to get into the United States on the basis that at the time of the revolution, the state of Maryland had voted Maryland citizenship for the direct descendants of Lafayette. Of course, the state of Maryland is not the United States of America. But on the other side, Rene "the rat," as we called him, had married one of the daughters of Pierre Laval, the arch-collaborator, who was prime minister under Petain. The bad thing that he did was fairly well documented. In fact, I think they tried him, and I think they hanged him.

Doc Matthews had this fellow blocked, and he couldn't get a visa. They tried again when I was in the position to carry on the blockade, which I was happy to do. I think eventually he did get in.

Q: Permanently or temporarily?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know how long he lasted, to tell you the truth. I think they finally gave him a visa. The Chambruns had connections to the White House, and he pulled out all the stops on this side of the water as well as France.

Q: Were those connections to Truman?

BONBRIGHT: No, to FDR. He was the worst of the cases. Of course, some of them were pretty good people.

I forgot to mention one of the advantages of my location in our house was that it was just about two miles from the embassy, which allowed me to keep on with the practice which I had started in Washington, walking to work, which was healthy and very pleasant. I enjoyed it always.

Q: In Brussels, you used a bicycle. That was a longer ride?

BONBRIGHT: That was longer; that was 13 kilometers.

Again, not to do anything official, but in Paris I was able to indulge for the first time my growing love for French wines. I had become briefly acquainted with some of them when I was in Brussels. The Belgians always imported the very best French wines. In Paris, I got to know, I think through Ridgway Knight, a man named Raymond Beaudois, who was head of the Academie de Vins de France, who had a marvelous palate and was in the business. He was a wine merchant, a very nice man. I got to know him well. He took some of us in the embassy under his wing just to choose good wines and buy cases for us, and we'd distribute it around. I was always very grateful to him for this and never got a bad steer.

I was also sensible enough while I was in Paris that every case of wine that I bought--and in my position there, I had to buy quite a few--I would remove four bottles and put them aside, so that by the time I left Paris about four years later, I had the foundations of a very nice little cellar, which the original inhabitants of that cellar have long since been consumed. I kept filling up their places and still have quite a number of lovely French wines.

Q: How does it work with wine if you have a particular brand of burgundy which has been known to be superb for years? That doesn't mean it will always be superb?

BONBRIGHT: No, no.

Q: Do you buy only the year that you previously tasted and know is so good? Or do you take a risk?

BONBRIGHT: Of course, there is always some risk. The experts will have a pretty good starting idea of what a wine is going to do within the first year or two, and that's the time when you can buy them the cheapest, is before they have a great reputation. It doesn't always work out, but actually, as I recall it, I don't think I ever paid more than $7 a bottle for even the finest. I have some Chateau Petrus 1961 in my cellar today that sells for $300 or $400 a bottle; it's just fantastic. I can assure you that I didn't pay anything like that when I got it. I'm a fool not to sell them.

Q: What about wines like Chateau Petrus? Are they at their best served with a certain dish, or sipped separately instead of a cocktail? How do you most enjoy good wine?

BONBRIGHT: Good red wines, I think, should be drunk pretty much with food. The old business of having red wine with meat, I think is a pretty good rule of thumb, and white wine with fish, although a good white burgundy, I think, will go with just about anything. Myself, my tastes have shifted pretty much and Letitia's, too. We drink very little red wine anymore. We drink mostly white. As I say, you don't have to worry too much if it's a good vintage and if it goes well with many things.

Q: People who booze a lot and drink rather heavily, their taste buds are not as sensitive as people who refrain?

BONBRIGHT: I suppose so. My palate isn't good enough. I'm not an expert. I was never in the class with Ridgway Knight, although I wasn't bad. There used to be certain rules--I don't know if they still follow. The French were adamant against the drinking of whiskey, Scotch, cocktails before dinner, if you're going to have wine. They would tolerate a dry martini or vodka, something of that sort. I think that's fair enough, although people have whiskey and then go ahead and enjoy their wine, too. But that's not the French way I was taught.

Q: These people who endorse wines--Alexis Lichine and Frank Schoonmaker and Peter Sichel and so forth--is that strictly commercial, or do they really like what they're recommending?

BONBRIGHT: Probably a combination of both. Schoonmaker, I think, was rather well regarded--he wasn't that from the French. But my friend Beaudois couldn't stand Alexis Lichine, couldn't stand him. In Beaudois's view, Lichine did the unpardonable thing: he owned a vineyard of his own that he bought there, and he would unmercifully advertise his own wares. A wine fellow is supposed to be unbiased and let only his taste buds tell him what was good and what wasn't, and he should act accordingly. So Beaudois and his friends thought Lichine was just commercial, I think, in an unacceptable way.

I haven't talked much about the substantive matters, and I don't think I want to get into that too much. Of course, this was a time of some very important developments--the Marshall Plan, and then we had all sorts of problems in connection with Indochina starting up, colonial problems, generally.

Q: Did you visit any of the French colonies?

BONBRIGHT: No. I had a trip laid out once with Mr. Bruce to go down to Morocco, but something came up and we never went. I just never left France while I was there.

The colonial problem was a terrible sore point, and one which I personally felt was not well played by us. FDR was obsessed with it; he was determined that the French would never get anything. He felt about the same, but not quite as strongly, I guess, in regard to the British empire, that great stabilizing force of the last century.

Q: That they would have to give up India?

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I think that movement was inevitable, but what bothered me about it was that I didn't think we should give it a push. As far as I could see, it never created any gratitude on the part of the recipients for support. Take a look at Africa today: many places that we helped gain their independence, they all hate us. So we got the worst of both worlds. The new people didn't appreciate it. We earned the distrust and intense annoyance, to put it mildly, of our allies, who still had some colonial possessions. It was all too fast. Practically none of them were ready for it. We had no chance to break them in gently. The best chance, of course, was the British effort, which to some extent prepared the way.

Q: Were you in Paris during Dien Bien Phu?

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember if I was there or whether I was back in the Department. I forget the date of it. I think it was in the Fifties, wasn't it?

Q: Early Fifties.

BONBRIGHT: I was back in Washington then. When I left Paris, things were still and not hotted up. The French were still coping, with difficulty.

Q: I remember then that they asked President Eisenhower for air support from the carriers in the Pacific, and Admiral Radford, who was in charge, recommended it, but the White House turned it down.

BONBRIGHT: That came later, but I remember I attended a meeting with Radford. Mr. Dulles was Secretary then. Top military people were at Dulles's house one Sunday afternoon, and I took notes and wrote the minutes of the meeting. This thing was debated. As I remember it, none of us wanted to do it.

Q: Because of the impracticality of it, or because of lack of sympathy with the French?

BONBRIGHT: We didn't want the possible involvement, plus lack of sympathy with the French, too. Of course, we took over from them and tried to do the same job that they failed to do, and equally failed.

Q: You stayed in France. Caffery left and Bruce replaced him.

BONBRIGHT: I stayed there until '49 sometime, I think.

Q: He went off to Egypt?

BONBRIGHT: He went off to Egypt. He was offered a choice of Egypt or Czechoslovakia. He felt--and I think he was right--that they were trying to get him to

retire. In fact, he had been interested in things Egyptian for a long time and was enchanted with it, so he accepted with alacrity. I think that was his last post.

Q: He could have a somewhat similar lifestyle there but not in Prague.

BONBRIGHT: Oh, no. He would have retired if faced with just that one. If they wanted to get rid of him, they made the wrong move.

Q: Bruce and his wife made a good couple, didn't they?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes, superb. Of course, he'd been in France for a year or more. He was head of the French ECA mission, which in turn was under the Southeast group, led by Averell Harriman.

By that time, I confess, the place was overrun with Americans. I think we had 300 or 400 people in the embassy proper and God knows how many in the ECA. At one time, I think there were five Americans with a personal rank of ambassador. It was just hopeless, you know. Part of my time, I didn't see many French people; I was too busy being in this tangled web of scratching Americans. That part I didn't like.

Actually, I could have--and perhaps I should have, but I didn't--leave in the fall of '49 after Caffery did. It was decided that up to then the top officer in any of our missions was the counselor who, as in my case and many others, was given the personal rank of minister. He was also called the minister counselor. They decided that they wanted a full-time minister as number two in London and Paris and so on. There was a scramble for these choice positions, and Paris was allotted Chip Bohlen, an old friend of mine. I'd known him for years. He had a brilliant Russian career, had been to Yalta, been close to FDR and his interpreter. This, of course, meant that he would be technically between me and the ambassador, and I would no longer be deputy chief of mission. Normally in those circumstances, the fellow that was squeezed, like I was there, would be transferred, lest he lose face or something. But I never felt that way about it. As it turned out, I went on just about as I had before, never had any problems of being cut off of David Bruce. There were so many international, multinational problems floating around which was the kind of thing that Bohlen found he was good at, and he concentrated more on that sort of thing. So I just said I'd move if they wanted me to, but otherwise I was quite happy to stay on, and I did for another eight months, I guess.

One amusing little thing I'd forgotten. In 1948, the time of the election, John Foster Dulles was in Paris in connection with some international meeting. The Philippine ambassador to Paris got the bright idea of having a dinner for Dulles two days after the election, just at the time that Truman was going to get beaten and that Dulles would be Secretary of State very soon. So we all had to laugh when the day after the election, here is the Filipino stuck with his guest of honor with egg on his face. I rather thought--although I didn't know him well at the time--that Dulles would tell him, "Let's forget it," but he didn't. They had the dinner, and Dulles went to it. I'm told--I wasn't there--that he

joked about it and took it all in very good form. I don't think back of him as having too light a touch. I thought he did very well.

Q: Who came in then?

BONBRIGHT: Truman was reelected. He beat Dewey.

Q: Dewey was elected in the papers for a few hours.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. That happened once before, you know. Remember Charles Evans Hughes was announced in the paper as the winner over Wilson. I forget whether it was the first or second term.

Q: And that proved to be false.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: So then Truman brought in Dean Acheson, didn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Marshall was in there somewhere, at the time of the Marshall thing. Marshall came in. In November of '44, Hull retired. Then came Byrnes, who went to the peace conference, and then came General Marshall. He wasn't there too long, I don't think, more than a year. Then Acheson, who, in my opinion, was the best Secretary of State that I ever worked with. Of course, before him I'd been too junior to see or have too close a contact with such an exalted person. But I've known them. He served in the Department for different stints; he'd been an Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. He had several jobs. I got to know him and his wife. We were friends, and I was a great admirer of his.

Q: Was he a good choice for Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations?

BONBRIGHT: I would have thought it would be the reverse. He was haughty, you know, and they thought that he was talking down to congressmen, who weren't as bright as he was.

Q: And he dressed so much better than they did.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It was a funny thing, but he worked hard at it. He was a charming man. I think when he tried, he could overcome a lot of this feeling about it. He was great.

Q: He worked well with Truman, didn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Perfect.

Q: Completely opposite types.

BONBRIGHT: Absolutely. Couldn't have been more different. He never tried to upstage Truman. Always Truman was the boss, and he was his servant, if you would. He never, never tried to push, as so many secretaries have, to get the limelight for themselves at the expense of their boss. Truman, of course, saw this very clearly. Of course, he'd had no foreign experience at all, and he knew a good thing when he saw it. He got his money's worth from Dean Acheson.

I have a couple more things about Acheson. Acheson was not an admirer of the United Nations. Of course, Stettinius had been Secretary of State at the time of the San Francisco Conference and the United Nations was born.

This is from a personal letter which Acheson wrote me in October 1960, right after the meeting in New York at which Khrushchev had taken off his shoes and pounded the desk and raised perfect hell:

"The performance in New York was incredible. Nothing could have more perfectly vindicated the judgment of those of us who strongly objected to the United Nations being in New York. It was the three masterminds of Ed Stettinius, Nelson Rockefeller, and Warren Austin that put it there. Can you imagine how much more amusing history would be had Attila the Hun been able to appear with immunity in Rome and tell off the ruling Caesar, or if Napoleon could have taken a boat across the channel and told the younger Pitt and the prince regent and perhaps the Iron Duke himself how he was going to bury them?

"I saw Harold MacMillan last Saturday afternoon, who told me that even his experience in Moscow had not prepared him for the violent effrontery of Khrushchev's performance at the United Nations. I did not say it to him, but I believed that Mr. K could not have picked a more useful man to insult than the honorable Harold himself. It really shook him out of the pipe dream which he has found so useful for political purposes in England. I did observe to him that when the United States, the British Commonwealth and NATO found themselves fortunate to be saved by a Swede, the world had come to a pretty pass."

Q: Meaning Hammarskjold or Trygve Lie?

BONBRIGHT: Hammarskjold.

Q: That's a pungent letter.

BONBRIGHT: One other little tidbit that was passed on to me by my friend William Tyler, who later became the Assistant Secretary for Europe and later ambassador to the Hague, a charming man and a superb officer. He was in Bonn when he wrote this letter, written April 1961.

"I must relate the following to you. Last Sunday I was with Mr. Acheson, who came here to see the chancellor. He told me that while things in Washington were, on the whole, going well, there were issues on which he disagreed violently with the administration's policies, e.g., Angola. “The other day,” he said, “I was in a car with Dean Rusk and that funny little man Waldron, or whatever his name is.”

“Waldron,” I asked, “who is he?”

“He works in the U.N. liaison office,” said D.A.

“Oh, do you mean Wallner?”

“Yes, that's it. Wallner.”

Anyway, when I objected to our vote on the inscription of Angola, he said, “Well, you see, that is what we call higher realism.”

And I said to him, “Look here, if you don't want me to throw up into the Secretary of State's lap, don't talk like that again in my presence.”

Poor Woody, my old friend. Wallner, who had been a great officer on the French thing, he'd gone to work for the U.N. division for a while, and that's where he picked up this “higher realism.”

I can probably work this one in, but while I'm at it, I might as well put it in. This is another letter from Acheson dated June 23, 1958. This had to do with George Kennan:

“While I was in England, I stayed with Wally Barbour, and one day going into his office at the embassy, I met George Kennan coming out. We had a well-behaved, indeed, affectionate reunion, and then went off in an empty office to talk for half an hour. I thought George looked badly. He said he was still suffering from sinus trouble, which he had had all winter. I think he had found his year at Oxford somewhat disappointing and certainly very uncomfortable. He was in one of his melancholy moods, and he appeared to regard all the troubles of the world as punishments for sin. He was going on to give some lectures in Warsaw and expected to go back to Princeton in the autumn, although he was not yet sure he would persevere in the third volume of his trilogy or devote himself to lecturing and writing on current affairs. I devoutly hope that he will take the former course.” Wonderful man!

Date: March 24, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. Here we are on a brilliant Monday morning, on the eve of a trip of yours to the South.

BONBRIGHT: I might go back to Paris for a few minutes and finish up there. Sometime in 1949--I forget exactly when--George W. Perkins was appointed Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. He was then attached to the ECA France mission and was head of the industry section. He was a very fine man, and everybody seemed pleased at the appointment. Like some of the rest of the embassy staff, we had met him but didn't know too much about him. Before he left for Washington, I gave a small lunch for him at my house, to which I invited several of the embassy people like Bohlen and Wallner, Ridgway Knight, and Tyler. We had an interesting time, but after lunch, we were sitting around having coffee, and George asked us to speak about what each of us thought were the most important issues of the day. As I recall it, we all spoke either about relations with the Soviet Union or the French recovery, some European thing. At the end, we asked George what he thought, and, to my surprise, he replied without hesitation, "The world population explosion." That's the kind of man he was; he was thinking beyond the small, immediate problems. Looking at the world today, I think his remark is as true now as it was then, even more so. This was 35 years ago.

Q: Another career Foreign Service officer, much later, became involved in world population problems--Marshall Green.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I remember him but slightly.

Q: He headed some population control activity.

BONBRIGHT: Actually, though, I think there's not nearly enough being done about it. It's very difficult.

Q: But a few countries have succeeded; one of them is Japan.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: But others, even right here in Washington...

BONBRIGHT: With this administration, you can't even have an abortion.

Q: I was thinking of the District of Columbia and rampant pregnancies.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The next spring, 1950, my own four years in Paris were running out, and it was time for me to move on. I was surprised and pleased that George Perkins had asked for me to come to Washington as his deputy. Sybil and I took off on the 17th of May by train to Le Havre and had a lovely sail home on the Queen Mary, at the end of which I was granted a couple of weeks' leave, which I immediately took in my normal spot, the Grand Cascapedia River.

Q: That was a good time of the year, too, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, it worked out quite well. My wife, Sybil, stayed on in Canada for a few weeks, and I came down to Washington and first started to house hunt, because we had no place to stay, and the houses we lived in before were not available. I was lucky enough, through a real estate agent, to find a house at 2906 P Street, which I fell in love with and was sure that my wife would feel the same, so I bought it. We had this house for 25 years and really were crazy about it.

In the Department, at the risk of boring you with orders of battle and so on, I will say something about the people I worked with. First I was to replace a man named Llewellyn Thompson, known as Tommy, who had been appointed as ambassador to Austria. I think of all the Foreign Service officers that I've known, he was the best. At that time, at least, he didn't have the reputation of such people as George Kennan and Chip Bohlen. He was not nearly so much in the public eye, but he had great judgment and quiet competence. He was a real star.

At that time, the European bureau had four divisions under it. Western Europe--WE--was headed by Theodore Achilles, who had been one of the fathers of NATO and had a very fine career. NBA, which was British, U.K., and Canada, was under Henry Labouisse. Eastern Europe--EE--was under Frederick Reinhardt. Our regional affairs--RA--was under Edwin Martin. Reinhardt was later ambassador to Italy and was a very brilliant man and a likeable one. Martin became ambassador to the Argentine and was active in many international questions. It was a fairly high-powered group, and it didn't take me long to realize that at least a couple of them, and maybe all of them, had wanted the job that I got. Nothing was said openly, of course, but I got the feeling, all right. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced myself that that was why George Perkins had picked me, that the choice was such, among these other four, that he didn't want to make it, for fear that the other three would blow their gaskets.

Q: Labouisse was married to Eve Curie, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: That's right. His first wife died.

It was a little touchy at first. I always felt that one of the jobs of the deputy was to try to screen things so his boss would have more time for more important things, and I still think so. On the other hand, each of these chiefs always had the right, if he wanted to, to go over my head and go directly to the Assistant Secretary, or even higher if he felt strongly enough about it. So I tried to make it clear, as soon as I could, that I wasn't there to try and interfere with their access to George Perkins, but that George was swamped with all sorts of things, and that if I could reduce that traffic, I thought that was my duty.

As luck would have it, two or three cases came up, where one of the directors of the offices below had something that he wanted to put before George, and I had a very strong feeling that George would not approve. So I told him that he was, of course, free to go to him, but that my opinion was that this would not pass and I couldn't recommend it to go to him or I'd recommend it to him myself. They went anyway, and by good luck, George

turned them all down. After that, they began to ease up a little bit. After a little time, my relations with all of them were perfectly satisfactory.

Q: Perkins was not a career man, was he?

BONBRIGHT: No, he wasn't. He was a banker, really. I think he had been with Morgan in New York. He was really a delightful fellow. One strange thing about him, I always thought, he was a Republican and served only in a Democratic administration and left as soon as the Republicans came in in 1952.

Q: There have been some examples in American politics of a great sense of public service and, "To hell with the party; I'm going to do my job."

BONBRIGHT: That's right. George certainly had that. He was a man of principle, if there ever was one, but not narrow. He was a fine man.

I might as well say a word now about the Russian team. I suppose, particularly that they were young, that Kennan and Bohlen were the best two Russian experts that any foreign office had. Of the two of them, Kennan was by far the most brilliant, I think, but Bohlen had his feet much more firmly on the ground. He was a much earthier fellow, as Kennan was sometimes in a dream world. He had some traits, however, that were most unfortunate, I always thought. First of all, if Bohlen was somewhat lacking in modesty, Kennan was surely the most vain and conceited man I've ever run into. The trouble is that it showed in all the things he wrote. He was full of contradictions. He was the author of the famous containment policy, yet seemed to spend most of the rest of his life denying its implications, and denying parts of it which were clearly stated in his original thesis. Another unbecoming trait was his instant dislike and disapproval of any idea which hadn't originated with him, which is just a deadly quality. I've read most of the things he's written, including his two books of memoirs, which were filled with a false modesty. He would claim that he was doing something objectively, when it was perfectly obvious that it was a product of his own vanity. That part of him revolted me. But he was a charming and delightful man to know, and wrote absolutely superbly.

Q: I had an interview with a university president who was very effective, but he would introduce the statement "Not to be self-serving...," and then he'd be completely self-serving. Kennan was like that?

BONBRIGHT: That's right. Absolutely. I'll insert the letter of what Dean Acheson wrote about Kennan years later. Acheson said he was fond of Kennan personally, but distrusted him, and mostly distrusted his skill in writing, so much so that, after a while, when something came in from Kennan, Mr. Acheson would have one of his secretariat turn the language into the most dreadful bureaucratic gobbledy-gook. This way, he said, he would see the point that Kennan was driving at, without being seduced by the charm of his language. Today that is clear. He puts everything beautifully, but under a microscope, it's apt to be fairly dangerous stuff, I think. Of course, I could never get over the finish of his

career in the Foreign Service. He was ambassador to the Soviet Union and went out, I think, to Germany on leave once for a very short time, and when in Germany, some newspaperman got to him and he publicly compared Stalin's regime with the regime of Hitler. Of course, as one of the men who knew most about the Soviet Union on this side of the Atlantic, the Russians were happy for this excuse; they immediately declared him persona non grata and didn't even let him go back for his suitcases and clothes. I can understand how he felt, in that it was one of the worst times, when Stalin was at his worst. But, of course, as a professional, he had absolutely no right to say such a thing, no matter what his personal feelings were. Even his personal feelings were ambivalent. He was always a great lover--I think he still is, and I think that's what tortures him--of Russia and of the Russian people. I think it just kills him to have a bad regime there. Some of his friends at that time used to argue that he did it on purpose, that he was so disgusted with the Russian regime, that he did this in order to get himself out. I don't believe it for a minute. He knew all about the Russians since 1917 on. He'd known Stalin for a long time. There was nothing new in it. I think he just lost control of himself.

Q: He considered himself the dean of all Kremlinologists, but did everybody worship at his feet, or were there a lot of people in that group who were gravely doubtful of some of his premises?

BONBRIGHT: I think he had some doubters, all right, but there's no question that his containment telegram and the subsequent article in Foreign Affairs made an enormous impression. I think it led literally to NATO. It was required reading for everybody and was a wonderful piece of work.

As a team of young men, Kennan and Bohlen were superb. When they served at the same post, they'd stay up hours on end arguing the finer points of communist philosophy and so on. I always thought that that was the high point of their usefulness in their careers, and that neither of them, although they rose very high, was as good afterwards as they were when they were knocking heads and honing their expertise against each other.

I was in this job for four years as Deputy to the Assistant Secretary for Europe. Of course, there were countless things that went on that were of great interest to me. In fact, it was to be the most satisfying period in my career. There was more work and more interesting work than I had anywhere else. It became exhausting, but it was worth it.

Q: Did you have any problems with outrageous political appointments as ambassadors? Or is that just par for the course and there were no momentous problems?

BONBRIGHT: Usually, particularly if they were not familiar, we didn't know anything about them until we read it in the newspapers. Naturally, we were unhappy with quite a few of the appointments.

Q: Were there any brouhahas that caused a great fuss when you were there during that four-year period, caused by political appointees?

BONBRIGHT: I'm quite sure that if my memory were better, I could think of them, but I don't think of anything offhand. I don't want to get into those things in detail, because that would take forever. I will just mention in passing that at that time, of course, not only was NATO newly-born and thriving, but also shortly before there had been the Berlin confrontation with the Soviet Union, which was finally resolved, thanks, in good part, to your uncle, Philip C. Jessup.

Q: With Jacob Malik.

BONBRIGHT: Philip Jessup was serving as ambassador-at-large at the United Nations.

One other thing I might mention, one of the smaller matters that concerned us at the time was a row over Trieste, a small matter, but it had the Italians and the Yugoslavs at each other's throats pretty much, and we were very anxious to try to get this thing settled.

I headed up a small group that handled the matter in the Department, and we were bombarded regularly from the embassies in Rome and Belgrade about the view of the their clients on the subject, which we knew quite well. The one who annoyed me most was Mrs. Luce, who was in Rome at the time and was determined to put her finger into the pie at any opportunity. She was a charming and beautiful woman, and it's hard to take umbrage, but in serious matters, she was often a pain in the neck. I even remember one day, when the Trieste thing was growing, she sent off two telegrams to the Department, each taking a completely opposite slant from the other. It seemed pretty clear that she had in mind writing her memoirs, and that, by God, she was going to come out right on this one, whichever way it turned.

Q: What was the exact issue on Trieste--who it belonged to?

BONBRIGHT: Boundary.

Q: Was that supposed to go through the middle of the city?

BONBRIGHT: They both claimed all of it. The thing was finally solved by secret diplomacy, which really was secret for a change. Tommy Thompson was taken out of Vienna, where he was serving as ambassador, and sent to London, where he negotiated with the Italians and the Yugoslavs. Each had sent someone to negotiate. It was through his work, he was the real one who delivered the goods. As for our own side, I'm sure the major credit belonged to Wally Barbour, who had come in as head of the Eastern European office after the departure of Reinhardt.

Q: What was the resolution?

BONBRIGHT: They drew a new line, and it was not a straight line. I remember they had to change it a little bit because it was running through a farm that belonged to one of the Yugoslav higher-ups, so the line was redrawn to avoid the boundaries of this farm.

While I enjoyed this period very much in my life, there were a couple of tasks which I loathed and detested and found very difficult. One was making speeches, and the other was testifying before congress. Actually, poor George Perkins, as Assistant Secretary, had to make most of them, but every now and then I had to fill in for him. The only one that I enjoyed, I remember, was a talk I gave down at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama. As for congressional testifying, it was invariably painful. In the first place, the committees had no thought about your convenience. You would be called up there, perhaps at 9:00 o'clock in the morning, sit in an uncomfortable chair outside the committee meeting all day and never be called. They you'd come back the next day. It's a terrible waste of time, and it got on people's nerves. We didn't like it much.

On the House side, the Appropriations Committee handled the State Department funds, and was headed by Congressman Rooney from Brooklyn.

Q: A long-established opponent of anything of the Department, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: He was terrible. I remember him once making the most impassioned and violent tirade at me about why we had not intervened in Ireland on behalf of the Republic. When he got through and I was getting a little red behind the ears myself at that time, I was about to answer, when he leaned across the table and whispered, "Don't say a thing. Don't say a thing. Shhh." I subsided, because I saw, of course, what I should have seen from the start, that he was talking for the record to have something that he could distribute to his Irish constituents back home. But I can't say I enjoyed playing the role of his dupe.

Another one that I couldn't stand up there was Senator McCarran. He was always lecturing us on the subject of Spain, I think so much so that I suspected he was in the pay of the Spanish Embassy.

Q: What did he want us to do for Franco?

BONBRIGHT: For one thing, he wanted us to give Franco more money than even the Spaniards had the gall to ask for, which took some doing. I also remember him unkindly, when one day he said to me, "Mr. Bonbright, I understand you're stationed at the embassy in Paris. I'd like to know what you did. Just for the sake of argument, assume you'd spent a day in the embassy, you go on home, and your wife speaks to you and asks you to tell her what you did that day."

I said, "Senator, first of all, if my wife asked me such a question, I'd give her a sound beating." This amused him sufficiently to ask that both question and answer be struck from the record, and he moved on to something else. But he was a bad man.

Of course, a lot of things changed with the election of 1952, when General Eisenhower was elected and Mr. John Foster Dulles became Secretary of State. I remember when he first came to the Department, he got all the employees out on the back steps of the Department and he gave us a speech. His speech, I thought, was quite insensitive; it asked for everybody to give him positive loyalty, which everybody, of course, resented--the thought that they would give him or any Secretary or State anything else. But oddly enough, it seems to be a disease of incoming secretaries, that they more or less have the feeling that they're entering into an organization which is surrounded by their enemies and controlled by their enemies. For some who had had no foreign experience to speak of, this could be understandable up to a point; they didn't know their way around and didn't know the people. Even Dean Acheson never was completely at home with the Foreign Service, although I never could see why, because he surrounded himself with many, leaned on them heavily, and used them. There was always something that didn't quite fit. I thought there was singularly little excuse for Mr. Dulles to feel this way. He'd been mixed up with foreign policy for a long, long time. He had been given the job under President Truman to draw up the Japanese peace treaty, for example, and for that work he was given not only quarters in the State Department, but he was given the best Japanese experts that we had to work with him, and I'm sure everything went satisfactory. So he had no excuse to walk in there and have his little group of secretaries and things around him, as though he was in a hostile atmosphere.

Q: Was he infected yet by the aura of McCarthyism, or hadn't that quite begun?

BONBRIGHT: It came shortly, I think.

In the European bureau, with George Perkins's departure, our new Assistant Secretary was Livingston T. Merchant, who was equally good and one of my best friends. I'm sure it's through him that I got my own missions later on. He had been doing some work on aviation, of all things. I don't know, really, what got him the job, but whoever did it picked a very good one.

I never had any trouble myself getting on with Mr. Dulles. I was not his favorite or anything like it, but we were on perfectly decent terms in the relationship. Livy actually came not only to admire him, but I think, in a way, he loved him, and Mr. Dulles loved him. It's hard for me to speak in this way, because Mr. Dulles, as far as I was concerned, was not a lovable character.

Q: Pretty cold.

BONBRIGHT: Very fishy. But as it turned out, Livy, I think, was a very good influence on him through the years. After I left, he was boosted up to Deputy Under Secretary for Political Affairs. They were very close. In fact, he once told me confidentially that if he'd had any political backing of his own, that Mr. Dulles would have recommended him as Secretary of State.

The Alger Hiss affair happened during the previous administration. Ironically, I don't wish to libel Mr. Dulles, but I think Hiss had been recommended to the Department by Mr. Dulles. His work for the Carnegie Endowment was where he had run into Mr. Dulles. In any event, I never heard Mr. Dulles claim credit for this. This was a great trial and disappointment to Acheson in his final time in the Department. He had taken Hiss with him to Yalta, and Hiss worked himself up pretty high in the councils of the State Department. At the risk of sounding smart after the event, I never liked him. I knew him, and I knew his brother Donald, who was a very nice fellow, a lawyer in town. Actually, I think his career was very greatly damaged by Alger. There was something about Alger that didn't ring true. He was young and attractive, he wrote well, but he just didn't seem trustworthy. In spite of Mr. Acheson's famous remark, when forced to say something about it, he said he would not turn his back on Alger Hiss, which was a good Christian attitude to take, but that was pretty unclear as to what he really felt. I don't know to this day how he felt about Alger Hiss.

Q: I think at the trial Philip Jessup testified as a character witness, saying, as far as he knew, he was a fine person.

BONBRIGHT: He must have impressed a lot of people. This is a very small point, but, to me, I was absolutely convinced--many people talked about the typewriter and the pumpkin and all these things at his trial, but to me the clincher was when Whitaker Chambers said that Hiss had told him that on his walks along the canal had seen a prothonotary warbler. I have liked birds all my life. I think I've only seen one of those warblers in my life. It's very rare. I think Hiss was a birdwatcher. I think Chambers knew little or nothing, or cared little or nothing, about birds. So it was inconceivable to me that he could pick this name of this rare thing out of a hat and say that Hiss had told him, without it being true. That doesn't necessarily mean that everything Hiss did was treasonable, but it certainly proved to my satisfaction that, on this point, at least, he was a liar.

Q: That's interesting.

BONBRIGHT: The McCarthy time, I think, was about the most disagreeable of any I've experienced in the Service. Of course, the whole State Department was very much under attack. Even though McCarthy was never able to come up with the long list of names that he claimed were communists, he threw enough dirt around to ruin quite a few careers, particularly among the China hands. I had known some of the China hands, not well, but I had known them. As far as I could ever see, I had never seen any disloyalty. Most of them were sons of missionaries who stayed on in China. Like all Foreign Service officers, they were trained and instructed to report what they saw, as they saw it, not playing favorites. They were supposed to be objective. I think they were.

Q: They saw the handwriting on the wall that Chiang Kai-shek was...

BONBRIGHT: That Chiang Kai-shek didn't have it, and Mao Zedong did have it. He was on the roll.

Q: Chiang Kai-shek was sort of like Marcos. I don't know how many Foreign Service officers said, "This guy is a loser from way back," but they were calling the shots.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so.

Q: And suffered for it.

BONBRIGHT: The big scene, of course, was when the McCarthy trial took place and his attack on the Secretary of the Army and others. TV was a pretty rare thing then, and I think there was only one or maybe two TV sets in that whole State Department. One was down in the news section. But a lot of us used to take a quick sneak to see what was going on when McCarthy was testifying. I swear, I think that trial is surely what killed him. You couldn't look at that face...

Q: He needed a shave, and his bloodshot eyes.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, an awful-looking man, flanked by those dreadful creatures Cohn and Schine, who were equally unsavory. You couldn't look at that trio without instinctively feeling that these people were crooks.

Q: Menaces.

BONBRIGHT: Not to be believed. That finally finished him off, or started him on the downward path, anyway.

One thing I could never understand, Mr. Dulles never stood up for his Department--never. President Eisenhower never stood up for it, and that is something I've never forgiven him for. There were many admirable things about him, but he was a popular President and could have.

Q: He had the stature and the prestige.

BONBRIGHT: He could have smashed him--BANG!--like a fly. So he had every opportunity to, particularly when Harold Stassen came out with a blast against McCarthy. The President not only didn't back him up, but he cut off Stassen at the knees and left him there for dead. I thought the lack of courage was frightening and uncalled for.

Date: April 3, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. You're back from Florida. A beautiful April day. When we left, you were still in the Department.

BONBRIGHT: Very good. Since I was talking about things that I didn't like, I might as well polish that subject off by recounting a couple of run-ins I had with General Bedell Smith, who came in as Under Secretary of State under Dulles, after the Republican victory of '52. I had worked under the General at the Paris Peace Conference, which was only about seven or eight years earlier. Anyway, he was a different man. He had for years been suffering with bad ulcer trouble, and had debilitated physically. He had had a bad temper before, the constant pain that he was under made him blow his steam even more than usual.

Q: In the eighties, wouldn't there be some medical procedures to alleviate such a chronic pain?

BONBRIGHT: I would think so. I don't know. He had the worst case I ever saw. Anyway, the first incident I had, out of a blue sky, he called me on the buzzer one day when he was Acting Secretary in the absence of Mr. Dulles, and said that he wanted the clearance of the European bureau for the appointment of a man, who I will not mention by name, as consul general in Geneva. Unfortunately, I knew quite a bit about this man. I didn't like what I knew. He was one of the few Foreign Service officers, to my knowledge, that actively used his religion to assuage his own ambitions and to his general advancement. I don't have any religious prejudices myself, and certainly none against Roman Catholics, but this man was a Roman Catholic, and he was active in this kind of pursuit which I deplored. In addition, I didn't think his record was anything to brag about. So I told General Smith that I was sorry, that I knew some things about this man that I didn't think would make him an appropriate appointment for this post, and that I would have to decline to give the clearance from my bureau. With this, he went into a violent rage.

Q: On the phone?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, screaming and yelling. I was glad I wasn't in the same room with him. He went on for a while, beating the table and shouting and swearing, and finally I just said, "General, you're Acting Secretary of State. You can send anybody you want, anywhere you want. My job is just, in the absence of the Assistant Secretary for Europe, to run this bureau. You asked my opinion about the man, I've given it to you, and I cannot go any further. Now if you want to appoint him, go ahead. There's nothing to prevent you." And that was the end of it.

The next day, I got a remorseful letter from him which I had noticed that whenever he flew into these things, he had these moments of remorse afterwards, almost as embarrassing as the outbursts.

Q: Almost like an alcoholic who recovers the next day.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. The next episode I had with him was again when Livy Merchant was away and Mr. Dulles was away. General Smith was chairing the daily meeting in the

Secretary's office, where the Assistant Secretaries gathered together to discuss matters. I was sitting in for the European bureau, and somebody mentioned some telegram that came in from--I forget, Paris, or one of the capitals in the area, which had something of interest in it. Bedell Smith stopped and looked across the table at me and said, "Why didn't you inform me of this?" in this kind of voice. Then before I could say anything, he began to get warmed up again and flew into another terrible tirade which was very embarrassing to everybody in the room, and particularly to me. The reason I had not called his attention to this matter before was that the telegram, I knew, was already in the file which his own people prepared for him every morning before the meeting. Obviously I didn't want to make a point of calling something which I was sure he'd read. As a matter of fact, I think he just hadn't done his homework that morning.

Q: Or his assistants hadn't flagged it.

BONBRIGHT: You know, they took the pick of the things that his office should see, and you assume that he's going to read that small file, compared to what the rest of us had to go through. But there again, I was as close to getting up and walking out of the room. I didn't think I could take any more of this in front of everybody. I was pretty damn mad, too, but I didn't. He finally calmed down. And again, the next day I not only received another distressingly remorseful letter, but also a copy of a very nice book on fishing, which he knew I was fond of.

Q: Amazing.

BONBRIGHT: Curious thing. To finish off my relation with the General, he was kind enough, in spite of all these things, in '54, at the time of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, he was to head our delegation, and he asked me if I would go with him. I was flattered and would have been happy to oblige him, but unhappily at this time, my wife was going through one of her occasional serious crises, and I just couldn't leave. I wrote him a personal letter immediately and told him that for personal reasons, I was unable to agree to go with him. I told him that all my life in the career, I had felt strongly about officers who declined to take whatever post they were asked to take. I had always felt that an officer who did this had only one recourse, and that was to immediately submit his resignation. I said that I still felt that this was correct, and since I was doing what I normally disapproved of, I would be happy to place my resignation in his hands. This time, there was no explosion at all, and he accepted what I wrote and declined to ask for my resignation, which I was always grateful for.

One more little temper story which has a happier ending, or rather one that personally involved me.

Q: Did he have pain?

BONBRIGHT: His face was so drawn.

Q: Was it always?

BONBRIGHT: No one in Paris--oh, he was as handsome a man as you ever laid your eyes on.

Q: But later it became taut?

BONBRIGHT: All pulled in, drawn in. He was thin and wiry and just all nerves. Actually, I think it was an unfortunate appointment at that time. I don't think he was physically fit for it. But, of course, he had been Eisenhower's number two in the war. Eisenhower was in the White House and, I guess, wanted him there. I don't know.

But the other man, years ago in the Service was a man named George Gordon, who rose to the rank of minister, was minister of our legation in The Hague at the time of this episode, when he became enraged with one of his junior officers, tore a telephone out of the wall, and threw it at him. Afterwards, the receiver picked up the telephone and took it away, and he subsequently had it mounted on a mahogany plaque with a little brass inscription on it saying, "To Vice Consul John Doe, From the Honorable George Gordon, my hand," which I always thought was nice. I don't know if George Gordon ever saw the plaque. But those are the bad tempers that I knew of.

On the lighter side of the Department was a small group of us, mostly in European affairs, founded an informal organization called the Institute of Iberian Studies. There were no officers of the Institute except one, a secretary, a Mr. E.J. Beagle, from the Division of Western European Affairs. Beagle had a genius for trivia. He was also the only man in the Department, I think, who really understood the French financial situation. A strange, odd, half-genius of a fellow, very amusing. He was who prepared the agenda for the occasional meeting of the Institute. I should add that one of the reasons why it was called the Institute of Iberian Studies was that no member of the Institute had ever served in Iberia.

Q: Which is Spain and Portugal?

BONBRIGHT: Spain and Portugal. The purpose of the group, really, particularly on spring days, was to get the hell out of the Department and go down to the waterfront and have a nice lunch at a seafood joint, usually Hall's, where we would all have a martini and a pitcher of beer, and have fun. I don't think any other part of the Department went in for this sort of activity, but we found it enjoyable and important.

Q: How did you appoint members?

BONBRIGHT: There was no formal election, but they gravitated to it. If one came in from the field and was working in a room with a member, and the new fellow was found to have the right attitude towards things, he would be invited to a lunch.

I'll just mention the names of some of them, just so I can remember them better myself.

Q: Was this a weekly or a monthly thing?

BONBRIGHT: I suppose once a month or six weeks, something like that. We didn't overdo it, I don't think. The members included, of course, Livy Merchant, later on, myself, Bill Dunham, J.Y. Millar, Francis Williamson, Freddie Reinhardt, Wally Barbour, Doug MacArthur, Woody Wallner, a fellow named Rogers, who was on the Italian desk, occasionally, I think, Outerbridge Horsey. The membership changed as people came and went in the Department. Anyway, I regretted to see, just the other day, that Beagle has retired. So my guess is that the Institute of Iberian Studies is now defunct.

Q: But it went on for 30 years.

BONBRIGHT: It went on for quite a while. I was honored, of course, when I was named as ambassador to Lisbon, the Institute's joy knew no bounds. One of its own had finally connected. In fact, they passed a resolution in my last lunch with them, making me a life member, despite my constant nonpayment of dues.

Q: Did it have a charter?

BONBRIGHT: No, no.

Q: Completely informal.

BONBRIGHT: Informal. The only thing we got was the written agenda which Beagle prepared and took it to lunch with him, and we passed it around. It was really quite amusing. We'd pick on different people for different things.

In the spring of 1954, my normal four-year tour in the Department was just about up. Under normal situations, someone in the position that I then held would have been eligible for a mission of his own in the field. As luck would have it, there was nothing open when my time came up. I could have taken a tour of duty on the inspection course with some sort of sidetrack, but this didn't appeal to me at all. In fact, I seriously considered retiring at that time, partly because of my wife's health, but also I didn't see that I was heading into anything that would interest me very much.

Luckily, I had five or six months of accumulated leave with pay which had piled up through the years, and after talking it over with Livy Merchant, we agreed that I should take my accumulated leave and then we'd see where we were at the end of it. So I went bouncing off to Canada and had a lovely month of fishing. Actually, I was called back to the Department to fill in temporarily for two months when my successor, Burke Elbrick, was sick. So I filled in for him and went back on leave, this time in the form of Nantucket, where we had rented a house, and I spent a lovely month there with my sisters and their husbands, lots of surf casting for blues and striped bass off the beach, which I'd become fond of.

Around about November, though, we were just going to go back to Washington, I got a call from Livy, saying that the embassy in Portugal was opening up, and would I be interested if I was offered it. I said, yes, I would. I never wanted a big embassy. I always preferred the small ones. I didn't like the pace in the big ones, and this sounded as though it should be fine. I was very pleased. So he decided to put my name up and see what would happen to it.

Q: In a situation like that, are there 30 names, or five names, or you never know?

BONBRIGHT: You don't know.

Q: And there might be a few from the White House.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. He then told me--this sounds..., which I hope I'm not, but I was told that the previous ambassador there had got into trouble, and that the Portuguese had specifically asked for "A Foreign Service officer and a gentleman." I was particularly pleased when Bedell Smith himself sent my name to the White House when he heard what the Portuguese were asking for, in saying that I was both.

It wasn't til later that I really found out the story behind it, why the Portuguese had made such a strong request for a gentleman. It seems that my predecessor, Mr. Robert Guggenheim, had deeply offended the Portuguese Foreign Minister Paolo Cunha. The latter was married to a beautiful blonde French lady of ample proportions, as I was to learn, and she caught the lecherous eye of old Guggenheim. At a formal dinner, when he was seated next to Mrs. Cunha, he leaned forward and dropped a spoon down the front of her decollete dress. This, of course, infuriated her and her husband, and the next day Mr. Guggenheim was declared persona non grata.

Q: Isn't that a bit severe? I mean, isn't that usually done on some major diplomatic faux pas, and not a social error?

BONBRIGHT: Not necessarily. Not necessarily. I mean, to deeply offend the foreign minister? No. Naturally, your usefulness has been destroyed.

Q: Was he an elderly man, Guggenheim?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he was an old man, an old lecher.

Q: Hadn't there been another person like that in Lisbon some time before--Herman Baruch's brother?

BONBRIGHT: Herman Baruch was an old one, too. He used to fly in a group of chorus girls from London every Friday night. At that time, he had some objections, which everybody laughed about. But he kept his attentions to the ladies of the theater and didn't

offend anyone in the government or society in Lisbon. They thought he was sort of laughable, I guess.

Q: Did Guggenheim succeed Baruch, or were there a couple of people in between?

BONBRIGHT: No, no, I think there were several in between.

Q: Because the Portuguese must have wondered if they were a receptacle for...

BONBRIGHT: I know when I got there, Mrs. Cunha kept a very suspicious eye on me for a while.

Q: Was she attractive?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, she was a very, very attractive woman. She finally decided that whatever else I might do, I wasn't going to be following in the footsteps of my predecessor.

I went through the usual drill in Washington of being briefed in various places, particularly by the Pentagon, with regard to the Azores problem, and had, of course, to appear before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was a friendly gathering. They didn't have any questions or problems that bothered me. Then after a brief session with the President, I was on my way.

We sailed from New York on the Saturnia, on the third of February 1955. It was a very rough trip. My wife was sick in bed all the way across, until we'd passed the Azores around the ninth. Then things smoothed out a bit. We landed in Lisbon on the 11th. I was met there by the consular, a very nice fellow named Aaron Brown, and a couple more of his staff, and drove up to the residence on the Road Sacramento Alapa, which was a nice, old-fashioned building, at that time leased by the government. I think its since been bought. Our entry was not spectacular, because the door opened, and the servants had been lined up in the hall, and my Scotch terrier, Joe Bonbright, walked in and did a job on the floor in front of them, which was not an auspicious start.

Q: For your first mission, did you inherit Guggenheim's State Department personnel, or were you able to select or recommend your DCM?

BONBRIGHT: No, I didn't select anybody. I took it as it was. Actually, I was lucky. It was a small but a good group.

Q: Was the size of the mission about 16 officers?

BONBRIGHT: Counting the company, the consular, two other political officers, economic officer, administrative officer, and one fellow who was quite invaluable, really, named Theodore Xanthaky.

Q: Is that Greek or Hungarian?

BONBRIGHT: He was a Greek, I think. He had served something like 25 years in Rio de Janeiro, and already ten years in Lisbon, I think, if not more. Of course, he spoke Portuguese fluently. He knew everybody in town, in society or official positions. As I say, he was valuable, even though at times he got a little uppity and had to have a cool hand placed on his brow. But he was good.

The house I found a delight, although I would not have looked at it so favorably in subsequent years as I got older. It went straight upstairs, straight upward, several long, long flights of stairs. It was built against a hill that rose up behind it, and the garden was up on the second level, the floor level, out the back. I think they've since fixed it up and put in an elevator. The trouble with it was the government's policy then was to not spend a nickel on a place that was rented. They were spending a lot of money after the war on buying new embassies or building them or renovating things that they already owned.

Q: Rental properties were out.

BONBRIGHT: So we walked into a pretty bare place. We redid our own bedroom upstairs and, with the help of my wife's paintings, of which she had quite a few, and my Audubon prints, we got a little color into the house. My wife even made curtains for some of the rooms, which were attractive.

Also at that time, the Foreign Service buildings were run by a man named Fritz Larkin, who would do anything for you if he liked you, and nothing at all for you if he didn't. Fritz didn't dislike me, I don't think, but I just didn't know him and he didn't know me.

Q: Was he a career person or an administrative type?

BONBRIGHT: He was an administrative type, who ran his own shop, and was a dictator if there ever was one.

We made out. The staff at the house was good, except for a social secretary that we inherited that immediately got me into trouble. Our first official deed was a fairly large reception for a number of Portuguese, and my wife and I, when we walked into the place, before the guests arrived, we couldn't believe our eyes. Long tables piled out with one dish after another of food. It was the most vulgar display imaginable, and we were horrified, no less so when we subsequently found that the Portuguese would--I can't say anything strong enough against them. They'd pick something up and taste it, and if they didn't like it, they'd throw it on the floor. Little things like that.

Anyway, the next morning, we got the social secretary and said, "This has got to stop. We've got to have nice things for people to eat and all, but not look like a Roman orgy. Try to get a little more sense of proportion." Well, I don't know. I guess the chef had been

getting--maybe the social secretary--they'd been getting a pretty good rake-off on this stuff.

Anyway, shortly thereafter, I gave a buffet supper for the office, the officers from the military mission, and everybody in the office, the officers. We walked into the dining room, and here were these long tables out and practically bare, with one dish here with a little thing on it, perhaps enough for six people. I was, of course, furious, but happy that it was my own official family that were witnesses to this horrendous affair, and we all laughed. But the next day, I had the chef up on the carpet and said, "You've gotten away with this, but if you try any such trick again, you might as well pack your bags and start moving.? The rest of the time, everything went all right.

I'm spending too much time on house trivia.

Q: Was Chief of State Salazar in yet?

BONBRIGHT: Salazar was the prime minister. The chief of state, the president, was General Walsh, as they called him. Salazar, of course, had a great reputation, but he was held in place by the armed forces, no doubt about it. But if there was something in the armed forces that he didn't like, he could get it changed. The Army supported him, because they knew he was best for the country, and, indeed, I think he was. Of course, most Americans call a man a dictator, and he's immediately turned into a monster in our eyes. In my opinion, Salazar was a great man. A dictator, yes, but he had none of the trappings of a dictator. He hated public appearances. In fact, I don't think he appeared at formal things more than maybe four times a year. He couldn't avoid it.

Q: Was unrest beginning in the colonial empire?

BONBRIGHT: Some, but not unmanageable. He was an economic professor, you know, first. He'd been in office since 1932, I think. When I arrived, he'd already been there for over 20 years. He started as a finance minister and then became prime minister. But anybody who criticizes that dictatorship, I think, ignores the fact that half a century before him, there was just one revolution and one assassination, one riot, one thing after another--trouble, trouble, trouble. And he brought peace out of chaos. I never saw the numbers of the people he arrested for political reasons, but I never had a feeling that it was absolutely outrageous.

Q: When did royalty end in Portugal?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, I don't even remember. It was in the early part of the century, I think. There was still a pretender; even his title escapes me, who lived near Porto, I think. I met them. They were nice, quiet people. They were allowed to remain in Portugal and never caused any difficulties. As I could see, they never had a royalist party that was plotting to bring them back. After all, all the business people, the people of substance, were only too glad to have a lid on it, in which people could work in normal fashion and not have all

these disturbances. I made it a point--he hated trivia, unlike the Institute of Iberian Studies, and didn't care too much to see the diplomatic corps. So I was very careful never to ask to see him unless I had something of real substance to discuss that had to come to his attention. That wouldn't happen more than maybe three times a year. The rest of the time, all my contacts were with the foreign office, either Cunha himself or with the two next to him. The under secretary was a nice man, but not into the same problems. The head of the political section was a man named Enrique Caros, who spoke very good English. He was my favorite of the Portuguese officials that I met, and I'd discuss anything with him perfectly frankly and feel that nothing would be taken amiss or any problem to arise between us.

Q: Did the Portuguese officially and unofficially evince more interest in Brazil than in the Portuguese population in the United States? Or didn't they pay much attention to either?

BONBRIGHT: Brazil was a funny sort of special situation. They were proud that one of their colonies had made it so good in the world, not much bigger than the homeland. They always had a special relationship with Brazil, always visits back and forth. The contact with the Portuguese in the United States was much more a matter of the Portuguese ambassador in Washington who kept this sort of pot stirring. I couldn't see much of it from the other side, nothing in particular.

Q: What is the most beautiful spot in Portugal? When you were being evacuated, you mentioned the place up north. But what about down in the south?

BONBRIGHT: I never went to the Algarve, in spite of being there four years. It was just starting to be developed. It was like the south of Spain, beaches and condominiums and all that stuff. Frankly, it never attracted me terribly, although I have friends who swear by it and have places there. But I really didn't give a damn about it. I loved the city of Lisbon itself, the surrounding country, places like Cintra, Cascais, Estoril, all that area was beautiful and easily reached. I was very fond of it. Of course, the bridge across the Tagus hadn't been built there, so that was harder to get to the other side. There were ferries running, but they took a long time and were not very convenient. Some of the old buildings in Lisbon are fascinating, the old Coach Museum. My favorite of all is the Tower of Belem, which is on the banks of the Tagus. It was built in commemoration of the voyages of Vasco de Gama in about, I suppose, 1400-something. It looks like it. It's a medieval fortress, and there it is, a straight, solid thing on the bank of the river, looking out, guarding the entrance. I used to go down and walk through it often. I was crazy about the place.

While I was still there, the government decided to perk it up. It had been sort of neglected. I haven't seen it since these trees have come out, but they've done a lot of planting around it. It was in the middle of an ugly, bare field. It must be very attractive now. They've cleaned it up. In fact, just before I went, the foreign minister gave a party for the diplomatic corps there, which was charming, a lovely place.

For recreation there, I went back to my old habits. I had a weekend game, usually with the service attachés, who all liked to play. We had a good game going for Sunday mornings.

Q: No fishing on the Tagus?

BONBRIGHT: No fishing on the Tagus. But my wife and I used to do a lot of walking around. Just outside the city are the great fortifications, the great embankments that were made by Wellington. A wonderful place to walk, with glorious views across the valley, the fields full of wildflowers. Spring in Portugal is really an enchanting time. Winter's not so much fun. It reminded me a little bit of Canton, where the winter dampness, the water would run down the walls and you could feel it in your bones. It was hard to get warm. We had these stoves in our rooms, which helped.

Q: Is the Ritz Hotel in Lisbon a nice hotel, or one of the world's great ones?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know. I've never been in it. It wasn't built when I was there. The famous one when I was there was the Aviz, which wasn't very big. It had a marvelous--the best restaurant in town, on the ground floor, and then the second floor, the hotel had been bought by old man Gulbenkian. I think I may have mentioned him before. I never met him. He was bedridden there, and owned and occupied the whole second story of the hotel. So there weren't too many rooms. In fact, it was one of the curses of being an ambassador there. Everybody who came to Lisbon, either friend or who you didn't know, would ask you to get rooms for them at the Aviz. Well, it was quite impossible, quite impossible.

Then Gulbenkian died, I think not too long after I got there. It was still '55. Then, of course, the great rat race began for control of his art treasures that he had collected over the years. We were in that race, too. The embassy wasn't involved, but the head of the National Museum came over and tried his wiles on--I think it was Johnny Walker at the time. But, of course, the Portuguese were fighting tooth and nail to keep it there. The British were interested. Everybody in the art racket tried to get into the game. I don't know how it was finally decided, whether it was actually--I think it was partly in Gulbenkian's will that certain things should be left, but I think it ended up with the Portuguese building a museum and keeping it all there in Lisbon, which I think is quite right, so it should have been. I mean, they gave him a place to live while he was alive.

Q: And a citizenship, didn't they?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so. So I think it's right that he left it.

Q: There's a Gulbenkian Foundation now, isn't there?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think so.

Q: An immensely wealthy one.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Well, remember, 5% on every nickel out of every dollar of oil.

On the business side, we had several things in the fire from time to time, most of them of no great importance. One was involving trying to keep Portugal as a basis for the operations of Radio Free Europe. But by far and away the most important thing for us was getting the renewal to the Azores Base Agreement, which was due to run out, I think, in '54. Well, I was involved with that constantly, all the time that I was there.

Q: Were they trying to strike a harder bargain, or did they want us out?

BONBRIGHT: Well, I think it was mostly bargain. They were ambivalent about it. Salazar knew that it was important to NATO for us to have these rights. He couldn't stand the idea, though, of our being in Portuguese territory with our PXs, all the side trimmings, what he regarded as a materialistic American civilization, which he didn't like. In fact, to skip forward a bit, when the foreign minister made a visit to Washington at the end of '55, as was the usual custom, I was ordered home ahead of time to brief people and be present in the meetings. I was rather disturbed, because I had hoped to have more time with Mr. Dulles before these things began, and as it worked out, I had about ten minutes, which is ridiculous. In the course of that ten minutes, he said, "Well, are things now going well with the Azores Agreement? What's the trouble?" And before I could say anything, he said, "Why don't we just tell them that we'll pull out?"

Finally, when I was allowed to say anything, I said, "Mr. Secretary, you just say that to the foreign minister, and you will make Dr. Salazar the happiest man in Portugal." And he looked at me and he ducked away from it. But, you know, five or ten minutes before a man's supposed to be talking business to a foreign minister, and he makes a remark like that, it's no good.

Well, to get back to it, one of the problems was that while we were concerned with the bases, the Portuguese were concerned with their empire, which was of great importance to them. The home country of Portugal had no resources to speak of. Cork and olives and all that sort of thing doesn't make a modern nation. The things that they got from Angola and Mozambique and Africa were important to them. Wherever they had colonies, there was less of the economic side, but still, the Portuguese presence seemed to be important to them in India, in Goa, this tiny little speck of a place, in which any attempt to get them out of there immediately...

Q: We were mentioning Macao.

BONBRIGHT: That wasn't as active, you see. I don't know to this day if the Chinese have raised much hell about Macao. It just sits there and works quietly. They have a working agreement, a working arrangement, and just leave it alone. It's not like Hong Kong. I suppose they must have a limit on their treaty rights, but it doesn't hit the press. It never

did at that time. But the Indians were beginning to stir on the Goa thing, and that one really had them hot and bothered. If ambassador to New Delhi said anything or the Secretary of State, or if anything was said in the United Nations, one of our representatives, in any way from the Goa--bang!--I would get a "come on down here," and get a lecture. Kairos once said to me, after the Indians really got into it, he said, "Of course we knew this was going to have to happen, but we wanted to make sure that it was done over protest, make sure that it was done by an Indian act of aggression, to show them up as the hypocrites that they are." That's about it.

Q: Eventually, after you left, the Indonesians seized Portuguese Timor or something, a great land mass down there, but there was nobody living there.

BONBRIGHT: By that time, the game was pretty well up. I mean, the empire thing was played out. These others were vestige parts, but the ones that really hurt were Angola and Mozambique. But I think they hoped that, even there, through their long contact with those areas, that they could work out working arrangements with them. I'm not sure that they can't. You see, as colonists, the Portuguese really absorbed a lot of the blood of the colonial empire through their own bloodstream. Whether that's a good thing or not, I am not prepared to argue.

Q: By heavy intermarriage.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I have a feeling that their relations with their colonies were better than those of many other imperial colonists, although I must say, the British did very well in India with their civil service system and better training.

Q: The French seem to have done well in West Africa.

BONBRIGHT: Yes.

Q: They've been invited back.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. We had one--well, I was amused by it, anyway. When the foreign minister did take his trip to Washington in the fall of '55, I think, the big thing they wanted was a statement from the Secretary of State, after talking, about Goa. Of course, I didn't have but ten minutes with the Secretary, but I had plenty of time with Livy Merchant, which was just as good, if not better. The point that we brought out--which was subsequently brought out by us, of course, over there--but which we felt would be attractive to the Secretary, with his legal mind, was that unlike many other colonies, the Portuguese really took their colonies into their home body constitutionally. Goa, for instance, was just as much a Portuguese under their law as the Algarve. So they didn't regard this as something which they had to put on the neck of some inferior race. These people were part of their state.

Q: Like the French with Martinique and Guadeloupe.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, return their own...

Q: They run for Paris.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, represented in the assembly. That appealed to the Secretary, and this statement which was prepared for him to give stressed this point. Well, it was a thing that I wouldn't have dared suggest to him. Anyway, it was to be done that afternoon, and Livy Merchant was to be down there to sign this thing together, and I was delegated to take this text. I went down to George Allen, who was Assistant Secretary for the Near East, for India and all that stuff, and I tried to sell it to him. I thought he was going to hit the ceiling. Whether he didn't quite get the significance or whether his mind was elsewhere, he didn't object. Even more surprising, out it came, and Livy and I were sort of ducking, to see if it was going to hit the you-know-what. For a day or two, nothing happened at all. Even the Indians didn't say anything. Then all of a sudden, I don't know what broke it, but all of a sudden, they saw this thing, and then they let fly whatever Mr. Dulles had taken. I think he was a very surprised man. I'm glad to say it didn't seem to affect his relationship with Livy. It didn't come to anything, anyway, in the end. It made Livy a very, very happy person. He came home a hero. I was able to bask in a little reflected glory.

Another thing I was able to indulge in there was something that I've loved all my life, and that was bird shooting. Those days are long since past. I'd no more shoot at a duck now than I would at somebody passing on the street. But I was very fond of all kinds of bird shooting, and I did a lot of shooting in Portugal. I even went once to a school in Spain.

Q: There were more birds in the air than in the hortobagy?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, yes, quite a lot.

Q: Lot more to fire at.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, pretty good, although the Portuguese shooting was a bit different. It was not as good as the other. But I enjoyed getting out, and the shoots were always in nice country, through cork tree orchards and groves.

Date: April 14, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright. It's a lovely day before taxes are due, April 14, a spring day here in Washington. Nice to be here.

BONBRIGHT: Thank you. I think when we left off, I was talking about my assignment to Stockholm, and being worried about my predecessor, Francis White, who was retiring. An announcement was made when I was in Washington for promotion, and so the only reason I went back to Lisbon was to really make my farewells, pack up, and leave, which

we did. I didn't take too long in Washington, and we got back just long enough to have some briefing in the Department. Around December 19th, I think, we took off via SAS for Stockholm, where we arrived the next day, and were met by Andrew Donovan, who was in charge, several members of the staff, plus the Swedish Chief of Protocol, Counte Bonde.

This, of course, was the middle of winter, which was quite a change for me from four years in Lisbon. I made a note afterwards that on the 21st of December, the sun rose at 14 minutes to 9:00 in Stockholm, and set that afternoon at ten minutes to 3:00. So when you were going home to lunch, the sun was always 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon, instead of the middle of the day. This gave me a very eerie feeling for a while. The Swedes sometimes seem so starved for sun, even though they get plenty of it in the summertime. In the winter, if you've got a sunny day, you could drive downtown and you'd see people lined up all along the main streets, leaning with their backs to the walls of the buildings, and turning their faces up to the sun. It was a physical necessity for them.

Q: Vanity? Or they needed the rays for their health?

BONBRIGHT: Health, purely. I really knew very little about Sweden, had not read very much, and had no experience in Scandinavia before, so I obviously was reading everything I could by this point, and enjoying the change. The living conditions were very good. We owned a building in Stockholm at No. 2 Nobel Gatan, which was on the water at one of their inland lakes. Across the water was the park of Sconsen. It was a lovely location, with walks all around the water. The house was solid and well built, but even though our government owned it, they hadn't really done much for it in the way of furnishings, so we went through the same business, pretty much as we had in Lisbon, with Sybil making curtains, and I was gathering our Audubon prints around as best we could.

In other respects, it was not too easy. The household was in complete disarray. We inherited, I think from the Butterworths' days, an English butler who was very elegant and rejoiced in the name of Button. I did my best to keep him, if for no other reason than his name, which charmed me. Unfortunately, we got on for about a year, but then he got so that he'd be at a cocktail reception, he'd be weaving around like one of the guests who'd stayed too long. He had a bad drinking problem, and I finally--we just decided we couldn't take it any longer, and let him go. It was the same way with all the other help in the house. There were several young girls. In my little over two years there, I think we fired eight cooks. It was terrible.

Q: Of different nationalities?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, all kinds. Anything. Anything that was free and could fry an egg, we'd give it a try. So the servant problem was a trial all the time that we were there.

Q: Bad luck, or any other special reason?

BONBRIGHT: I think so. We just couldn't get it going. We inherited a bad situation, but I don't think we improved it much.

The problem was somewhat the same at the chancellery. The Chargé d'affaires, as I mentioned, was Andrew Donovan, who was not a very senior officer, and who was about to be retired. There was no economic officer at all. One did come very shortly after I did. There was no counselor, which is number two in an embassy, which is probably the most important man in the shop. The only one I could really lean on was a junior second secretary named William Owen. He was a very hard-working, studious fellow, and was a great help to me. I thought the State Department had done badly to let the embassy get into such poor shape, but there was nothing for it to do but carry on with what we had.

Q: How would that blame be allocated--on administration? On the desk, or on the ambassador who was there previously, who didn't soup it up?

BONBRIGHT: Well, I think there was enough blame to go around. It just wasn't well managed. Some of it may have been bad luck, I don't know, but it was a pretty poor outfit.

One of the bright spots for me was the head of the CIA station, a man named Paul Birdsall. He and his wife we had known very well, were close friends in Paris days, and we continued to get on very well. He seemed to know exactly what I should be made aware of, of his doings, and I was also aware of things that was better not to have me know. So we had a very good relationship that way, and understood each other, and got on fine. When he left the second year, unfortunately, things changed for the worse. I don't even remember who his replacement was, but I know that I saw very little of him, and he of me.

I might as well mention that we also had a social secretary, a girl named Benita Ramel, who was an American married to a Swede. Her father-in-law--I forget his exact title, but he was the introducer of ambassadors, that sort of thing, and knew everybody. So she was very helpful in getting us started right and seeing that we didn't make a lot of false moves.

Q: Are Swedes, in the social circles, aloof and haughty, or do they loosen up? Are they difficult to get close to?

BONBRIGHT: Well, I find it hard to be categorical on that subject. Generally speaking, things go slowly. You cannot thrust yourself upon them and expect them to open their arms to you when you get there. They are very formal people, and, in some respects, quite cold. Having said that, I will add that I had a few who I considered very good friends there. The best friend I had among the Swedes was Victor Hasselblad and his wife. He was the inventor of the famous Hasselblad camera, and made the one that our people took to the moon. He was not, to me, very Swedish. That may sound like a snub. Maybe it is; I don't know. They were delightful people and very nice, kind to us, and I think we had more pleasant and interesting times with them than we did with any other Swedes.

I think it was a mistake to let Francis White retire after he--I similarly think it was a mistake for me, at the end, to leave after only, I think, a little over two years, two years and a quarter. I don't say that to mean that the Swedes loved us; it's just that it takes time for the Swedes. To be most effective, I think an ambassador ought to stay there a good four years, anyway, four or five. Anything more than that, he may begin to get stir-crazy, but less than four seems to me that a man will not reach his most effective stage in dealing with them.

Being in the foreign office in Sweden was no fun. The foreign minister was Professor Undane, a very cold fish, and surrounded by a lot of other cold fish. It struck me that Swedes, in general, are much more affable and reasonable and easy to get on with when they're abroad. There's something about it, when they go back to their home base, they reacquire their stiffness and coldness. It's an unfortunate trait. I noticed it particularly with the Swedish ambassador to the United States, Eric Boheman, who had been here for many, many years, he and his wife are great friends of the Achesons, and knew everybody here. He was a delightful, very bright man. Back in Sweden, he was just a pain. We'd see them occasionally, but he became just one of the worst Swedes. I related this later to the Achesons, and they found it hard to believe, but it was true.

Q: What about relations, in the circles you moved in, between women and men? Are Swedish women sort of discontented, or do they put up a good front? Swedish men are sort of macho and arrogant, aren't they?

BONBRIGHT: Well, yes. I found the women much easier to get on with; we both did. They didn't seem to have a chip always on their shoulder. There were some very charming ones there. Yes, definitely, I felt the women were the leavening part of the combination of Swedes. Without them, it would have been really rugged.

Of course, everything was very correct. One of the outstanding features of life in Stockholm was the virtue that is made of promptness. You might get away with being five minutes late if the traffic was bad or you had a good excuse. Any longer than that was flat out. Often we would drive over to somebody's house for dinner, and we'd see the guests parading in front of the house at three minutes to 7:00, say, and as the clocks were striking 7:00, everybody made a shot for the door, and in we went.

Q: No Mediterranean habits of coming in half an hour late.

BONBRIGHT: No way! Frankly, that was a trait that appealed to me very much. I hate lateness. I hate being late, I hate others being late, and I thought it was one of the more endearing Swedish qualities, just right on the dot.

Q: Sweden, being neutral traditionally, were their greatest fears the great Russian bear, or didn't they have fears? Did they feel pretty secure?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, I don't think they felt very secure. I think they were pretty uncomfortable. Not only that, but they had the added discomfort of having their fellow Scandinavians looking down on them. They were the only ones, of course, that were not directly involved in the war, and I don't think the Norwegians and Danes let them forget it. It was very clear when I was there, still, although, again, there was a solidarity between the Scandinavians, certain fields in which they worked very closely together. But the war experience was not helpful to the Swedes.

One of the things that resulted from the war, though, everyone before the war spoke German as a second language, and when I was there, it had pretty well turned around so that everybody spoke English. It was a complete turn-about.

Q: Were they proud of the Swedish emigration to the West and Northwest, or didn't pay much attention to it?

BONBRIGHT: No, they made quite a lot of it. They made quite a lot of it. Of course, there again, like the Portuguese, the advantages of this were played up by the embassy here, who got all the mileage out of it that they could. It was less evident from the other side.

Q: I had a secretary who had served in Stockholm and came to Tel Aviv. On her level, she remarked that on social occasions, mixing, that the Swedes would come dressed to the nines, and by midnight, their ties would be disheveled, and they would be plastered completely. Do they drink a lot?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, they drink a lot. They drink a lot. One shouldn't get too strong impressions from reading novels, I don't think, but I did read one book about ancient Sweden before I got there. It was called The Long Ships. I forget who wrote it. It was back in the Viking--or "Veeking," as they call it--times. It struck me all through this thing that there were some admirable qualities, bravery and all, but lurking everywhere was this streak of cruelty. And I think that's still there. It's in the blood somehow. A Swede would rather not use a rapier on you, or nick you with something; he'd rather hit you over the head with a shovel.

Q: And let you suffer.

BONBRIGHT: They really go after it in a brutal way. There's nothing hidden or subtle about it. They really let you have it. It was one of the things that made me sorry for my successor, an old friend named J. Graham Parsons, Jeff Parsons. We'd been fishing and shooting together for 30 years, and I was, of course, pleased when I had to go, to be succeeded by a friend. But his timing was most unfortunate, because the Vietnam thing was heating up. I got a certain amount of flak about it, but he arrived when it was really getting bad, and he had been ambassador to Laos, and had been Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. So they were loading for bear when he arrived. I think he would have had a happier and maybe even more effective time--he had six years of it--if

he had rolled with the punches a little bit more. But having been intimately connected with that whole Far East thing for a number of years, he just couldn't take it. So when he got criticized for something which he knew was wrong, he let them have it back.

Q: Are you talking about the press or the foreign ministry, or both?

BONBRIGHT: Everywhere. Everywhere. Well, just a few days ago, when the Swedish Prime Minister was killed, Olaf Palme, one article I saw in a Washington paper said he was more American than Swedish, and said that he had all these friendly feelings toward the United States, he'd spent a lot of time here as a young man in college and different things. Hell, he was our worst enemy! I couldn't believe my eyes. I looked at the front page of The Washington Post, and here were hard cases like Henry Kissinger and Senator Ted Kennedy wiping tears from their eyes over the death of this son of a bitch! I am sorry he ended the way he did, of course, because that he was a great friend of this country, he simply wasn't. It annoys me to have him have sainthood thrust upon him by our press and politicians. When I was there, he was the private secretary of the prime minister, who was Tage Erlander. He I admired and liked. He was not a terribly warm man, but as Swedes go, he was. He was friendly and good, I thought, in many ways. Of course, he headed that Social Democratic group that has been in power, minus a few years here and there, for a long, long time in Sweden.

Q: When you were there, had that post-war influx of foreign workers begun?

BONBRIGHT: I wasn't too aware of it, no. I think they had some.

Q: But they didn't have 33,000 Turks and that sort of thing.

BONBRIGHT: I don't think so. No, I don't think so.

The one man that I had a lot to deal with in the foreign office was a fellow named Eric von Sydow. He's a cousin of the Swedish movie actor, Max von Sydow. He was an economic expert, particularly, and we started off in a very bad footing. One of the problems that we had with the Swedes at that time was a lot of the Swedes were importing a lot of things that were of strategic interest.

Q: For transfer or for themselves?

BONBRIGHT: Oddly, for transfer to the Soviet blocs. We got a good deal on some of these fellows that were doing this, and our economic officer, when he came, a fellow named Ralph Hunt, would go and call on these companies and try to argue with them and talk to them. I don't think Hunt was the most diplomatic officer I ever met, but dealing with Swedes on a subject like that isn't the easiest job in the world either. These companies, of course, screamed bloody murder, and I got involved, because they complained to me about Hunt. Finally, one day I said to von Sydow, "I'm at very cross purposes on this thing. You have some information, apparently, that's not the same as

what we have. If you like, I'll come down some day to your office and bring Hunt along, and we'll just talk about it and see if we can sort out if there's anything here that we can do." I think that improved matters.

Well, Hunt and I went down, and von Sydow was there with one of his assistants. We started off all right. Then all of a sudden, von Sydow began yelling and accusing Hunt of acting improperly, and all of this, and after a couple of minutes, I couldn't take it anymore. I had to stop him. I said, "We're here at my own suggestion to discuss this thing, and you're acting as though you're a prosecuting attorney, criticizing this officer of mine. If this goes on, we're going to leave." And he quieted down, and we had a fairly reasonable meeting.

Then after that, he was the closest friend I had in the foreign office. Funny.

Q: Yes.

BONBRIGHT: Couldn't do enough. Too bad.

I'll just mention a few odds and ends that come to mind, that don't have any real connection, but just part of the picture. In the diplomatic corps, I had been lucky in Lisbon. The Chinese representative there came from Taiwan, and they didn't have any Russian representative, which suited everybody fine.

Q: Did they have an embassy without an ambassador, or nothing, in Stockholm?

BONBRIGHT: In Stockholm they had both. They had a man named Guseve, who was the Russian ambassador, really sort of a bear of a fellow, and the Red Chinese had an ambassador, too. Taiwan was out. I never had any run-ins or any problems with the Russian. We did the usual calling on each other, we each had the other for a meal, and that was that. It wasn't quite so easy with the Chinaman. He arrived there a couple of weeks after I did, so by the luck of the draw, he and I were doomed to be next to each other at every official function of the diplomatic corps, of which there were quite a few. I certainly had no desire to be allied with him, but I thought it was stupid for two grown men to have to stand together, time after time, or sit next to each other, time after time, without at least being civil. So at the first thing we went together, we sat down, he was next to me, and I turned to him and smiled and said, "Good morning." I didn't think I was making any great diplomatic gaffe. He looked as though he'd just stepped on a snake. His eyes looked up in surprise, and then he looked right through me. So from then on, so much for trying to be civilized, at least on a personal basis.

Q: But did you continue that way?

BONBRIGHT: Oh, yes. We continued all the rest of my time, sitting beside each other like a couple of cigar store Indians.

Q: That must have been his instructions.

BONBRIGHT: Oh, I don't know that he was given any instructions. I think he was just taking everything literally. We didn't have diplomatic relations, so we didn't exist. Certainly we never would have discussed anything officially. I wouldn't have. It's just when you sit next to somebody once a week, and not admit that he's alive didn't make much sense to me.

Q: Was there that East German-West German confrontation there? They weren't allowed to talk to each other for several years.

BONBRIGHT: I don't remember the East Germans being there.

Q: German Democratic Republic.

BONBRIGHT: Federale Allemagne, that's Western, isn't it? I don't know.

Q: But they weren't supposed to talk to each other for quite a while.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. I don't think they were there.

One of the people we saw quite a lot of socially was Estelle Bernadotte. She was the sister of an American, Eddie Manville, I think. Her husband had been killed in the Near East when he was there on a U.N. job, so she was a widow, a very pretty young woman, but no more humor than you could put into a thimble. She was very kind to us, and we saw a fair amount of her, but she lived a sort of sterile life after her husband died, just doing good and became very Swedish.

Q: Speaking of sense of humor, that is a great gaffe in the Swedish character, isn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, pretty much.

Q: Not enormous comedians there. You didn't find any.

BONBRIGHT: Not too many. Some you could laugh with about things, but they weren't spontaneous fun-makers by any means. They reminded me of--this really belongs in the story about Portugal, because it deals with Portuguese ideas and speeches and all. The Dutch minister there, a very bright man, was Kleffens, who was foreign minister. He once came to the American club and was going to make a speech, and he allowed as how he didn't know how to begin, because for the Portuguese, a speech with a joke was no speech, whereas an American, a speech without a joke...

Q: Were you hampered by invading congressmen and advisors, seeking favors?

BONBRIGHT: Not so much. Not so much. There were a few congressmen, but Sweden is a bit off the beaten path, and they weren't attracted there in droves. We had visits from various other people. We had a number of military visits, Admiral Burke, for instance, was one of the ones. We had the cruiser Northampton that came in. But these were sort of port calls and had no relationship with NATO. That was one thing that we had to steer very clear of. A lot of people just assumed that the Swedes were in NATO, because the Danes and Norwegians were, but they were not, and they were very touchy about it. In fact, once, I think, in the second year, our ambassador to NATO, Randolph Burgess, decided to while away some weeks in the summertime by taking a royal tour of Scandinavia, accompanied by military advisors, admirals and generals. He wrote to me asking if this would be all right. I had to write him back and tell him we'd be glad to have him and put him up, as long as he came wearing his economic hat, but that if he planned to come as NATO military, I was sorry, they couldn't do it. Well, he came anyway, by himself. It annoyed me a little bit. He was just having a little summer fun, and nothing came of his trip. He wasted the time with the Swedes, just one of those things that shouldn't have happened.

Q: Was the Swedish press sort of still and stuffy, or did they have a pretty free-wheeling press?

BONBRIGHT: No, I didn't think their press was very good. All sections of the Swedish, I think, have terrible chips on their shoulders, and they're always looking for trouble, and most difficult to take, as far as the high morals. They're the worst...

Q: Immoralists.

BONBRIGHT: ...back-seat drivers that I ever ran into. The further off Sweden was from responsibility for a given issue, the higher moral tone they took, of course, in condemning. That was one thing that made their attacks on the Vietnam War so easy, but they had nothing to do with it.

Q: They probably didn't even send one doctor, one medical unit.

BONBRIGHT: Probably.

I'll just put in this little insert. Just for the record, I officially entered on my duties on the ninth of January. This time we went up in style to the Palace.

Q. *What about the aspect of royalty in Sweden? Did it exceed that of Belgium? How was it? Was it very quiet and dignified?*

BONBRIGHT: Very. Very. Actually, they entertained quite a bit. Of course, the old king was a fine man. I forget his name now--Gustavus V Adolph, something like that. His queen was Louise, who was the sister of Lord Mountbatten, a very nice woman. They used to give dinners for the diplomatic corps now and then, which were very well done, a

real affair. The Queen used to have a waiter in uniform with a great tall plume, who always stood behind her chair and served her everything she ate. Nobody else could touch anything. Whether he was the taster, too, I don't know, but very chic. Then after dinner, everybody would have a few minutes for private talks with one and then another, and home at a fairly reasonable hour.

One awful thing that I should mention was the Nobel ceremonies. They lasted about three days, and always we would be very proud that there were Americans on the list. But those three days, nobody got out of their white tie and tails, which was a favorite Swedish fashion. To me, I had a horror of that. My last white tie affair in Sweden, I remember, and I haven't since put one on, and hope I never will. It was well done, though, the different ceremonies and receptions, then the actual presentation by the king. In the morning, getting into a tail coat at 10:00 o'clock in the morning was not fun, but we all did it. Then I went down to the reception. They were very stuffy about it, too. They got a lot of criticism, particularly the prize for literature very often (audible)).

Q: Going to somebody who had never been read by anybody outside of Albania.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Also the Peace Prize, but that was not in Stockholm; that was done in Oslo by the Norwegians.

One other visit I might mention was of Carl Sandburg, who was an impressive-looking, white-haired old man. I've seen a lot of vanity; I don't think anybody had as much as he. It was really quite appalling. I was disappointed, because I'd read a lot of his books, and wanted to like him, but I couldn't do it. He was playing up to the hilt his Swedish origins. The only pleasant thing I remember about it was I was asked down to the prime minister's country place for dinner and to spend the night. It was a delightful, easy occasion.

Q: Was Mrs. Sandburg alone, nee Steichen?

BONBRIGHT: No. Steichen was the brother-in-law, wasn't he?

Q: Yes, the photographer.

BONBRIGHT: Captain Steichen. Yes, he was along. I may be wrong, but I think Steichen was fed to the teeth with his brother-in-law, as far as I could see. I think he thought he rated at least equal, but by no means achieved it. I don't think Sandburg would have let him, even if he was in the running. He just looked sour most of the time and left out of it. I think he had his share of vanity, too, but nothing compared to Sandburg. Just awful.

Some of the things that came in the way of visits were our old friend from Hungarian days, Agi Sambor, the pianist, who gave a recital at the embassy, which was very successful.

Q: Is that the one who married Claude Rains?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that's the one. This was before. One of the theatrical experiences, we went to see "My Fair Lady," done in Swedish. I don't know why or how--I can't tell you how funny it seemed, totally inappropriate. The man who played the Rex Harrison role was just terrible! Of course, the Swedish language coming along with the music and so on was ludicrous, not funny the way it should be funny. The Jerome Robbins Ballet came there, also the New York Philharmonic.

Another visit that didn't give me much pleasure was our Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson.

Q: Now head of the Mormons.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I think. He was a sourpuss if you ever saw one. In fact, as is usual in these visits, the Department always sent a warning cable, giving the dates and many helpful hints they might have for entertainment of the great guest. In this notice, it was pointed out that the Secretary did not like to have liquor served in his presence. Well, you can imagine what effect that had on me. I never failed, on the few days he was there, to offer him a drink at all suitable occasions. He never accepted, but that didn't stop me serving others or having one myself. We went out in the country to visit farms and other interesting places that the Swedes had set up for him, and I don't know what was the matter with the man, I don't think he learned anything from the trip. He never stopped talking himself. He wasn't there to learn; he was there to lecture. I found it a rather incredible performance. I was happy when he left. He got nothing, nor did the United States.

I had some pleasant trips around the country. One, I went up to Kiruna, a mining town above the Arctic Circle. I went up with a labor attaché, whom I should have mentioned before, Vic Ulriksson, who was first-class and very, very interesting in many, many ways. He was a close friend of Arne Geiger, the head of the Swedish trade union, and a very, very powerful, influential man in the labor movement and in the Social Democratic Party. Vic and Hunt, the economic advisor, and I went up to Kiruna for a couple of days. Of course, it was pretty damn dark, and going through the mines was pretty dismal. That's the town, you know, when the ore was shipped out, instead of coming down the Baltic, down from Sweden, was shipped across to Norway and came out at Narvik. But what the Swedes had done there, it was a very rich mine, so they had lots of money, and spent it. They built this enormous swimming pool with saunas, for everybody that helped them, children and grownups, everybody, through these terrible winters up there. I thought it was a very wonderful thing.

Then I had some nice trips with my friends the Hasselblads. He lived, actually, in Gothenburg, which the Swedes call Goteborg, at a place called Rao. It was a charming place. We went down there a couple of times. Vicky was a great birder. One of the finest examples was a bird book on hummingbirds, written by a man named Clifford Greenewalt, with Du Pont, I think.

Q: Yes, Clifford Greenewalt of Delaware.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It's a glorious book of photographs, hummingbirds in flight. Anyway, he was a great birder.

Once, from there, in the middle of the summer, he took us by boat around to Marstrand, which was the scene of the annual sailboat races, lovely to see, with the old castle, about as informal as the Swedes get. Another time we went to the island of Oland off the east coast, presumably to shoot while we walked around the fields for a couple of days, but I don't think anybody fired a gun. The interesting part was that the island of Oland was on the main flyway of thousands and thousands of birds, warblers. The southern tip of the island was covered with these nets, and they were netting the birds of migration and tagging them, then releasing them. Anybody who was interested in birding was fascinated.

Q: Is Lapland at the top of Sweden, or the top of Norway?

BONBRIGHT: I think they both have a bit of it. Laps inhabit the northern reaches of both countries.

Q: They're a different race, aren't they, American Indian?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, Eskimo, a mixture. Without reindeer, I guess they'd have a tough time, or even a tougher time than they do.

Just a couple of other little things I'll mention, of no importance. One was in August, I think it's the eighth, they have a sort of holiday, where everybody eats crayfish and drink beer until it's coming out their ears. It's a rather disgusting orgy, is what it amounts to, a summer holiday. It took me some time to learn to like crayfish again, after that.

I should have mentioned earlier, too, one of the nice things about Sweden. I don't think I ever saw anywhere people who were so in love with their country. In a very real sense, it's a beautiful country, and Swedes just adore it. I never met a Swede that wouldn't prefer to have his little cottage, 10 foot square, somewhere in the woods of the country, who would rather have that than a Rolls Royce or anything of that sort. They really love the outdoors.

I might add one word about the life in the city, including Stockholm. We think we have it not so good in spots, but for gangs operating at night, the Swedes have lots of bad boys on the prowl. We were fortunate that our residence was situated on the outskirts of town. Of course, we had Swedish policemen out front all the time. But in the parks in town, sometimes these gangs would simply take over. The people who lived down there had the prettiest parks in the middle of town, who virtually didn't dare go out to walk the dog. They were afraid of being beaten up. No protection. Very, very bad.

Q: Were they natives?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, sir. They were Swedes. Very, very tough.

Q: So the welfare state has its own crime wave.

BONBRIGHT: Very much so. Very much so. I suppose it still does.

Date: April 17, 1986

Q: Good morning, Ambassador Bonbright, on this rainy Thursday.

BONBRIGHT: Good morning. This has nothing to do with anything of importance, but I thought I might just mention at this point that it was while we were in Stockholm that I took up a hobby which I've had fun with for a good many years, and that was fine needlepoint. I used to get quite a lot of pleasure out of it. I used to make my own designs and work on small canvas with silk. That cushion over there is mine.

Q: That's interesting.

BONBRIGHT: You might see the bag in the hall; that's mine.

Q: How long does it take to do something like this?

BONBRIGHT: It takes a couple of months.

Q: Is it hard on the eyes?

BONBRIGHT: I have this special light that has a magnifying glass in it, and the light shines through, so you can hold the work underneath that and see very much better. Otherwise, I wouldn't possibly do it that fine. That's 24 to the inch, so that's quite small. I used to get up at 6:00 o'clock in the morning and work at it for an hour. I found it relaxing.

Q: Do you still do some?

BONBRIGHT: No, I've stopped. I've still got plenty of silks hanging around, but I haven't done it now for quite a while.

Q: These are silk threads?

BONBRIGHT: That's silk, English silk.

Q: That was the medium you preferred?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, I like that.

Q: If you were doing it commercially, you could make quite a bit, couldn't you?

BONBRIGHT: I could make some, but I don't think, considering the hours, I think it would have to be so expensive that nobody would buy it.

Q: Did you have to take instruction on needlepoint?

BONBRIGHT: No, no. I just fiddled with it and got better.

The activities in Stockholm. I visited both the University of Lund in Malmo and Uppsala, probably the most famous of the Swedish universities, giving speeches there.

Also, I forgot to mention, when I was in Portugal, they had drawn up the habit of having what they call a chief of mission meeting in Paris every year.

Q: For the Western Europeans.

BONBRIGHT: All of Europe would gather. This gave everybody a little break, and it would last a couple of days. We'd have plenary sessions, and different people would make a brief presentation about the situation in their area. I didn't make any. When I was in Stockholm particularly, the senior officer, from the point of view of time, from Scandinavia, was Frances Willis, who was my old friend from Brussels days, and who was at that time ambassador to Norway and had been there much longer than I had. She gave the Scandinavian briefing.

Q: That was her second post. She'd been in Switzerland first? Or did she go to Switzerland later? She went to Berne at one time.

BONBRIGHT: I know she did. I couldn't say which order they were. I think she went to Switzerland...

Q: I remember there were eyebrows raised when they selected that post for her to a country without suffrage.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. It did look like a bad bet, but I think it turned out pretty well. I always heard that she was very well regarded there. No, I think Norway was her last post. That's my guess.

It was nice to have these get-togethers once a year in Paris, and we had lots of gossip to exchange, and we ate very well and drank very well, too.

Q: Who was the ambassador, the old career person who wrote a book about his memoirs, in which he said the best embassy he ever had was the smallest one, and that was Czechoslovakia? He had 13 people in that, and that was a good ship to run.

BONBRIGHT: I see what he meant, and I think I would be inclined to agree with him, that the smaller ones are much more fun. I don't remember who that was, unless it was Alexis Johnson, perhaps?
Q: I don't think so.

BONBRIGHT: Alexis was there. Horsey was there, but I don't know that he wrote any books. Maybe Ellis Briggs.

Q: That's who it was, yes, Ellis Briggs. That's who it was.

BONBRIGHT: Sounds like Ellis, yes.

As far as the wine was concerned, I didn't need to go to Paris. The Swedes ran a monopoly in Stockholm, and they imported all the very best French wines, to be bought there not too unreasonably. I was surprised that they had this.

Q: The state-run liquor store?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, state-run, and very well run indeed.

Q: By people who knew.

BONBRIGHT: By choice. Knowledgeable. So no problem there in that respect.

Another pleasant occasion in Stockholm was the visit of the King and Queen of Thailand. They had several very colorful ceremonies, which were enjoyable. One that sticks in my memory was an evening at the Drottningholm Theater. This is a very old building, beautifully restored and kept up, small as a theater, and desperately uncomfortable. But it was a charming setting for all the plays and things. They put on a brilliant evening for the Thai couple.

Q: Were they the young and glamorous King and Queen, or were they senior people? They aren't the ones that are around now.

BONBRIGHT: No, they couldn't be. No. As I remember, they were not.

Q: Is that the theater where Eugene O'Neill's plays were played, the Drottningholm? His widow, the literary executress, arranged for Sweden to have the rights to produce unfinished plays and so forth.

BONBRIGHT: I couldn't say. I don't remember. I don't think any of them were put on there in my time.

Q: Those dour, pessimistic plays were more suited to the Swedish nature than "My Fair Lady."

BONBRIGHT: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. A funny thing.

Another thing that interested me very much there, and I was sorry I wasn't there to see the end of it, was the raising of the old warship Vasa. They had located it right in Stockholm Harbor, down very deep in the mud. They had pulled up, taken some artifacts from it, which were interesting to see. The ship was built in 1628, and was to be the flagship of the fleet. On her first sailing, they had the crew on board and their families, lots of people, and they started off, and the ship turned over and sank with everybody on board.

Q: In the 17th century?

BONBRIGHT: In the 17th century. Not a very good advertisement for the Swedish naval architects of the time, I didn't think. It was a great tragedy. This unusual ending had been of interest to historians for a long time. They decided then to try to raise it. They went at it very carefully and scientifically, with great care, and little by little, they put things underneath it, slowly. Of course, they tried this because they could see it was beautifully preserved.

Q: It must have been of wooden construction.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, wooden construction. Now they've got it out, and have actually built a museum around it, I believe, which I've never seen, of course. I've never seen the ship, but I would have enjoyed being there to see that come out of the water.

Q: That must have been about the time of Peter the Great and Charles XII.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, 1628.

Q: So it capsized on its first...

BONBRIGHT: Very first outing. Pretty bad. I think they must have been drunk as goats.

Q: And all on one side.

BONBRIGHT: All on one side. Terrible thing.

We are getting closer to my departure. I might as well say a few words about that. First of all, I should say we had our dinner for the King and Queen in the winter of '61. This was customary for ambassadors to entertain them at dinner, but under very carefully staged

circumstances. To suggest an invitation before you'd been there two years would have been regarded as grossly inappropriate, and I didn't go much beyond my two years, but I wasn't sure how long I was going to be there, and since I was within the prescribed time, I did go to Admiral Vetter, who was the head of the King's household. I explained to him that we would be happy to do this whenever it was considered appropriate. So it was set up, and we had it, I think, on the third of February. Yes, the third of February. It went very well, it was very nice.

Q: Did Queen Louise bring that servant with the plume, who served her?

BONBRIGHT: No, she didn't bring the plumed fellow along. They were very nice.

Q: Who would you have for such a party--other senior ambassadors?

BONBRIGHT: No, we didn't have any other foreigners; just Swedes. I had to go over the list with Admiral Vetter, and, to my disappointment, had one, Victor Hasselblad...

Q: As you were saying, Admiral Vetter said no.

BONBRIGHT: This surprised me. I never was able to figure out why, because he was well and favorably known in the country, reasonably competent in his work with his cameras and all, and I had never heard a word against him by anybody.

Q: It might not have been something sinister; it might have been that he had dinner the night before with him or something.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. There was one other. This one didn't bother me, but it bothered the Swedes. I had to inform Admiral Vetter that one of the invitees had declined. I could feel the electricity through the telephone, and he immediately wanted to know who it was. It was the banker, Marcus Wallenberg. There again, why, I don't know. But it was not nice for me, and it was really an insult to the King, and I think it was so taken. I don't know why.

Q: Strange.

BONBRIGHT: Strange. He didn't say he was going to be out of town or anything. Anyway, those are just small little contretemps.

I don't know when the custom began, but it certainly had been going on a long time, that when there is a change of administration at home, every chief of missions is expected--in fact, is requested--to submit his resignation in writing to the newly-elected President.

Q: It's directly to the President, but goes to the Department.

BONBRIGHT: It goes to the Department to hold, and then when the new man is in, he's got the idea that he should have a free slate to accept or not. This, I don't think, ever caused much trouble, although I have heard of a couple of politicos that didn't like the idea very much.

Q: There's a couple now, according to the newspapers. The ambassador in Hungary doesn't want to leave.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. Well, he hasn't got his resignation in the President's hands because of an election.

Q: Other reasons.

BONBRIGHT: I suppose. But this letter business is required, even if the same President was re-elected. You again gave him the chance, just the same as if he hadn't run and a new President was elected.

Q: Is this a short form letter, or can you write page after page? Does everybody write a different letter?

BONBRIGHT: They send you a suggested form, but are careful to point out that if you want to, you can say anything you like.

The sample letter which was sent to all chief of missions, regardless whether they were career or political:

"Dear Mr. President,

In keeping with what I understand to be the established custom, that presidential appointees submit their resignation to the newly-elected President at the beginning of his administration, I tender my resignation as ambassador extraordinaire and plenipotentiary to Sweden for your consideration.

Faithfully yours."

Those were all sent in to the State Department, addressed to the President-elect, "and should be sent in by December 1, 1960, postdated January 20," which was the inauguration. It was also said, "You may frame your letter in your own words if you wish." I guess that's what was used.

I, of course, had no idea whether I would be accepted or declined. My letter I had written in '56, while in Portugal, had not been acted on. As a matter of fact, I don't remember that there was ever any answer to it.

Q: You just stayed.

BONBRIGHT: You just stayed. But this time the answer finally came. On February 17, I got a telegram, saying that my resignation had been accepted. I was a little disappointed, because I thought I really hadn't been there long, but it wasn't a serious blow. I was quite, quite ready to retire.

Q: The President had nothing to do with it. That was State Department maneuvering, wasn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Well, the President certainly had a team that was working on appointments. I heard--I don't know if it was true or not--that Chester Bowles, who had been ambassador to India, I think, from an advertising firm, had had a good deal to say in going over the list and saying who was to stay and who was not. I never got an answer, so I don't know. I imagine they required a few fingers in that particular pie.

Q: Does that mean that your successor was a friend of Bowles's or a friend of the President?

BONBRIGHT: No, not necessarily. As it turned out, he was a very close friend of mine--Geoff Parsons, with long experience in the Far East. People who served in the Far East area for a long time used to be given a break every so many years. They were taken out and sent to Europe or South America, some other part of the world, so they could get a change.

So when I got his name and was asked to seek the agreement for his appointment as my successor, I was a little surprised, because he had no connection, of course, with Scandinavia at the time. But I was also very pleased. I had feared that they'd probably be sending another used car salesman, somebody of that caliber. So naturally, I was pleased that they were sending a career officer, and one that I knew well and admired.

Q: What is the custom? I've only observed it briefly, but there's never a holdover of ambassadors. I mean, you stay two weeks with a new ambassador. There's always a separation. Why is that?

BONBRIGHT: Well, I suppose it's to keep them from fighting. But I don't know.

Q: But that's true, isn't it?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, it's true. You do not overlap with the other fellow.

Q: That's what I mean--overlap.

BONBRIGHT: In fact, it's considered very bad form if you even appear in that same country that you've just left, for a considerable period of time. It was a small matter, and I didn't give a damn, but when I went to Lisbon, Guggenheim was in town. He'd come back to go to a wedding. It was all right. He and his wife were there, and I asked them in for a drink, and they came for a little visit and so on. But by Service standards, that was very bad form on his part; he shouldn't have been anywhere near there when I was coming to present my letters.

Q: A career person wouldn't have done that.

BONBRIGHT: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

When the foreign minister and the prime minister gave a dinner for us, after this farewell, a very small and very nice, agreeable occasion...

Q: Was that Erlander?

BONBRIGHT: Erlander was the prime minister; Uldane was the foreign minister. But Uldane lost no time in his remarks, a brief toast after dinner, to say that he couldn't understand our system, whereby we kept moving people around just when they were beginning to know the country a little bit. He made it pretty clear that he didn't like it. That was not because he was in love with my blue eyes. When I replied to him, I said that I never felt that it was the place for an ambassador to criticize what his own government was doing, but in this case, I was happy to agree with the foreign minister.

All countries are touchy in some way, and little countries, I think, have a bigger chip on their shoulder than big ones. The big ones can afford to pass over a little thing like this, just brush it off. Smaller countries are quicker to take offense, they're more sensitive, and they've got a point. It has always seemed to me that I've not noticed this in other countries. It may be so, but in our country, we seem to be choosing of our people to go abroad as chiefs of mission. In the choices and in the manner of acting, we seem never to take into account the feelings of the people and of the government that they're dealing with. Everything is from the point of view of the domestic political situation, how they want to handle it, whether they'll leak it to the press, or any old bits. It's unfortunate. With just a little effort, we could avoid these hurt feelings on something which is of no importance.

Q: There are several flimsy premises, too, aren't there? Like a country doesn't necessarily, like Italy, want an Italian American, or that sort of thing.

BONBRIGHT: I think so. I think when they sent Volpe to Italy, for instance, I thought that was pretty bad, a man who can go back to his old country and show that "here's one

of your boys who made good in the United States, and now look at me." No, that's poor. The reason sometimes given, and occasionally is not bad, is that you've got somebody who knows the language.

Q: Of course, not always very well.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that's true, but in many cases, yes. For instance, I could never complain when they sent Reischauer to Japan. He had such long and deep connections there. It made a certain amount of sense.

Q: And he had a Japanese wife.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that's right.

Q: Apparently, until just a few years ago, I don't know that it was written anywhere, but American Jews were never sent to Israel, on the ground that there would be pressures on them psychologically.

BONBRIGHT: I think that's very sound, myself.

Q: But now there's no bar on that.

BONBRIGHT: I don't know.

Q: There isn't. Now there are Jewish labor attachés and economic officers and so forth. But the Israelis told me they would never want an American Jew as ambassador.

BONBRIGHT: I can quite see why, because they can get some backlash out of that.

Q: And you wouldn't want to send a Catholic to the Vatican. But the Department, in sending career people, there's so much room for mistakes in political appointees, but you must have seen some examples of the Department sending the wrong career people to the wrong place for ambassadorial posts, when you knew of someone who was more qualified or could have done better. Was it all studied very carefully, or was there sort of "eeny-meeny-miney-mo" approach?

BONBRIGHT: Well, you didn't have all that many to choose from. I mean, if a post came open today somewhere, you wouldn't probably have more than four or five Foreign Service officers, if that many, who were then themselves available, not otherwise engaged, or would be in line for that kind of promotion. Surely there have been lots of Foreign Service officers who were assigned to places where things went very badly. A case in point was an embassy officer in Sweden, I hadn't asked for him, but I knew of him slightly. He was a very bright, very energetic man, primarily interested in economic affairs, particularly international, multilateral economic setups. After I left Stockholm, he stayed on for a while, and then he was made chief of mission to a small country. Well, I

don't know what actually happened, but I know he got into trouble and came out of there with a lot of egg on his face. Something was wrong, I suppose, with the system, but I never felt he should have been an ambassador, although he was a kind of man who should be given a difficult economic problem, and then put him off in a room and let him work it out by himself. He was no good with people, and he didn't get on particularly well with foreigners or Americans. He was sent to Stockholm to be under a career chief for his first foreign assignment, to sort of learn the ABCs. Well, he was a terribly energetic fellow, and he was determined to learn everything there was about the running of that embassy, where pencils were sharpened, and he drove everybody crazy. So what do you do with a fellow who has no sense dealing with people and yet has a good mind on certain things? If he concentrated on that, he'd do a fine job. I don't know the answer.

Q: Some countries, like Germany, I believe, have only had one or two or three political appointee ambassadors; all the rest are career. It doesn't mean they're all perfect by any means.

BONBRIGHT: No, indeed.

Q: They can have mediocrities, but it has a consistency to it in that system.

BONBRIGHT: I don't think ours is working well. There are too many bad choices. I don't think I ever met a Foreign Service officer who would argue or felt that every ambassador should be a Foreign Service officer--never. What they uniformly dislike, though, is this picking of obviously unqualified people over a man who is, at least, a professional. I mean, when a man like David Bruce was appointed, or Ellsworth Bunker--I could name a dozen of them--the Foreign Service officers were enchanted, delighted. The appointments made sense, and the men were distinguished in a field where foreign policy counted. That sort of thing was fine. But this party hack business is no good at all.

Q: Depending on the size of the contribution.

BONBRIGHT: Very largely, or some political favor.

Q: Five or 10,000 might get you Iceland, but 200 or 300,000 will get you a larger post.

BONBRIGHT: One small case amused me, but I was in the middle of it. When Eisenhower first came in, in '53, I was in the Department. A letter came to the President from Pearl Mesta, who had been ambassador to Luxembourg, unhappily for the Luxembourgers. She wrote this sort of fawning letter to the President, ignoring the fact that she was a political appointee and had been appointed by the Democrats, saying that she would be happy to stay on and work for his administration. She wrote that she would stay on, if that was desired. The letter ended up on my desk, with a little note to prepare a reply for the President, which I did with glee, because I had absolutely no admiration for the lady. When I got through with my drafting job, I looked at it and said, "Oh, God, this is all terribly negative. I ought to lighten this up somehow, a little bit." So I tacked on a

paragraph at the end. I had heard that Eisenhower had gone to Luxembourg when Eisenhower was Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and had been entertained there. So I stuck on a little paragraph saying that he recalled with pleasure the visit to Luxembourg, when she'd been kind enough to have him for dinner, or whatever it was. I thought with that, maybe the pill would be swallowed.

The word came back from the White House that that had been accepted up to the last paragraph, which was deleted in toto. Not a kind word in it. I thought it was unnecessarily rough, even for somebody that was no good. However, that wasn't my worry.

We're talking about ambassadors, I guess, and political appointments. I don't know that I have anything much more to add on that.

Q: I remember one political appointment which apparently had some good effect. Under Lyndon Johnson, a man by the name of Feldman, who had made a fortune in surplus ships, was made ambassador to Malta. Well, Malta was in a depressed state because their ports were not being used, and he used his shipping connections to get people to go there. A career person might not have been able to do that.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that's true.

Q: That's unusual.

BONBRIGHT: Yes, that's a happy little by-product, as we don't often see.

One of the things, again a small matter, that had struck me before, beginning when I was in Lisbon, I often noticed that the French Embassy, the British Embassy, even the Swiss legation there, had many things in the form of books and pictures that had been obviously collected through the years, that gave a special charm to these buildings. When I was appointed to Lisbon, and again at Stockholm, I had a roof over my head, but that's about all. There was nothing that was left in either of these houses that would give even a hint that it had been occupied before by decent human beings, who had any feeling for the place.

Q: These places that you refer to, that had atmosphere, were those acquisitions or loans from museums?

BONBRIGHT: I think most of them were acquisitions that had gone on loan. Now, on our side, this business of loaning pictures out to embassies and legations hadn't really got rolling yet; it had just begun. I think that made an enormous difference. I think it was a very good program, and I'm only sorry it didn't start sooner. But in our case, there just wasn't anything. I felt if you're going to have any feeling of tradition and past in an embassy, there ought to be some evidence of somebody caring and adding. So in both posts, I couldn't do much. Well, I should say, before that, in places like London and Paris,

very rich people had contributed all sorts of things--buildings, particularly buildings, I think.

Q: Barbara Hutton and Regent Park.

BONBRIGHT: Yes. So that was fine for those big places, and Italy, I think. So I thought I would start in both places, which I did. I don't know if anybody's ever kept it up or not, but in both embassies, I left a gift of five of my Audubon prints, and I also had made a collection, which wasn't extensive, but of all the books on Portugal and Sweden in English that I could find--modern, old. I had a bookplate made, which I put in these books. So a new fellow coming could at least go to a bookcase and find something to read about the country. There wasn't a wide choice, but I thought it might start something.

Q: Did the Department have its own unit which purchased furniture and so forth? That didn't come under General Services Administration, did it?

BONBRIGHT: No. It was that fellow Fritz Larkin, Foreign Buildings Office. I think I talked about him briefly before. If you were on his good books, he could get some things done for you, but everything was on a very small scale. Next to the counterpart money, we were able to do quite a lot in the way of buildings.

Q: I think in recent years they've had consulting groups of architects to design buildings throughout the world, but that's come to a halt now, when you need a fortress.

BONBRIGHT: That's right.

Q: You'd need a redoute and portholes to fire through.

BONBRIGHT: Absolutely. Terrible. I don't think there's much more to say, Peter.

Q: Did you have another assignment when you came back?

BONBRIGHT: No. It was suggested to me that they had nothing to offer me at the time, and that I was eligible for retirement, if I wanted to take it. I took it at once. I was only 58 years old, so, technically, I could have stayed on for another seven years, but if I wasn't going to have a mission of my own, the choices of jobs were pretty restricted. Just before I went to Lisbon, I could have gone in the inspection corps. There were a few things like that that could be done that would kill a year or two, if you wanted to. I had several friends in the Service who did just that. They needed the money. They wanted to hang on as long as they could. I was lucky enough that I could live comfortably without having to have this job. Not only this, but I thought it was a little undignified just to hang on, particularly when I didn't need to, so I said, "No, I'll go." And I was very glad I did it.

Q: Then you make room for somebody else on the way up. As you look back, was there one or two assignments, if the world were perfect, that you might have had, that you

would have loved to have had? Did you ever have your eye on a certain place in the world?

BONBRIGHT: Well, it wasn't fixed on anything, but I had such a good time with my nine years working on Canada, that I occasionally thought it would be nice to go back there as ambassador, but it never happened, and it's probably just as well. That's the only one.

Q: There were vast areas that didn't interest you. You never cared for South America.

BONBRIGHT: I never set foot in it, and never wanted to, which shows a small mind, I guess, but anyway, I wasn't drawn to it at all.

Q: Did Australia ever appeal to you?

BONBRIGHT: Not terribly. I once was under consideration in the Department for South Africa. It wasn't put to me straight, but I never encouraged anybody. I would have liked it, I think, in many ways, at that time. It was interesting, lots of outdoor life and all. But it seemed a long way off and, frankly, my wife wasn't well. I didn't think it was a very good idea.

As a matter of fact, my happiest days in the Service were when I was working in the State Department, rather than abroad. That's quite the reverse of the usual Foreign Service experience. I knew many of them who worked in the Department who could hardly wait for the time to be up so they could get out in the field again. I didn't feel that way about it at all. I found that the Department was the center of where things counted and were dealt with, and never a dull moment. It was hard, it was considerably harder work than anything in the field that I had had, but I liked it.

Q: Is this a fair criticism, that when somebody has been an ambassador somewhere for some length of time, and has accumulated considerable knowledge and influence and contacts, it has struck me that the Department pays no more attention to the person. I was thinking particularly of Wally Barbour, 12 years in Israel, and after he--I think he went into retirement--Golda Meir would call him up, and other people, but I wasn't aware, I wasn't in a position to know, but the Department no longer consulted him as a leading American authority on Israel. Does that happen, or am I being unfair?

BONBRIGHT: I don't know what they do now, but my feeling has always been that from the day you retire, you're a dead duck. Life moves on.

Q: But if there's nobody to compare with your knowledge of a certain problem or area, that seems terribly remiss.

BONBRIGHT: Well, you always think that there's somebody who does, who is capable of doing it.

Q: For example, I would hazard a guess that there's a considerable number of people in the Kremlin who will continue to ask Dobrynin about "What does this mean in the United States?"

BONBRIGHT: Oh, I would think definitely, but then that's what he's been brought back for. He's in. The line just moved up. So I think that's quite natural. He's not outside the stream.

Q: When you got out of Harvard, was it a rare thing, that year or the approximate time at Harvard, to go into Foreign Service, or were several of the people in your class, before and after, also Foreign Service officers?

BONBRIGHT: There was a sprinkling. I went into the Service with a fellow named Vinton Chapin, who, actually, was the class of '23, two years ahead of me in Harvard. We lived together down here and studied for the exam at the same time. Chip Bohlen was a couple of years behind me at Harvard, Ray Hare. There were a fair number from Harvard that generally came, and quite a few from Princeton, like Kennan and Butterworth. I forget, but there were more than a drop in a bucket. Of course, when I came in, the Department was under criticism for having this so-called elitist East Coast Ivy League tinge. I always felt that they should live up to the principles which they professed, that they were looking for the quality, the best that they could find, that it was secondary where they came from. Occasionally, though, if they could find someone whom they thought in all respects filled the bill, if he came from South Dakota, he would have been welcomed with very open arms.

Q: I guess it's true at a certain time that the more qualified people came from that nucleus in the East.

BONBRIGHT: I think so. They were people who were interested in it, facing the Atlantic.

Q: Sort of like the better, more talented Brits went to Oxford and Cambridge.

BONBRIGHT: Now, I guess, there are quite a few blacks. I don't know how many. They were still very definitely a great minority when I was in it, and also there are many more women now, I guess, than in my day.

Q: Speaking of blacks, I remember an outstanding fellow. He's now president of some university. He was on the National Security Council staff, and he was a Foreign Service officer with Bundy, and his name was Ulric Haynes. He left the Foreign Service and had a successful career, but he was later ambassador to Algeria. He came back from the business world and was a great help, working with Iran and getting the hostages out. I said, "Why are you going to leave the Foreign Service?" He was quite young.

He said, "If I'm a real good boy, when I'm 50 years old, I can be ambassador to Liberia." And that was about it.

BONBRIGHT: That was about it. Yes.

Q: There's an outstanding ambassador in Copenhagen now--Todman, who's black.

BONBRIGHT: Ambassador Holland in Sweden.

Q: He was a political appointee, wasn't he?

BONBRIGHT: Yes, he was. He headed a university, a first-rate man.

Q: Todman went from Spain to Copenhagen.

BONBRIGHT: To cut a long story short, we finally left Stockholm on the 20th of March, and flew down to Hamburg, where we shifted over to the steamship United States, and sailed from Bremerhaven the next day. It was restful and pleasant, but, again, a fairly rough passage, but we enjoyed it.

When we got to New York on the 27th, we had a problem with what to do with ourselves. The house which I had bought in 1950, at 2906 P Street, in Washington, was still leased, and a little hard to give them warning that we wanted to take it back when the lease expired. This wasn't due until the autumn, so we had no place to go. We decided that we would change, and spend a month in New York City, and got a nice bedroom and a little sitting room at the Hotel Stanhope.

Q: Yes, near the Metropolitan Museum.

BONBRIGHT: 81st and Fifth Avenue. This proved a very happy choice. It was a nice, quiet hotel. Being so close to the museum made it very easy to go there. Another place was easy, just across the street, to walk in Central Park, which we did a lot of and enjoyed. Then the rest of the time we went to all sorts of museums and theaters. We had a very agreeable time. I was glad of it, because I have never really had any fun in New York since. The city no longer holds any charm; it's just a dangerous jungle.

At the end of April, we went back up to the river, so I had that summer up there. Then we came back in September and moved into our house in Washington. It was an ironic ending, in a way. I had vowed, as a young man, that when I retired from the Foreign Service, I would never set foot again in this town, this city. I had taken a great dislike to it when I was here studying for the Service. Not the living, but I detested the jungle atmosphere of everybody trying to climb the ladder by clawing their way up on the backs of other people. I found it disgusting. So by the time I retired, I had the house here in Washington, I had really no other place to go. My parents were dead, and most of my friends of my youth were dissipated and gone. I had nothing to draw me back to Rochester, particularly, although I had my two sisters who lived there in the winters, over

in Nantucket, who were there. But Washington just seemed the place to stop as a point of resistance. So I've never regretted that.

Q: I think people who feel they should move because everybody else is supposedly doing something in the field that they were once active in, they don't think through a lot of problems, because if they travel around and say, "I think this would be a lovely place to live, Asheville, North Carolina," or Tryon, or Sante Fe, it's not that easy. It's brand-new, and how do you know you'll like it in a year? They've sold everything and moved, and it's quite a challenge.

BONBRIGHT: It is. It's a problem.

Thank you, Peter.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview