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Information Series

RUTH WALTER CROOK

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INTERVIEW

Q: Ruth, how did you first get into the international information operation?

CROOK:: I began working for the U. S. information program in May of 1941. At that time it was the Office of Government Reports, headed by Lowell Millett, and I was hired by Reed Harris as an information clerk. He was the acting director of the OGR for New York State. Our office was located in the RCA building, down on the Concourse, and the part I played was information clerk with the original U. S. Information Service. It had been created in 1939 for the Federal building at the World's Fair at Flushing Meadows, New York. The information clerks answered questions about the U. S. Government. We were dressed in Air Force blue uniforms, with a shield on the left breast pocket which had on the top, "U. S. Information Service." When I first went to work for the organization, I wore a uniform every day.

We never had time for lunch because the lunch hour was the most critical time when people just poured in to ask questions about the government, particularly, as it was then quickening toward the war. People were asking about how you got a contract to go overseas to build some of the bases which were already being built abroad, and they wanted to know about the draft, what their chances were. Then as the war progressed, of course, there were answers to be given on OPA regulations for businessmen. It was an extremely busy operation.

We moved to 521 Fifth Avenue in early '42, and expanded to the extent that we were the only government agency in New York City that was selling government documents. Everyone was buying government documents to find out the latest regulations. For example, the Harry Truman investigations of defense cost overruns. We had all kinds of documents to sell. It was an extremely busy place.

There were times when it was very amusing. I remember when war was declared, the very next day we had a bombing scare in New York City; somebody had sighted German

planes, supposedly, coming over toward the Empire State Building. Our instructions were to get under the desk. So all of us, the whole office, got under our desks, and we all had our phones down there because the phones were ringing off the hook: Was there really a bombing threat? Of course we knew no more about it at that moment than anyone else. No. There was no real bomb threat.

1942 OWI Created, Absorbing U. S. Information Service and Four Other Related Organizations. OSS Created And Becomes Overseas Office.

We had a teletype through to the Washington office. Our opposite number down there was the head of the U. S. Information Service, Harriet Root. Her supervisor was K. C. Blackburn, who was a very active figure in the FDR period. It was a very going concern. They did press intelligence, and a lot of other materials came out of that office, which ultimately became the domestic part of OWI (Office of War Information). Then in June of '42, OWI was created out of five different agencies concerning information in the government, trying to coordinate them. The OSS (Office of Strategic Services), of course, was the overseas portion that went separate and later became the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). The information part ultimately became our foreign service. Domestically, we continued to be in operation, and actually at one point our offices expanded so that we had outlets in Los Angeles and Boston, and there were a couple of others; I don't remember where they were at this point.

That went on until the summer of 1943. By then I had become acting director of the New York office, had gone up the ladder, and then our little operation was abolished. We had become a part of the Domestic Branch of OWI, and in Washington the publications division had put out a pamphlet called "The Negro and the War."

Political Factors Cause Abolition Of State-Side U. S. Information Service: Crook Goes To Overseas Support Office Known As Outpost Service Bureau

There were pictures in that document showing white people working side by side with black people. Well, the southern senators got on their high horse and the whole of the domestic OWI was just put out of business overnight, by law. The heart of OWI, as I knew it, was gutted, and all that was left was the overseas Branch. There may have been a few little things left, but the U. S. Information Service was part of what was abolished. (A small operation known as the Bureau of Public Inquiries was established later.)

We had complete files of government documents since 1939. This library became the nucleus of the library which was used by the Overseas Branch, in the old Argonaut building. Roth Newpher had just been brought in as librarian, and he wanted that whole library, and he wanted me. Well, I did not wish to be a librarian; that was not my calling in life, so I was interviewed for different jobs and finally became the deputy outpost representative in the branch that was handling all the British Empire outposts. That included then India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and a lot of little places like the Fiji islands – everything that had to do with the British Empire. Canada was not included because it was considered a part of Europe and was handled by the European

division – but just about all the others.

Jean Singer was the chief of my branch of the Outpost Service Bureau, and the head of the Outpost Service Bureau was Barney Bernard, who was very well known. He had come to us from an advertising agency. His deputy was Luther Conant. I may have the timing wrong, as Jim Linen at one point was also head of Outpost Service. He was originally from Time, and went back to it after the war years.

So I landed in an office where I knew very little about anything except that our primary function was to get anything and everything that the outposts overseas asked for, whether it was a body or a paper clip.

Q: So this was like an area office?

CROOK: It was an area office as a servicing operation. Every cable that came in from that outpost we had to answer one way or another, whether we could get the thing or not. It was up to us to go through whatever part of OWI we had to go through to get what was wanted, such as a publication. All these materials were cleared through us. Well, the work was quite a lot because Jean was then primarily concerned with our psy-warfare operation in the China-Burma-India theater, and we were stockpiling people as well as equipment to go to the part of India where all this was going on – I think it was Assam. They were going to go over the Hump and drop leaflets and do radio broadcasts from there into China--the whole Pacific part of the war.

Q: Was there coordination with the military in this regard?

CROOK: Well, of course there had to be coordination with the military because overseas that was all under the military.

So Jean was very much involved and absorbed in that and by default I got Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the little pieces to handle. At that time it was purely an information operation. When I came on the job, I'll never forget, one of the first cables I had to answer was: "Are we an outpost or an outhouse? This cable sent at our expense. Signed, Michael Stiver and Pat Frank."

Q: From where?

CROOK: From Australia, from Sydney. Mike at that time was the director of the office overseas, and Pat was his deputy. Evidently, before I appeared on the scene a whole lot of cables had come in and never been answered, and they were absolutely at their wits' end as to how to get anything out to them, much less an answer.

So it was fun to learn that job and to work with people throughout the Overseas Branch, because my job touched on every part of it.

Q: This was a whole new function, actually. The government hadn't done this kind of

thing before, right?

CROOK: A whole new function. In the OWI it was a whole new idea of servicing the field. And what later became within the Department of State the country representative – as a matter of fact that was one of the jobs I was offered at the end of the war, to become the Australian desk officer in the Department of State, but I wasn't ready to go to Washington at that time so I didn't take it. As you well remember OWI was absorbed into the Department at the end of the war – in other words, joining the political with the operational part of the desk work for an individual country.

Work Expands Enormously For Support Office When MacArthur Sets Up HQ In Australia And Later Moves HQ Up Pacific Island Chain Toward Japan

Well, as the war progressed, Australia became the jumping-off spot for MacArthur. He opened an enormous operation in Brisbane, and at that point I got into psy-warfare because I was responsible for the information programs in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. But in addition now I had to service the people who were going to work for MacArthur in that theater.

Q: Ruth, how were the people who were going out to these outposts trained by the government to take over these jobs?

CROOK: The government took over the Marshall Field estate on Long Island – Huntington, Long Island, I think it was – and there they were trained in how to set up a shortwave antenna, and also to use a shortwave set to receive and transmit. They were taught some of the mechanics of writing releases and how to prepare leaflets. They were taught a lot about history and how to work with the military, because all of these people overseas were under the aegis of the military as they went into the war areas. I remember I was sent out to see how this was done, when I was engaged in processing people to go overseas, and was out there for a week's training. It was extremely interesting. They had quite a group of people, including rather well-known people whose names escape me now, as teachers and instructors. It was a very secured situation. It was quite interesting to be in that house for a week, to see how the other half lived in the opulent days that had been. Franklin Field, who was a cousin of Marshall Field, was the general manager of the whole operation, but he had nothing to do with the technical aspects.

The Many And Variegated Duties Required In Backstopping MacArthur Operations

But getting back to the information program, there were some very interesting things that I did. One of them was sending Eugene Ormandy to Australia during the war. This was a very complicated business because he was foreign-born; and getting his wife's clearance, because he wouldn't travel without her; and getting them to Australia for a series of concerts in Sydney, Melbourne and other cities in Australia, conducting local orchestras. He was very well received. When he landed there, he was asked about his birth, and he said, I was born when I landed in the United States 22 years ago – or some such thing. It made a terrific hit with everybody.

The first day that he was there there came a frantic cable: Ormandy had left his dress coat in Philadelphia. How to get that to him in time for the concert, which was to be two days later, because evidently no one in Australia could fashion him a tail coat with the enormous shoulders that he had from conducting, and he was a very short man. It was a very difficult proposition.

I remember getting in touch with the director of the business office of the orchestra and getting that coat on a West Coast plane. At that time we had someone in the San Francisco office by the name of Charlotte Riznik, who carried that coat, absolutely by hand, to a secret airport from which a military plane was going to Australia. The pilot carried that coat to Australia, and it arrived about two hours before the concert. So we had that kind of crisis.

Then we began stockpiling people for the operation in Brisbane, and ...

Q: What do you mean by "stockpiling people?"

CROOK: Well, you know how long it takes to get somebody on board – the pipeline. The interviews that were going on, bringing people to New York for these interviews, seeing that they were taken care of while they were in New York, and then arranging the details relative to their families – because the families were not allowed to go with them – and all the pay things, seeing that they go through their physicals, all the details that went on to get people overseas.

We did, however, begin to establish an office, and of course the office in Sydney, which was the main office of OWI in Australia, had the responsibility of finding a place in Brisbane. By that time somebody had to be working with MacArthur, and to find somebody who was acceptable to MacArthur to go out to head that operation was extremely important.

Finally, the candidate was Frederick S. Marquardt, who had been raised in the Philippines. His father was the superintendent of schools at that very dramatic time after the Spanish-American War when a whole raft of American teachers went out to the Philippines. He had known General MacArthur's father, who was also in the Philippines. This was the man he wanted. Marquardt had left the Philippines and taken a job with the Sun-Times in Chicago, and was very happily living in Chicago when he was asked to do this. He came on board and did his patriotic duty, even though he did not want to leave Chicago and his family. The staff in Australia, as it was assembled, turned out to be a very good staff, and that was the nucleus of the staff that eventually moved on to the Philippines, with Marquardt at its head.

OWI Activities: Philippines, China, The Rise And Demise
Of The OWI Supply Ship "Phoenix"

Among the things I worked on was obtaining specialties which we shipped out to

Australia and were then gotten into the Philippines by submarine. These included such things as chewing gum, sewing kits, pencils – that was before the advent of the ballpoint pen, cigarettes – oh, a great many different kinds of things, all with the slogan, I SHALL RETURN, on everything, because MacArthur insisted on it. These were prepared by the publications division as an adjunct to their work for MacArthur, and this became part of the same program where the leaflets were developed for dropping.

Q: Were these dropped as well, or just distributed?

CROOK: At this point, no. The leaflets came later, when we were based on Hollandia before we moved into the Philippines. Then, once we were in the Philippines, when we got a beachhead on Luzon, then they were dropped over the parts of the Philippines still held by the Japanese. So it was a very interesting time.

I remember one set of publications we did was a magazine called Free Philippines, which was the name of the newspaper that had been very popular in the Philippines before all this happened. We had to get a statement, I remember, in one of them, of encouragement from Cardinal Spellman, who was then the archbishop of New York. I remember going over to the cardinal's office and talking to him about it, and getting his letter and then having it incorporated into the magazine.

Once the team finally got into Luzon – they started at Leyte and then worked their way up; they were in the second wave with the troops going in there – they finally got into Manila and commandeered the printing press which had put out the Free Philippines before. Fritz Marquardt had worked on the Free Philippines before he moved back to Chicago. So they began issuing a daily newspaper, in English, called the Free Philippines – the name was kept. And that was publishing all through the rest of the war.

Another thing they did was to go to Santo Tomas University, which was a Japanese POW camp, as early as possible, and they found an NBC correspondent, Bert Silen, who had been broadcasting off the roof of the Manila Hotel as the last broadcaster from the Philippines before the Japanese took over Manila. So NBC was of course immediately interested, and he began his first broadcast again saying, "I take up my broadcasting after having been so rudely interrupted," etc., etc.

Q: He had been interned?

CROOK: He had been interned by the Japanese. His daughter had been shot. He had a lot of interesting but terrible experiences, as did all the Americans who were interned there. Of course they didn't suffer as much as the Bataan survivors, but they had a lot of problems getting food and medical attention. It seems that just before the war, Silen had been hired by OSS to continue broadcasting clandestinely once the war started, if it reached the Philippines. No one was sure that was going to happen right away.

So he came out of the war without anything. Evidently he had resigned from NBC at that point. I had the job of reestablishing the fact that he had been hired by the government

and got him back pay and all that. It was very interesting. I made several trips to Washington tracking that down. At that time Arsine Butts, who was our top administrative man, was very helpful, and Bert Silen, needless to say, was very grateful. He went back to work on – I think it was NBC – on the West Coast, and eventually he died very prematurely, and a lot of the things that happened to him during those war years were pretty much responsible for his early demise.

Another thing I worked on which was fascinating was the Phoenix. Did you ever hear of the Phoenix?

Q: I don't think so.

CROOK: This was an Italian ship. Remember when the Italian navy all went into Bari, and we got a lot of the cargo ships? I don't remember whether it was before or after the French navy, but anyway, we got a lot of ships at Bari. This was an old ship used to transport food or something, and it was given to the OWI. The purpose of that ship was to go to the coast of China and bombard the Chinese with VOA and other propaganda about the war effort: your friends are coming to relieve you, etc. Also, a leaflet operation was getting into China clandestinely.

Q: How could they distribute the leaflets?

CROOK: I don't know. These were people who somehow or other got into China. Don't ask me; I don't know the details. Anyway, there was to be a leaflet operation, because I know one of the things I had to buy was a Webendorfer printing press. Maybe that was to be done once we got on the coast of China.

So I remember OWI getting that ship. It had to go through the Panama Canal, and the crew was all Italian; nobody spoke English. Some of them got into trouble in Panama, and I had to get the Panamanians and the Americans at the Panama Canal to get them out of the jails. Finally we got the ship out to San Francisco, and I was working on the servicing of that ship – meaning getting people who were going to work on it. It had to be completely re-outfitted by the Navy; it was an old ship and needed a lot of work. Then getting rid of the Italian crew and sending them back to Italy, and putting on an American crew – it was a tremendous effort. Then one day word came down that we were abandoning the ship.

Q: Why?

CROOK: Because the plans were already afoot for us to drop the atom bomb, which of course none of us knew anything about. At the same time we were also beginning to stockpile for the Japan landings, and again the word came down: forget about it.

Q: Overtaken by events.

CROOK: Overtaken by events. But of course none of us knew what the main big event

was. We all found out on August 6th, when the first atomic bomb was dropped.

Q: I would think that the preparations for Japan would still continue.

CROOK: Well, they were continuing so far as people were concerned, but the psy-warfare parts of the operation were dropped. And of course there were a lot more people that were to be hired than MacArthur wanted. Once he got control of Japan he wanted his own people every place. Then of course the Philippines became an information program, on which I worked.

1945: War Ends. OWI Phased Out. Crook Becomes Foreign Press Liaison
In Newly Established Office In New York City. Exciting Times.

By that time it was the end of the war and OWI was being phased out. Parts of it went to the State Department, as you know, and parts of it were dropped completely – all the psy-warfare operations. So again I found myself without a job. It was at that point that someone in the State Department conceived the idea of bringing to the United States a lot of the foreign press who had had no access to information during the war years – countries like Holland and Greece, France, Czechoslovakia – all those that had been drastically occupied by the Germans. So a foreign press liaison office was established in New York, with Bartow Underhill as its chief, and I became a foreign press liaison officer in that group. This continued until '53.

I had a part in working with these various groups that came in, and that was, to be their New York liaison. While the chief of the whole travel arrangements would work on the arrangements all over the country, I handled some of the arrangements for the groups in New York City.

I will never forget when we brought in a group of three Russians. One of them was Simonov, who was quite a well-known author, and Ilya Ehrenburg, and the third one was the editor of Red Star, whose name escapes me – he was a general. Ehrenburg had English but Simonov had none. At that time a very well-known sculptor, Jo Davidson, was doing the heads of almost all the war heroes, and he was interested in doing Simonov's head. I took him to Jo Davidson's studio, which was very interesting. It was in the morning, and Jo brought out a bottle. It was Scotch, and of course Simonov was ready for a drink. And all the while he was sculpting, Davidson carried on a conversation, telling Simonov what a lousy Red he was and all these things, and I trying to keep a straight face, and the Russian just nodding, unable to understand a word. And Davidson knew he didn't understand a word. It was one of the most amusing as well as interesting times I had because I was watching this intent work of this sculptor.

Creation Of UN

At the same time the United Nations was created in April of '45 in San Francisco, and the first meetings of the Security Council were held up in Hunter College, and part of my responsibility became working as a liaison with the press office of the United Nations. At

that point the State Department was clearing all the credentials of all the foreign press who came. It later became entirely a UN activity but we were in the process of setting it up. So I was doing that liaison work, and working with the foreign press who were covering the UN.

Soviet Attempt To Take Over Part Of Iran

I remember the first big story we worked on was the Russians invading and trying to take over the Azerbaijan part of Iran. It was a very exciting time, when the UN really had teeth in it. Maybe with this present crisis it will have teeth again, I don't know. Everyone was thinking of that as being the hope of world peace. So it was a fascinating time, meeting all these people as they came in from abroad. Different officers were chosen to head up the various trips of these people who went all across the United States. I remember writing letters to Ford, for example – they wanted to see our great automobile capital – Ford, General Motors; Hollywood, of course. All of them coming in wanted to do stories on Hollywood. And of course the United Nations. Washington was not that important in the scheme of things at that point in history.

Visit Of Shah Of Iran To U.S:

Another amusing incident, I remember: the Shah of Iran came to New York, his first visit since becoming Shah. This was some time in '46 or '47, and of course the primary reason for being in New York was the United Nations. But while he was there I did some coverage with the photographer who was sent up from Washington. It was my job to go around and follow this photographer who took a phenomenal number of pictures, and get all the captions straight, from left to right, who all these people were, and it was quite a job.

One time we went to West Point. This was just before Thanksgiving, and the cadets were primed for the Army-Navy game. It was the only time in my life I rode behind a motorcycle escort; all of us correspondents were in these Carey Cadillacs behind the Shah, behind the motorcycle escort. We went roaring through New York, from the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where the Shah and his entourage were all staying, and up to West Point. We crossed over at the Bear Mountain Bridge, where the state troopers picked us up, into the Point. And when we got there, hearing the 21-gun salute was a very exciting experience, one I'll not forget. Of course, I had gone to West Point several times so that was not a new thing to me. The commandant – who I think at that time was Maxwell Taylor, but I could be wrong – entertained the Shah with a beautiful luncheon. While he was there the toast was given, of course, and he was told what to say. He gave all the cadets who were then in jail for one reason or another, or confined to base, permission to go to Philadelphia for the Army-Navy game, and a huge roar went up, and all the plebes' caps went up like they do at graduation. It was very exciting.

Visit Of President Of Chile

Another time, the then-president of Chile, whose name escapes me, and his wife came to

visit the United Nations, and I was given the assignment to cover the wife of the president as she made her way around the various do-gooder things – the hospitals, the children’s wards, things like that. Also, she was very interested in furs, and went to visit Maximilian’s who was then one of THE top furriers in New York City. It was a magnificent show of beautiful furs I’ve never seen the like of, from sable on down. She wound up buying a mink coat – that’s all.

In 1947, I decided it was time for me to see if I could get a job someplace else, having been in the government six years by that time. The Girl Scouts of the USA came after me to work in their international division as an international adviser, and since I had been working on the UN, they put me in charge of liaison with the UN. I went over there and worked for about a year. Meantime, the Iron Curtain was rapidly descending on Europe, and I just felt out of place. I didn’t want to stay with this organization, even though I had no bad things to say about it. So I started working with Bill Ucker again. By that time he was chief of the Foreign Press Liaison Service, and I got my old job back. I went back there in the fall of ‘48, having worked a little bit more than a year with the Girl Scouts.

Q: When did you work with Bill Ucker before?

Helping Foreign Press To Cover U.S. Scene Outside New York

I hadn’t worked with Bill Ucker until he came in to be deputy chief of the Foreign Press Liaison office. And then Underhill left – I don’t remember what happened to him, but then Bill became chief of that unit. That was my first experience with Bill Ucker. He was a totally terrific boss. He really was. He always gave you the credit when you did anything, and he came up with a lot of ideas. It was at that time that I began preparing a monthly list of events throughout the United States for the foreign press, because we began encouraging them to leave New York City – not just come to Washington and spend the rest of their time in New York. By that time there was more to cover than just the UN in the United States. I began assembling materials from all kinds of organizations that might have some international connection, and I worked very closely with other parts of the State Department, which was then already beginning to work on exchange of persons, to find out where they were sending people within the United States. Every month I’d bring out this list, and distribute it to all the foreign press, with the name of the contact, the address, location, dates, and so forth. It became very powerful as a tool for them to use to show their newspapers that they ought to get out of the city.

Q: Were these all newspaper people? Weren’t there any broadcast journalists?

CROOK: There weren’t many broadcasters at this point coming in from abroad. There was a BBC operation, and some of the foreign press also did radio. Of course, there was no TV.

So, that was a very important tool for them to use. We also had a small liaison office in Washington, which tried to find out what was going on there, and a lot of material that was prepared by the IPS people in Washington would come up to us and we would then

make available to the foreign press a list of items of news – slow news, not spot news – that we thought they could make use of. Every Friday afternoon we would mail this out to some two or three hundred people from our little office in New York. Everybody would gather around a table and we'd collate and fold – the envelopes were pre-addressed, of course – and mail them out. That was very well received. I'd write some articles for it, and enjoyed the work with the members of the foreign press very much.

Another interesting experience I had occurred in 1950 when the State Department brought over the first group of national employees from USIS posts to give them an orientation. Jack McDermott, then the head of IPS, asked me to become an escort officer for a month, during which we traveled to Louisville, Indianapolis, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. There were 14 nationalities – from Burma, Vietnam, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, Haiti, Argentina, Chile and Turkey. At that time we had to travel by train. We had very full schedules, set up by international organizations in each city.

In Louisville the Haitian had a rough time. He wanted to go south and had intellectually accepted what might await him, but when he was refused service in a restaurant, he had a hard time handling it. (I intervened and he did get waited on, but the episode was very unpleasant.)

While we were in Los Angeles the Korean war broke out. The nationals from Denmark and Italy were sure it was the beginning of another world war and they wanted to go home immediately, so I had to get a special dispensation from State to fly them back to New York where they could connect with ships. (Our people did not fly the ocean in those days.)

Getting Foreign Press On Campaign Trains During Pre-Election Day Period In 1952, And Later, Viewing Televised Inauguration

In '52, we were working with the press on the presidential campaign, and we arranged for certain members of the foreign press, whom we knew to be very good reporters, to get – as many of them as we could – onto the press trains of the various candidates who were then traveling across the country. After the election, for the very first time the inauguration proceedings were televised. We hired a news theater somewhere on Broadway, which used a large screen, projecting a very grainy black-and-white picture of the Eisenhower inauguration. That was the first time that that had ever been done. The press just streamed into that theater – it was all filled – watching the proceedings, because very few people had home television at that time.

Q: This was live coverage?

CROOK: This was live coverage, from the Capitol, January, '53.

Q: And soon thereafter you moved into the Voice of America. What were the circumstances of your joining VOA?

Crook Joins VOA, August, 1953 At Time Of USIA Creation

CROOK: In the summer of 1953, there had been a great deal of investigation following the McCarthy hearings. I was on my first vacation trip abroad, and, on my way home, I saw on the ship's daily newspaper that certain offices had been abolished in the State Department, including the Foreign Press Liaison Office, then a part of IPS, and for which I had worked since 1946. I had spent all the leave I had saved during the war years, eight weeks, because we'd been told, "Use it or lose it." I came home without a job and without a day's leave.

Al Schlossman in the Personnel office found me a slot in the Public Information Office of the Voice of America. I went to the Voice in August of 1953, about the time USIA came into existence. Bill Ucker had become head of this office. The other person in the office was Stan Miller.

Another person in the office, who came in to do publications, was John Jacobs. He was there only a brief time. The two of us worked on the first VOA pamphlet for domestic use. I also answered letters from the public, which I seem to have done most of my working life. Stan was in charge of radio news and I was in charge of print. So under Bill I learned how to write releases, because I had never had training along those lines, and generally did all kinds of PR.

Q: What were some of your early experiences?

CROOK: I met Len Erikson, who became the Director of VOA when USIA was created, and you couldn't have found a nicer man than he was. Ed Lathrop came in as his deputy. At the time, Jack Vebber was the VOA program manager, and my first big story was the resignation of Len Erikson. One day Jack Vebber stormed into Erikson's office and said, "Did you do this to me without even so much as the courtesy to tell me?!" In the cable was the fact that Ted Streibert, Director of USIA, in Paris, had decided to make Gene King program manager of the Voice of America. He had not checked it out with Len Erikson, he had not checked it out with Jack Vebber, nor with anybody. He just made Gene King – who really put himself out to take care of Streibert in Paris – program manager of the VOA. Jack Vebber, of course, was a foreign service officer and eventually went overseas. I think he went out as PAO (Public Affairs Officer) in Brazil. Erikson had it out with Streibert when Streibert came back from his trip. He said, "You can't decide who my employees will be, and if that's the case I resign." I think Erikson worked for VOA as Director for six or eight months, no more. That was the first major story.

Q: What else?

CROOK: The next big story I worked on was the Supreme Court decision on the desegregation of the schools, and I made the front page of the New York Times on that one. Within minutes VOA had the decision on the World Wide English service. Those

were probably the two major stories, one good one and one not so good. There were many stories about the VOA moving to Washington in 1954. The feat of moving 800 people, VOA broadcasting equipment, etc., without losing a single broadcast became news.

Q: Another big story from the early days?

CROOK: I remember one weekend reading in the papers that Jack Poppele was talking about what he was going to do when he became Director of the Voice of America. That was the first I knew that Jack Poppele was going to be Director of VOA. Again, Bill Ucker and I worked on that, and of course Stan was getting a good amount of coverage on radio – we didn't have television to speak of.

I also conducted tours. Believe it or not, we did tours in the New York office. We were located in two buildings: in what was then the General Motors Building and the Fisk Building. We showed some of the studios on the 15th floor of 250 West 57th, which had been set up with hall windows, at Bill's and my insistence. And the newsroom, which was at 251 West 57th, and I think at that moment Barry (Zorthian) was in charge of the newsroom. Hal (Berman) had resigned because of the McCarthy hearings. Dorothy (Crook) was in charge of Talks and Features at that time.

1954: VOA Moves From New York To Washington. Many Disruptions Involved

And then when we went to Washington, she stayed behind, because her husband was still working, and Norman Jacobs became the head of Talks and Features.

A lot of people could not make the move for family reasons. Some became weekend commuters. Bill Stricker comes to mind. His wife was a doctor in New York City and could not give up her practice. Later Bill went to New York in charge of the foreign press office – reconstituted at a later date.

Q: Did your office staff remain stabilized until the move to Washington?

CROOK: Well, while we were still in New York, the same thing happened to Bill that had happened to Erikson. Suddenly, a new face appeared on the horizon. It was John Slocum. Someone had decided he would head the VOA office of public relations in New York City. He'd never done any work like that before, and he had to learn everything from Bill, just as I had had to. Bill was really quite wonderful to him. I can't speak highly enough of how he handled that situation, which was not tenable for either of them. It left me out in left field, because Bill, while deputy chief of the office, had absolutely nothing to do, unless he worked into the print media. He knew nothing about radio. It was a very tough situation. And of course we had to work with the Washington PR (public relations) office, because they always felt the VOA was getting out ahead of them. We didn't consult about everything, we went ahead and did it on our own, when it was a question of getting material out to the media to meet deadlines.

Q: At what point did you come to Washington?

CROOK: I moved to Washington on October first, 1954. The person in charge of radio in the Washington office was Ann Hagen Randall. That meant that Stanley was virtually out of a job. The trouble was that Ann knew very little about VOA's operations. Sidney Fine was in charge of the PR office. The Washington office didn't trust us New Yorkers. Bill Ucker was out completely; he finally found a niche in the office with Vestel Lott, in the program manager's office. Stan and I were kept on as sort of media consultants. We were assigned to the VOA, but every morning we had to report to 1776 first before going down to the VOA so that they could see what we were doing. John Slocum went overseas, I believe.

Q: What were some of the things you did in your new office structure?

CROOK: Stan and I set up the tours. We went around to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) tour and other DC (Washington, District of Columbia) tours, and that was even before master control was completed. The Near East Division broadcasts were coming out of the old Interior Building broadcasting studios.

We had a big jamboree when they formally opened the Washington studios. Secretary of State Dulles was there, among others. Stan and I got a lot of media coverage. Ann Hagen wouldn't have anything to do with us; it was very funny. Later Ann and I became good friends but at that point it was kind of: Don't step on my turf! Then Sidney Fine decided that he couldn't let Stan and me free-wheel, so he brought in Joe Newman, who needed a job. Well, by then Stan and I knew the Voice backwards and forwards; we knew how many miles of wire there were in Master Control, where everything was, who did what and when and where. We were a going business, because we were the new gang in town – 800 of us moved down from New York and we were interviewed to a fare-thee-well. And I was setting up all kinds of appointments for the various people in the various language services, and really quite a lot of publicity came out in the fall of 1954 and into 1955. I think the studios opened in December 1954, and we were in the news.

Q: That splash wouldn't last long. What did you do to follow up?

CROOK: Well, that sort of simmered down, and we began talking about having a real, a genuine exhibit, and that began to percolate up through the ranks. Finally we got a very good exhibit along the center corridor. We began to do all kinds of tours, working with the various colleges that sent groups to Washington, Washington seminars, and the War College. And we were getting out information to all the publications and travel books about the tours – in those days we only had two a day, Stan did one and I did the other.

Crook Moves To VOA Special Events (1955)
Then Shifts To Become Deputy Head Of Field Relations Staff

We both began to get very tired of the office situation, because you'd come in with an idea to Joe Newman and he'd say "No," and then a couple of days later you'd find out

he'd written a memo to Sid Fine suggesting it under his name, and neither one of us appreciated the way he was taking credit for any ideas we came up with. And Sidney was very firm. We could not go out on our own; we had to do our work through Joe Newman.

Q: That doesn't sound like a very satisfactory situation.

CROOK: Stan got out first; Stan made it to Special Events, and he kept his eyes and ears open, and when the next opening came in Special Events, that's where I landed. I guess that was late in '55. The chief was Keith Jameson, and his deputy was Bob Redeen. It was a good group in there. We had a fine working relationship.

Then I was put in charge of the New York office liaison. Eddie (Goldberger) and I worked very closely together because he was just establishing the small New York group of special events officers. Anything I could find out in Washington about what was happening in New York I'd call him, and we worked back and forth very well together. He cleared through me when he had to go to a language service, so that I knew the whole picture in Washington and he knew the whole picture in New York. I had instituted, when I was with the Foreign Press Liaison Office, a monthly list of coming events, and Mattie Schneebaum, who used to work for Eddie, would take my monthly list, and remove the names and addresses of contacts which I would give to the foreign journalists, and just substitute "Get in touch with the Special Events office at VOA." I thought it would be a good idea if I started something like that in Special Events in Washington, so I did that for a while. It was well received by the language services, but it petered out after I left Special Events.

Q: How did you come to leave Special Events?

CROOK: I was sitting there one day minding my own business – a lowly GS-12 – when in pops Jerry Stone, the head of the Field Relations Staff of VOA. He said, I want to talk to you, and he dragged me over to his office, and he said, "How'd you like a GS-13?" "Of course I'd like it," I said. "Well, you're going to come in here as my deputy." I said, "I am not. I like Special Events; get me a 13 in Special Events." "No, you've gotta come; if you don't come I'll lose the job, but you're the one I want."

We scarcely knew each other. All I knew about him was that he was kind of free-wheeling. But I went, because of the GS-13 – I'd been a 12 a long time. So I left Special Events. Much of the systems I'd been doing with Eddie fell by the wayside, and the language services began free-wheeling again.

Q: What did you do in the new job?

CROOK: I did a lot of things with Jerry Stone. First of all, I did the Monthly Report, which up to that time had been very haphazard. I coordinated and worked it out with all the division chiefs, obtained their reports and edited them. Sometimes the report became a 24-page booklet, with lots of quotes from listeners to show effectiveness and a pretty complete picture of the VOA. It was very widely used. I also prepared the VOA portion

of the semiannual reports to Congress. And I instituted the training; all the training at VOA started with me in that office, because I worked with the USIA Training Division. I began to send notices around to the VOAers about what training could be made available to them. And I did a lot of work in seeing that they got special studies when they needed them.

The third thing that I started was working with USIA Congressional Liaison. I had always believed that letters from the public that came in directly, and those that went to members of Congress on the same subject concerning VOA, should be handled in the same office. But they never were. There was no way of keeping track of all those except in the office of Operations up in 1776. So I began the VOA Congressional liaison. Marvin Cox, who was in the Congressional Liaison office uptown, would, once a week, bring a Congressional legislative assistant for lunch and a special tour of VOA.

Even though there was a PR office, it had kind of dwindled to almost nothing. Ann Taylor was there, and Van Swol was in and out. Anyway, it wasn't doing much. So then I began getting all the letters concerning VOA that were forwarded from members of Congress. I would work with the PR office in case they had the same person writing the same letter, and so we'd liaise and make one answer to go out to the person and to the Congressman for the person if he had written to Congress. So I had really three things that I worked on primarily: the Monthly Report, the training, and Congressional liaison.

Then, suddenly, Jerry Stone decided that he wanted to go overseas. A very dear, sweet, lovable man named Jesse Butcher was put in charge of the office. I was very incensed because I should have had the job. I really was running the office while Jerry was out doing his thing. He was almost never in the office. Jesse had been in charge of television, and Ted somebody was brought in as head of television and Jesse Butcher was out. He had been the head of PR at CBS; I remember dealing with him way back when I was working with members of the foreign press corps. So he was a big name to me, one of the giants of PR in the forties. He really didn't need a job financially, because he had been retired by CBS on a fairly good pension, but he needed something to do. That's how he had gotten into the television business, as a producer. That's when television was down in the basement of the HEW Building. When this new man came in, whose name escapes me, Jesse was out of a job, and since Jerry Stone was going out, they put Jesse Butcher in charge of the office.

At one point Fran Neiman LaFalce had been in the office when they were trying to work on the Field Services part, also Hugh Collins. They got in touch with all the VOA people around the globe to find out what they needed in equipment and tapes to be broadcast on local radios. That was to be the coordinating office, part of what the Field Services was all about: to know what was needed in the way of equipment and where the supply line was bogging down. Fran and Hugh Collins were in their own little domain, and I ran my little domain, and Jerry Stone free-wheeled.

1959: Crook Becomes An Assistant To New VOA Director Henry Loomis

By the time Jesse came in, the part that Hugh and Fran had done was decentralized. There were just Jesse and I and a secretary left in the office. And the Monthly Report began to get much shorter, because about that time Henry Loomis came in, and he didn't like this long report; he wanted something short and succinct. Then one day, I'll never forget it, he had Jesse Butcher and me come in – this was in '58 or '59 – and he said, "Just what do you two do?" Well, Jesse just couldn't say anything because he didn't do anything. Anyway, that didn't last very long. Butcher was put out to pasture, and I went into Henry's office. The Field Relations office was abolished. I maintained some of the functions: I moved the training and the Congressional liaison with me. The Monthly Report gravitated to Wanda (Allender), as one of her responsibilities. Wanda came in with Henry as did Terry Martino, his secretary, and Lionel Moseley became his executive assistant. His first deputy was Gordon Ewing, if I've got my memory straight. Wanda and I became Henry's two assistants, but we were pretty much autonomous in our own little spheres. Wanda was superb at statistics, and this is part of the thing she had generated with him when she was over in Research. She immediately began setting up all kinds of research projects about VOA audiences. She worked on the revitalization of the relay stations. She was the general secretary of the Steering Committee.

Q: What were some of the training activities in which you were engaged?

CROOK: One of the interesting training things that happened, and which Henry instituted, was that nobody could get promoted in the language services who had not had a high school education in the United States unless he had passed the American-University English language test. I remember – I was the monitor – that everybody who hadn't gone to high school in the United States had to take that test – including Barry Zorthian, which always amused me a great deal. If they did not pass that test, Henry decided they had to take English lessons. So we did that on Agency time and at Agency expense. We brought in an instructor in English-as-a-Second Language from American University. After she left, I taught the course. Finally, when they flunked the course the second time they had to go outside the VOA and pay for it themselves. While I had some teaching in my background I hadn't taught English as a second language. That was very interesting. I think it was in the early sixties.

We still had the Monitoring Service, Bob Mayer's shop. A lot of things had gone out over VOA's air which were not what they should have been, in the way of interpretation and translation. This was the major reason for the English classes.

Q: How about your other responsibilities?

CROOK: Meantime, I was continuing with Congressional liaison. Van Swol was now the head of the PR office, and we liaised very well together. It was a very rewarding period to be working there because Loomis was just so upbeat at getting VOA going. It had just sort of drooped; there wasn't much activity in improving the programs or the language. In some cases he returned nationals to their own countries after they'd been here for two tours – I think that was very hard on those people, but Loomis was determined to increase the quality of VOA programs as well as VOA's facilities.

We instituted other training programs. One of the most rewarding was setting up two intern programs – one for summer interns, the other for recent college graduates – a one-year program during which they spent periods in the newsroom, Talks and Features, Worldwide English and a language service. This was the first intern program in the Agency. I read hundreds of 171's and backgrounds of the various applicants; worked out clearance procedures with personnel and prepared their schedules; talked with the interns and became their friend. Some of those original interns are still with VOA or other parts of the Agency.

Other programs we instituted included bringing over foreign broadcasters for training at VOA. On this program I worked with AID, the Department of the Interior, and some embassies directly. I arranged their VOA programs. Some of the broadcasters were from Ethiopia, Tunisia, Zaire, and the Trust Territories of the Pacific. Another program I helped set up was sending qualified VOAs for university training on the area they were concerned with.

Loomis Leaves VOA.
John Chancellor Becomes Director.
Crook Goes To VOA PR Office

Q: What happened to your job with Henry Loomis's departure from the Voice?

CROOK: After Henry left, Keith (Adamson) was acting. Then John Chancellor came in. Randall Jessee came in as his executive assistant, and I became his number two assistant. (Wanda left with Henry.) Ultimately they decided that I should go to the VOA PR office, since that job had been vacant for some time. We had a postage stamp of an office. I was alone with just one secretary. And we were putting in a new exhibit. That's when I got to know Clark Thornton, and I thought the world of him. He had been a reject all along the way because he was a talker; he never stopped talking. But he was a doer, and he did the very best exhibit we ever had. That was when the exhibit went all around the studio area.

Q: Any special memories you have of the period when you were in the front office, before returning to the public information office?

Recollections Of VOA During Cuban Missile Crisis

CROOK: I left out one major story: the Cuban Missile Crisis story, when we were all working with the heads of the various commercial radio stations in the southeastern part of the United States. We knew that the Portuguese, the Russian and the Spanish (translators) were all locked up uptown translating President Kennedy's speech, which was to go out live at 7 p.m. Henry compiled a list of all the clear-channel, fifty-thousand watt stations that could reach Cuba, and we talked with AT&T long lines and they plugged those stations directly into VOA's master control. Pierre Salinger, the President's press secretary, called the presidents of each of these stations to say that the President of the United States was going to talk at 7 o'clock that night and requesting

them to carry the speech, translated into Spanish and Russian. These calls were all done after 5:30 that afternoon; we all worked in that one hour. One of us was on the direct line to the White House, and another would put a call through to that station immediately after Pierre Salinger's call to the station president. Henry Loomis got on the phone and told him the whole thing was set to go, that the station was plugged into VOA's facilities, and the broadcast was being readied right then. So that when the President spoke at 7 o'clock he would be carried in English followed by whatever languages were applicable on that station – Spanish, Russian or Portuguese.

At the same time, of course, the other languages began to get the speech as soon as they could and put it out on the air, but of course the important one was Russian, both to Cuba and to the Soviet Union. That was the main one. And then of course the Spanish for the Cubans. That was a very exciting evening. We were all on the phones, getting the next station to Henry. And of course we were all involved in interviews as the week wore on.

Q: How closely did you work with the Agency leadership?

CROOK: Chancellor wasn't very happy as director of VOA, and I remember one time I went in to him and said to him, "If you don't like any of this administrative work, why did you take the job?" He was primarily a broadcaster; what he wanted to do was write and comment for broadcasting. He said, "When the President of the United States twists your arm there's nothing you can do. Especially when he's announcing it on national television!" And that's the way Lyndon Johnson had named him director of VOA.

1968: Crook Shifts To USIA Public Information Office, But Returns Year Later To VOA

In 1968 Van Swol and I switched jobs. I went to the I/R office uptown. I was then active in the American Women in Radio and Television, and persuaded them to invite Leonard Marks as the keynoter at the annual convention banquet, held in Los Angeles that year. Barbara White suggested that Marks use that forum to challenge China to cover the '68 elections. He invited them to send coverage teams, and promised to make air time available on VOA. Needless to say, the Chinese didn't bite, but VOA and USIA got both national and international coverage.

I did a lot of publicity on John Reinhardt; he was the first Black man to head an Area office. I placed home-towners on him, and he went on the air down in South Carolina, which was then no small achievement. I did a lot of placement like that, so I have nice memories of it. Bob Goodman was the head of I/R at that time, and I liked Bob. He didn't stay very long, but he got along very well with Marks. I wanted to go back to VOA; that was really my home away from home. And Van wanted to come back uptown.

Q: So you returned to VOA.

CROOK: I was so glad to get back to the Voice and all those people, and Van was very happy to be back uptown. Margita White came in as director of the public information

office. I found her to be a very energetic, wise person, and she certainly had the inside track on a lot of things, and we just got along fine. From then on I kind of made that job my job – at least ten years, until I retired. Of course that included the one-year hiatus uptown.

In 1972 I was selected to go on the Agency inspection team to Germany. There were eight of us. Jim Mocerri headed the team. Mr. Regnery was the public member. We worked for a week in Bonn; then teams fanned out to other parts of Germany. Jack Shellenbeger and I were assigned Munich, where we spent over a week because of the VOA installations – interviewing both American and local staffs. Then we went to Nuremberg, Stuttgart, Freiburg, Tuebingen and Heidelberg. The final week was spent in Bonn where the teams prepared their findings and they were integrated into the final report with the team's recommendations. The trip lasted a month. It was a high point in my career.

Recollections Of Memorable Characters in VOA

Q: Who are some of the most memorable characters with whom you've worked at the Voice?

CROOK: As for memorable characters, the one who occurs to me right away is (Alexander) Barmine. I had known the story of his marriage to the Roosevelt girl, Kermit Roosevelt's daughter, I believe. There was a lot of scandal about that. That was before I joined the Voice, but I read the papers about it. He was an interesting character; I had read his autobiography. He was a Soviet general, and then in their foreign service, a very dramatic figure. He defected in Greece, where he was serving as a diplomat. He had become chief of the VOA Russian service. I remember there was a free-lance writer, whose last name was Roosevelt; I don't recall her first name, but it never occurred to me that she was the Roosevelt he'd been married to. But she was. I was going to set up an interview with him, and I went in to talk to him about it, and he said he would not give an interview. And as fate would have it, he saw her in the halls, so afterwards he said, "See, I told you I shouldn't be interviewed!"

I think Joe Gdynski was a very interesting guy. He'd come from a legal background, and sometimes he could be a real pain in the neck because he'd pin you to the wall. He was a very proud man.

There was a wonderful lady called Mrs. Smith in the Monitoring Office. She was born in China, and she spoke Chinese like a native. She was the monitor for the Chinese service for years and years. She had the most fascinating background, and she was a lively interview. When we first came down to Washington from New York, there were so many stories that went into the papers, and that's when I really got to know people.

In the Indian Service, I found the Kauls very fascinating – Mahendra and Rajni Kaul. The shows at the Press Club were another way I got to know a lot of people. Rajni did an Indian dance in one of those. These shows were produced by VOAs on their own time,

under the aegis of the State Department/USIA Recreation Association.

Q: You did enjoy your career, I gather. Do you have any regrets?

CROOK: (My career with VOA) was very exciting. The thing that I look back on is, now that I am so knowledgeable about women's lib, I wish to Heaven I had been more aggressive about myself, because I think I could have gone a lot higher – the things that I innovated, a lot of which I never got credit for, and the various activities I was involved in through the years. I think if I were a man I would have gone up a lot higher a lot sooner than I did. But I have no regrets. I had an excellent career. I'm not sorry about anything that happened. I look back on it with much gratitude that I was at the right spot at the right time to have had such a career, because as a young woman out of college I never anticipated I would have such a career. Certainly I ran with the opportunities when they were available.

Q: Thank you very much, Ruth.

End of interview