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

AMBASSADOR DAVID J. FISCHER

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INTERVIEW

Q: Let's start with where and when you were born and something about your family.

FISCHER: I was born in Connecticut in 1939 into an essentially middle class family. My father was a salesman. But I was raised really in Minnesota, moving there when I was eight years old. I grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I went to a private school and from there went on to college back east at Brown University.

Q: Okay, well, we're going to go back a bit. Where did you live in Connecticut?

FISCHER: I lived in the suburban bedroom communities of Westport, Fairfield, and Southport.

Q: Now, your father and mother had they gone to college?

FISCHER: No, my father was a self-made man. He left school with a fourth grade education and eventually rose to become vice president of Weyerhaeuser Timber Company. My mother was born in the United States in a German family that immigrated here in the late 19th century.

Q: What was life like while you were in Connecticut?

FISCHER: Oh, an idyllic kind of life. I guess all of us look back on our childhood in those first five, six, seven years as being wonderful. My father was not in the military, because at age 40 or 41 he was too old to be drafted.

The war was very, for me, seminal, although I was only six years old when the war ended. Growing up in that time on the east coast, I felt the war very personally. Whether it was blackouts or a victory garden or taking the twenty-five cents to school every week to buy war bonds - all that stuff made the war very real. My job was to collect milkweed pods. Milkweed pods grow on the East Coast of the United States. We were told as children that we were collecting this "kapok" to be stuffed into life jackets for sailors on the north Atlantic.

Q: Did your family have political views?

The family mythology is that before the war my German-born grandmother was a fairly staunch supporter of Hitler. If true, it's not surprising, since many German immigrants found Nazism attractive. I do know that she was invited back to Germany in 1936 and returned enthusiastic about what she had seen. My father was a staunch isolationist, at least until Pearl Harbor. Growing up in the '50s, I inherited a certain liberal bent, particularly from my mother. My father was a political agnostic in the sense that he felt a

"curse on" both their houses. He took pride in his vote for Norman Thomas (a socialist candidate) in one election.

Q: You say you went to Minnesota when you were about eight years old? Where did you go there?

FISCHER: Minneapolis. They only memorable event was that I got polio in the great polio epidemic of 1947 or 1948. But with no, thank God, lasting consequences. I guess I absorbed a lot of my parents hostility to the Midwest. Both my parents consider themselves East Coast people. My mother I can remember was appalled by the fact that she used to say how could anyone name the capital of a state "urine," speaking of Huron, South Dakota. Those in the Midwest pronounce it "urine." So that was that.

I went to an absolute fantastic private school, a country day school, largely because I was put into a public school in fourth grade and there was a school strike. The then-mayor of Minneapolis, Hubert Humphrey, refused to settle that strike so the schools were closed for seven and half months. At that point I was then put into a private school.

Q: What was the name of the private school?

FISCHER: The Blake School.

Q: Oh, yes, that's a well-known school. What were you interested in at this time, reading or interested in anything in particular in school?

FISCHER: Yes, I certainly was a history buff, and I credit of people for probably setting me on the Foreign Service career path. One was a fifth grade geography teacher. He had been in the war, been in Germany during the war and had collected what are called "stocknageln" in Germany. When you walk from village to village or climb a hill or mountain in Germany, you get a little enameled plaque that you can nail onto your walking stick. So my assignment in the fifth grade class of geography was to take that walking stick and to find on a map every place where he had walked. It was a very fascinating experience.

And the second most influential man was a guy by the name of Jack Eddy, who was the history teacher at Blake - senior history and head of the debate team. I became very involved in that and won a state championship for extemporaneous speaking and a few other things like that. But those two people were, I think, very influential in first igniting my interest in overseas stuff, Europe, and second, for making me read the New York Times every day. That was a demand of every senior at Blake School. You had to read the New York Times on a daily basis, which was tough to do in those days in Minneapolis. We must have been reading three-day-old newspapers.

Q: So you were at the Blake School from when to when about?

FISCHER: 1948 until I graduated in 1956.

Q: Did the world intrude much on the rest of Minnesota during this period?

FISCHER: Probably not. I can remember, however my classmates. It was a very small country day school, I mean there were thirty guys in my class, and I think probably at least half of them were what I would call socially aware. Aware of politics. I can remember vividly walking home from school one day in 1954 with a classmate of mine whose father had just called to say that the Supreme Court had just ruled in Brown v. the Board of Education. His father had been someone who had worked with the NAACP. I mean that was an important event to us. So we were certainly much more aware than the average kid growing up in a rural town in Minnesota. Blake was a school for the upper classes in Minneapolis, children of people who ran the local mills: Pillsbury and General Mills. But it drew from a class of transplanted New Yorkers and Bostonians, as well.

Q: What about the McCarthy impact. I mean McCarthy was from Wisconsin and I was just wondering if this was a man and policy admired in Minnesota?

FISCHER: I don't know why - I may have been ill - but I remember as a child watching the McCarthy-Army hearings on television on a daily basis. I don't if it took place in the summer or sometime over… I think I may have been at a time when I was out of school for six weeks following an accident. But it absolutely dominated the family conversation and certainly very widely talked about in my school, of course. I also remember the famous broadcast by Edward R. Murrow that signaled the beginning of the end of McCarthy. My family was very anti-McCarthy; an attitude certainly passed down to me.

Q: Where were the kids from the school and your family coming down on the McCarthy issue?

FISCHER: Oh, very anti. One couldn't be a McCarthy supporter in that milieu and survive very long.

Q: I mean did you feel that being in Minnesota, this is the height of the real sort of liberal labor type state wasn't it?

FISCHER: Yes, Democratic Farmer Labor, DFL. Hubert Humphrey, Orville Freeman, and later, Eugene McCarthy and Walter Mondale. I worked in politics in the summer of 1954 and 1956 on a couple of political campaigns, so I was really involved in that kind of stuff. I worked initially as a volunteer but got hired in 1958 by the Republican Party in a gubernatorial campaign. I guess money was more important to me than ideology!

Q: I might add on our program that when I return from here I'm going to be interviewing Frances Howard who's Hubert Humphrey's sister. I've also interviewed Constance Freeman who is Orville Freeman's daughter so they continue to enter into the system.

FISCHER: I was responsible, partly, I wouldn't say in large measure, for the defeat of Orville Freeman in the gubernatorial race in Minnesota in 1958. I was working as a volunteer in the Republican Party for a guy named Elmer Anderson. I was running their volunteer headquarters in St. Paul. I was then in college and it was a summer job. At some point on a Saturday afternoon, the office was locked and closed, and I heard this rapping on the door outside. I went out. This guy said he want to talk to somebody. This was my first experience with what we later learned from the Foreign Service is called a walk-in, a guy who wants to walk in and give you information. It turned out he was a guard from Stillwater State Prison and wanted to provide us with documentary evidence that there was a nasty corruption scheme going on. I wrote it all up, paid him $50 for his information, and we used it as a major attack against the governor, Orville Freeman. It became a major campaign issue and Freeman was defeated.

Q: What sort of things were you reading at school?

FISCHER: I was reading a lot of history and non-fiction, certainly at my school. My major emphasis was on that. I was interested in all sorts of things. I remember reading Prescott's Conquest of Mexico for example. As a child I read a great deal. I was blessed with the fact that my parents had read to me all the time. Reading still in our family is a very important activity. My family subscribed to all sorts of book clubs, and my mother encouraged me to read what she was reading: everything from Pearl Buck to Michener. The best sellers I remember were things like "The Caine Mutiny."

Q: While you were at Blake were you thinking about international affairs?

FISCHER: Not at all. I came from partly an immigrant family. I had never been to Europe. We had traveled in Mexico. My parents had gone to Mexico virtually every year and eventually subsequently, long after I had left Minneapolis, they went to live in Mexico. But I don't think that was an important time in my life.

Q: When you were getting ready to go to college, what were you thinking about a career or where you were going or what you were going to do?

FISCHER: I don't know, Blake was a very unusual school. Entrance to that school was not based on money and it was a fairly diverse group of people, but it certainly had upper class attitudes to some degree albeit most of us came from the middle class. In my class of thirty, twenty-five of us went to Ivy league schools and the rest to good schools like Stanford and Carleton. Given today's Admission standards, I can't imagine a school today placing students in universities of that caliber. I ended up going to Brown with an idea, I think, of either going into business or law.

Q: Well, you were at Brown when?

FISCHER: 1956, graduated in '60.

Q: Can you characterize Brown in those days? Brown has a reputation now of being a particularly liberal type school but I was wondering in those days?

FISCHER: Well I guess the best way to sum it up is something that was always shouted at every hockey game "What's the color of horseshit, brown, brown, brown". Brown was very much a second rate institution; I hasten to add, second rate in comparison to Harvard, Yale and Princeton. It was still an excellent university. I ended going to Brown really almost by accident. Brown had recruited me very heavily. They recruited three of us in my class at the Blake school. I originally wanted to go to Yale or Harvard but didn't get in. I think that was true of most of my entering class at Brown -- kids who wanted to go somewhere else. It's a far cry from what it is today.

Q: Granted this was a sort of school living in the shadow and getting the leavings you might say of the selection, but still it was a selection process of people who would go out of somewhere else and deliberately seek a New England style upper class education. So you really are starting with a pretty selective group. What was the emphasis while you were there?

FISCHER: I started out as an English major for my first two years there. I can't say that I was terribly happy at Brown. I never really integrated into that college in any great way, partly because I had spent a junior year abroad, we can talk about that later. Then when I came back to Brown, I was on an independent study program and spent most of my time at Harvard. So I really only spent two years at Brown. I joined a fraternity and had friendships made there, but I don't think Brown was that influential in terms of shaping the way I viewed the world. My high school years were much more formative years.

Q: I find I have the exactly the same. I went to a prep school and then I went to Williams. The prep school had far more influence.

FISCHER: Where did you go to prep school?

Q: Kent. I think that often is the case for all of us. While you were at Brown were you taking sort of general subjects? What were you doing these first two years?

FISCHER: I was taking the liberal arts courses. As I say, I was going to be an English major. I suppose by my sophomore year I had much more emphasis on history and ended up majoring in history. I don't know how I found out that you could study abroad and get credit for it. In those days that was a fairly unique thing to do. To make a long story short, I ended up going to the University of Vienna in Austria under the auspices of some, I wouldn't say fly by night outfit, but it was called the Institute for International Education. Brown accepted and said as long as you do x, y and z we'll accept that for credit. So that's what I did. It was the most formative year of my life.

Q: Talk about it. This would have been 58-59.

FISCHER: The first thing about it, it was extraordinary liberating. I traveled from Minneapolis to New York. It must have been late August of 1958 to board the then New Amsterdam. I'd certainly never been on an ocean liner before. I knew very little about the American west. I was essentially an East Coast person although I'd moved to the Midwest. So the first night at the bar, when I met a very attractive woman by the name of Dixie Jones, I'll never forget that. Dixie was a Mormon from Salt Lake City. I said, can I buy you a drink? She said, no, I don't drink. I said well can I get you a soft drink, a Coke, whatever. She said, no I don't do that because it has caffeine in it. So I said, what do you like to do? Well, you get the punchline and for the next five days, I never surfaced out of my cabin.

Q: Other than that what were you doing?

FISCHER: I was bumming around. My year in Vienna was extraordinary. I went there with no interest in classical music and ended up being a member of a clack, a paid clack at the Vienna state opera house, so I got to go to operas every night. Not only that, but I got paid for it, five shillings (the equivalent of 25 cents.) In those days five shillings was enough to buy me a very, very good meal. My studies at the University were extraordinarily easy, largely because I think the professors figured since I was an American I knew nothing, and I wasn't worth their wasting any time trying to teach me anything. I got exposed to an embassy, the Foreign Service. The real reason I guess I joined the Foreign Service, I had never been in an embassy before in my life, and two experiences happened. The Marine guards at the embassy in Vienna were selling scotch on the black market out the back door of the commissary. So you could buy a bottle of scotch for I think we paid, three dollars, which subsequently I learned they were buying for seventy-five cents! It was a good business for them. I was interested in Eastern Europe, Eastern European history. And in fact I went to Vienna with the idea of doing some work on a thesis I would be writing my senior year at Brown on Polish-German history. Although many people find it hard to believe, if you remember, in the days of 1958, you had a big green passport and on the back of it, it said this passport is not valid for travel to the following countries, Poland, Czechoslovakia and the whole list of communist states in eastern Europe. I wanted to study in Eastern Europe; I wanted to go to Poland. So I went to the American Embassy, and if you gave them any cock and bull story they usually would validate your passport.

So I met a young Consular officer whose name was Richard Strauss, which I thought was a great name to be a Vice Consul in Vienna. He said sure, just leave your passport here and come by tomorrow and you can pick it up validated. So when I went to the Embassy the next day, this must have been January 1959, my passport wasn't ready but there was a man upstairs who wanted to talk to me. The man upstairs it turns out was working for the Army Security Agency. To make a long story short, I was recruited to be a spy. I was given fifty dollars a day, a Volkswagen, and a camera with a very strange kind of lens which would allow me to take photographs somewhat surreptitiously. I went go to Hungary where I was asked to go to a certain apartment in Budapest to pick up an envelope and bring it back to Vienna. In retrospect, when I think about the fact that

somebody had employed me as an eighteen year old, incredibly naïve spy, it boggles my mind.

Q: I t also helped fill the jails of East Germany.

FISCHER: So I made two trips into Hungary. One in January or February 1959 and one in April or May. On my way out in May I was detained at the border for about twelve hours. The Hungarians, God bless their souls, must have seen this for what it was, an amateur operation. I was politely told to leave all my papers behind and go across the border. So they let me out, which was very nice of them. So that was my introduction to espionage, and the Foreign Service in a way.

The other story I tell about the Foreign Service - I guess can we use real names - I was traveling with a girl through Yugoslavia. We were invited along with some Yugoslav students we had met in Zagreb to the home of the American Consul General, her name was Olga Zhivcovich. Olga couldn't have been the Consul General. I think she was probably the Vice Consul. So we went to her apartment with these Yugoslav students. I felt that her behavior was so insulting to them. She constantly talked about how good America was, which was okay, but she did so in a way which totally put down the Yugoslav students. The final straw came when she announced loudly that Yugoslavs never bathe and that's why her apartment smelled so badly. I was angry enough about her behavior… I wrote a letter of complaint to the State Department. I said in essence "What the hell kind of people do you have representing us overseas?" Somebody was smart enough in personnel, rather than sending me the typical form letter, wrote a little note that said hey, if you don't like it, think about joining us. That was my first introduction to the possibility of joining the Foreign Service.

Q: What was your impression while you were spying in Hungary?

FISCHER: The other day I ran across some old photographs. For me it was a lark, a total lark. I had no idea what the consequences might be. I can remember you could buy cigarette lighters in kiosks in Vienna for about three or four shillings. In Budapest, which had one or two good restaurants, the game was you could order whatever you wanted and in the end rather than paying the check, you would leave a cigarette lighter on top of the table. The waiter would come by and palm it and that would be that. So for me it was living the life of luxury in Eastern Europe. But I traveled in, I spent a lot of time in Yugoslavia, I went into Bulgaria, actually went into Albania. I went about ten miles into Albania. They had a bus service that would allow you on a day trip to buy a tourist visa, a one day trip.

Q: This part of a Yugoslav deal, l wasn't it?

FISCHER: Yes, it was out of Lake Ochrid. So I was probably one of the few Americans that ever went to Albania in those days. But I traveled around Europe a great deal and it was for me an extraordinarily broadening experience.

Q: When you came back to Brown, you said you really didn't connect with Brown again. Your last year you used to write a paper or something?

FISCHER: My class was the first in an experimental program, which subsequently was enlarged to become the famous Brown curriculum, but I think there were ten of us who were designated university scholars, on the basis of grades and whatever. So we were allowed to do pretty much what we damn well wanted to. We didn't have to attend classes. I attended I guess a couple of history courses but I worked mostly at the Widener Library at Harvard, my thesis which was on German-Polish relations from the end of WW I until the outbreak of war in 1939.

Q: Were you feeling that Eastern Europe was the place for you?

FISCHER: I don't know how I ended up interested in eastern European studies. I think the reason that I may have fallen into that is that I must have been looking for an excuse to go to Europe, again I don't know how I even found this institution that sent me there. I was working with a guy who subsequently went on to be my history advisor, who was a Germanist, he said well, it's a good opportunity. Eastern Europe is an interesting era of history, German-Polish relations and whatever. That kind of became a focal point for a couple years. I learned Polish, enough to read. And of course I had German. So that was a logical step, later on in my career certainly.

Q: What were you getting out of this study between the Poles and the Germans on the border issues?

FISCHER: Not much. I don't think much of senior college theses. It's an effort to look erudite and use as many esoteric footnotes as possible. I re-read it a few years ago and closed the cover with an enormous amount of shame that I had somehow managed to get a decent mark out of it.

Q: So you graduated in 1960, what did you do then?

FISCHER: Originally I had applied to go to Harvard history, to go on and get probably a Ph.D. Harvard didn't and still does not give master's degrees so you're accepted on a Ph.D. level. I think the idea was I had taken the Foreign Service exam my senior year at Brown but hadn't heard about getting an appointment for the oral exam. I had been recruited by the CIA my senior year at Brown, and had gone through that examination process, the written exam. So I didn't know what I was going to do. The Foreign Service was of interest to me but I didn't think about it much. So I thought I'd go to Harvard history. That summer I also applied to Harvard Law School and had been accepted at the law school as well as the history department. Over the summer when I graduated I thought I really wanted to join government service, either CIA or State and that therefore it was probably smarter to go to the law school. You think back how impossible it would be to do this today, but I called up the law school on July 1. I was accepted six months

ago and I told you no, but I changed my mind. They said fine, just arrive September 11 or whatever the date was. So I went to the law school.

Q: How long were you at the law school?

FISCHER: One year.

Q: This would be, you started in September 1960. Were you at all caught up in the election, Kennedy and Nixon?

FISCHER: Absolutely. I was on the steps of Memorial Hall in Cambridge when Kennedy gave a rallying speech, a very famous speech. That was a big issue particularly at the law school where it was very politicized.

Q: How was it politicized?

FISCHER: They were an extraordinarily bright group of people, virtually all of them well read, they were interested in politics. I don't mean politicized in the sense that they felt strongly about one issue or another, but I think all of us were very interested in politics.

Q: In a way, Kennedy's inaugural address - what you can do for country - this is probably the only time a President has really called upon a generation to join up. Was he in a way plugged in to at least the ethos that you might say to the law school at that time or how you felt about it?

FISCHER: I don't know. I think I was always seen as a bit of strange duck at the law school because it was quite clear I was going to go into government service. I heard subsequently that there were eight people in my class at the law school, who had taken the Foreign Service exam, so I was not alone. But most of those people in those days saw themselves as corporate attorneys and would have a house in Greenwich, Connecticut, and their wives who went to Wellesley or Smith, the station wagon, that was the desired lifestyle I think. Janet Reno was in my class at the law school, one of eight women in a class of five hundred fifty. And of course today, everyone in my class knew Janet Reno, great friends with Janet Reno. Nobody, as far as I know, even ever talked to Janet Reno. She could have gone through three years of law school ignored by everyone.

Q: You were only there one year. How did you find the rather famous law school system and how did you fit into it?

FISCHER: Well, for those people who may not know Harvard Law School, there was a book and subsequently a movie called "The Paper Chase" which is the most frightening, realistic description of what life was like as a first year law student at Harvard Law School that I know of. I came to that law school, I was a good student at Brown, I graduated in the top ten percent in my class, so I went to the law school thinking I was pretty hot stuff. Then you realize all of a sudden that you're not. Everybody else around

you was Valedictorian at Princeton, they were number two at their class at Yale, etc. Very, very bright people. I was intimidated by the law school. I hated the law school with a passion. Largely because of the paper chase aspect being constantly open to ridicule, criticism, and sadistic behavior on the part of professors. Today it is inconceivable that anyone could do to students what was done to students at the Harvard Law School. My favorite story was that I was unprepared, which was not an unusual circumstance. But at Harvard Law School, when you were unprepared, you had the right to sit at the top of a horseshoe amphitheater and if you were seated in the back row, that led the professor to know that you were not prepared and so therefore you were rarely, if ever, called upon. I got called upon by a professor whose name is Kasner, very, very famous man in American contract law. The case that I was supposed to describe that I had not read was a case involving a newspaper subscription which was delivered free for six months and then subsequently continued to come and through that form of contract do people have to buy the newspaper. So I said "Mr. Kasner, I'm not prepared." He said that's all right, step down to the well. I had to walk down in front of one hundred and twenty five of my peers. "I bet you had a paper route when you were a little boy," he began I said, "yes, as a matter of fact I did." He said, "what did you have, a little wagon, a Red Flyer to carry the papers?" He proceeded to make me walk up and down in front of this amphitheater talking about the case and at the same time giving me newspapers to fold up and throw up to certain rows. It was humiliating, I can tell you but I had never had such excellent training on the need to think on my feet as I had there. But it was not a pleasant experience.

Q: Ok, one year, it's a three-year course. It's a bit like boot training. Once you're through the first year I wouldn't say you're home free, but it's a whole different name. Why didn't you complete it?

FISCHER: I got a call from the Foreign Service, saying there was an opening in the A-100 training class beginning in June. Did I want it? This is June 1961 and I say you bet ya'[you]. In the meantime, I met a woman who I'd fallen madly in love at Wellesley, who subsequently became my wife. I figured I'd gotten enough of the Harvard Law School and I didn't want to risk having to take the Foreign Service exam over again. So that was my ticket out.

Q: So you took the written exam, passed it obviously. How about the oral exam? Had you taken that already? Can you talk about that?

FISCHER: Oh, yes. The oral exam was very strange. I took it in the summer - must have been July or August of 1960. I had graduated from college and was home in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I had no idea what to expect. I wasn't prepared for it. It wasn't something I desperately wanted to pass, it was simply another opportunity. I was called for an interview in the afternoon. At lunchtime, I was working in downtown Minneapolis, I went to a little café, it was in the building where the interview was to take place, and I ended up having lunch with two guys who turned out to be the examiners. The oral exam was for me a pretty easy exam. I was asked the usual - knowledge of geography, for

example. I remember one thing they asked me - "Ok, you're sailing down the Mississippi River from Minneapolis to New Orleans, name the major cities on the port side." I guess that was to know if I knew anything about American geography and if I knew port from starboard. I bullshitted my way through at least one question that I can remember. One guy, knowing that I had written a thesis in German-Polish relations, asked me who I considered to be the most prominent Polish historians. I weighed that for about a tenth of second in my mind because I couldn't think of a name, and I figured there is no way this guy is going to know and modern Polish historians, so I said, "There's Karchewki, of course; his work is very controversial. I think that Jerzy Karpan and Wladyslaw Bolewski's works are more interesting." I just made up three names and bluffed my way through!

Then I had a very funny experience. This may be out of context. Maybe this was the CIA exam. I took the CIA exam subsequently. I had met this girl at Wellesley, and Pam, my wife, is from Texas. This was, again 1960, and one of the questions I was asked in the oral exam was where would I like to serve. I said Eastern Europe but I also have a great interest in Africa. They asked me "Did I have a girlfriend?" Yes, I did. Did I intend to marry her? Yes, I hoped to; she was from Texas. The next question was "Do you think your wife would have any difficulty accompanying you to an African nation?" The implication was that she was from Texas and racist. I said, "No, I don't think so; she herself is the product of a mixed marriage." I remind you that in 1960 the idea of someone in the Foreign Service with a mixed-race spouse was somewhat radical, a view certainly reflected in the shocked faces of the examiners. "Yes," I said, "Her father was a southerner, her mother a northerner." The relief on the part of the examiners was palpable, and I was passed with flying colors.

Q: So you entered the Foreign Service when?

FISCHER: Late May, early June, 1961.

Q: Can you sort of characterize your class?

FISCHER: Yes, but I don't know how typical it was in those days. I think the first day there was a show of hands on where people had gone to college. Fully three quarters of the class has done their undergraduate or graduate work at an Ivy league or good eastern university. Very heavily weighted in that direction. The guys in my class that went on to be fairly important Ambassadors in my class were Warren Zimmerman, Paul Boeker. I myself roomed with two of my classmates. We had a little house in Georgetown. It was a very Kennedyesque kind of time. Not that any of us would have had the chutzpah to think we were hob-knobbing with the policy makers of the Kennedy administration but it was that kind of atmosphere which permeated Washington. People were living in Georgetown, we got to know the right girls who also had little houses in Georgetown. It was very, very prestigious in Washington to be in the Foreign Service and you were seen as being something very special.

Q: There was great emphasis on youth as part of this Kennedy thing, particularly Bobby Kennedy was pushing this, you were one of the first of the Foreign Service classes to start during the reign of John Kennedy. Did anybody pay attention to you from the administration?

FISCHER: No, I don't think so. But again, there were several people in my class who had the right social connections and get the "right" invitations. So you'd go to a cocktail party and you had to chance to meet an Under Secretary. I remember the first time I met Loy Henderson was at a cocktail party in Georgetown. Here I am twenty-two years old meeting senior diplomats at Georgetown cocktail parties. It was a sort of an unreal time.

Q: You think your group was full of itself at that point?

FISCHER: My class was also very young. I don't know how it compared to classes on both sides of it. But I think fully half my class had come directly out of school, graduate or undergraduate. But none of us had ever been in the military, especially since there was no draft. There were a couple of people that were the old men, most of them were married. Most of us were unmarried. I suppose, in a class of thirty-three, maybe only five were married. One of them had a child. That was very unusual. So it was a young group and as such, no doubt very full of ourselves. There is no question, too, that being in the Foreign Service - even in a training class - gave one a certain aura. People, at least those in Washington, knew how selective the Foreign Service was.

Q: Did you get any feeling about the Department of State and Foreign Service from the class?

FISCHER: You know that's odd because I don't remember ever going to the State Department in my first years in the business. The Foreign Service Institute was in Arlington in a god-awful brick high-rise, the Arlington Towers building. I went through the A100 course. I did learn a very valuable lesson in the 100 course though. We had a bus trip, in those days the entry classes were taken on various field trips to New York to the Custom House or whatever. We were driving, I think to Philadelphia, and our bus got hit broad side by a car. The bus driver was clearly very innocent. And so, he stood up and asked if any of us would make a statement on his behalf. And the instructor of the A100 course said "Don't say anything, don't get involved." I always thought that should be the motto of the Foreign Service. I don't remember going to the State Department. There was a shuttle bus, there must have been. We went over there. You were in the A100 course, you were trainees, you didn't know anybody that was doing any real work. After the A100 course I went directly into language training.

Q: When you were in the basic officer course, did you have yourself pointed toward anywhere in particular? Was it still Eastern Europe?

FISCHER: No, I had studied I-Swahili at Harvard, don't ask me why. I needed something to change the rigors of the law school. So I dabbled in Swahili because I figured that if I

did join the Foreign Service I really wanted to go East Africa. So I joined the Foreign Service but there was nobody that could test me in Swahili. It was a language nobody knew. There was an opening in Nairobi, in the Consulate General because, of course, it was still British territory. And that's what I thought I was destined for. But, I ended up going to Frankfurt as a Vice Consul.
Q: This is of course the period where Africa was brand new and it was a great opportunity.

FISCHER: It was a place you could go and have much greater responsibility and I had the sense, someone must have come over and talked in our A100 course and pushed that idea. But I guess it was my language background that I thought I might conceivably go to East Africa.

Q: So off you went to Frankfurt. Was that kind of a disappointment?

FISCHER: No I loved Frankfurt. For me to go to a German speaking country, I felt very comfortable. My wife (I was then married. I got married in September.) was able to take the language course at FSI, which was a godsend because it would have been very difficult for her to survive in Germany in those days without German. It was a terribly luxurious life. I will never forget that we drove from Washington to New York to board the SS United States. Foreign Service Officers in those days were sent first class as a way to subsidize the shipping business. So I was twenty-two, my wife was twenty. Here we are sitting in first class on one of the most luxurious ships in the world. Among the other passengers were Catherine Cornell, an aging but sill somewhat famous actress. We got to eat at the right tables. It was ludicrous. Here we were these young kids sitting in the first class dining room with everybody else aged eighty. I think the stewards recognized before we landed at La Havre the chances of their getting a decent tip out of these two children was about zero. So they rigged it, I know they rigged it, so that we won the horse race game the night before we landed. I won two hundred bucks, precisely the amount of money we were supposed to tip these people. It was wonderful.

Frankfurt for us was a good posting. I was put to work in the visa section, work I rather enjoyed, frankly. I did citizenship work. It was a chance to use my German. We lived in State Department/Army housing for senior army officers which was owned by the Consulate, very luxurious standards in the early 1960s. My wife enrolled at the University of Frankfurt so she was kept intellectually occupied. Every evening I would leave the office at five o'clock and walk and meet her in the Gruenberg Park in Frankfurt, and we would go out to a restaurant to eat. Coming from the U.S., it was almost inconceivable that we could have afforded a restaurant. We bought our first car, a little Renault, brand new from the factory in Paris for the grand sum of the nine hundred and eighty dollars. On weekends we would go to Strasbourg, all over Europe, and it was a wonderful life.

I think it's worth noting that in 1961 it was only 15 years since the end of World War II. Germany was in the midst of what was called the "Wirtschafts- wunder," the rebuilding process. But compared to the U.S., Germany was a poor country. We were treated as the

occupier, even though the occupation had ended ten years earlier. Still, being an American government official gave one certain privileges. The fact that the exchange rate was 4.20 DM to the dollar certainly helped make us very rich in comparison to the local German population. Few Germans owned cars and those that did spend Sundays driving out to the nearest river to wash the family car.

Q: Who was Consul General at that time?

FISCHER: Well I was his staff agent, his name was Edwin J. Dorsz (it means codfish in Polish.) Mr. Dorsz was indeed a very controversial figure. He had a wife who was the typical nightmare of any junior Foreign Service Officer, an absolute shrew. She was incredibly demanding on the spouses. Since I was the staff aide, I can remember Dorsz one night calling my wife up, I guess it was after I had left the office, to demand that she come as a dinner guest at a party he was giving that night. He was short a woman. She said, have you talked it over with David. He said, I'm inviting you, not your husband. She didn't go. She had the courage to say no.

I worked for a guy who was head of the Visa Section, whose name was Charlie Borell. I remember that because Charlie's son had been my freshman roommate at Brown.

Q: Charlie Borell was still there? He was my boss in Frankfurt when I went there in 1955.

FISCHER: Charlie was still there. He was an old Immigration and Naturalization Service Officer. You remember of course the McCarran Act had the famous Asian triangle restrictions on Anybody born in the Asian Pacific triangle had to wait years for a visa since only 100 were granted a year. The law was a holdover from the famous Chinese exclusion laws of the 19th century. It's hard to imagine now when Asians are the largest immigrant group that as late as the 1960s they were effectively excluded. And Charlie Borell would walk through the waiting room of the Frankfurt Consulate every morning and then would call me up into his office. "I smell a Chinese," he would say. "Woman over there in the gray coat, she looks like she was born in Shanghai." And you know the incredible thing was, he was always right. He was an extraordinary person, an old-fashioned immigration officer that had spent years in Hawaii before he joined the Foreign Service as a visa officer.

Then I worked in the citizenship section for a man named Howard Goldsmith who committed suicide in the Lido Beach outside of Venice. This was a very strange case that has never been fully explained to me. Subsequently, I learned from Vic Dikeos, who was a security officer, it was believed that Goldsmith was involved in an espionage case in the Embassy in Warsaw. Whether Goldsmith was a spy or not, I can remember I was the duty officer the weekend that this happened. It was a Friday evening at about eleven o'clock. I got a call from this Howard's wife saying Howard had gone out at eight o'clock to buy some cigarettes and hadn't returned. So I remember calling I guess the Security officer and within hours a team of security and CIA officers arrived from Bonn. They

interviewed all of us who worked with Howard, went through his office, etc. He had simply disappeared. On Monday afternoon we received word that his body had been found floating in the Lido in Venice.

Q: It wasn't publicized particularly.

FISCHER: No.

Q: You were doing both citizenship and…

FISCHER: It was a rotational assignment. You spent six months in the visa section and six months in the birth registration office. I was the birth registration officer. I registered nine thousand babies in my tenure up there. Again one of those consular stories. As you know, when you register the baby of an American citizen you have to swear that the statement is true and whatever. I had an army major and his wife, and I'll never forget this, who came to my office. Of course, this was a fairly standardized quick process … kind of getting a passport. I asked them both to stand and raise their right hands to solemnly swear that the statements were true. The major said, "I do" but the wife was silent. I said, "Do you swear to this?" And she turned to her husband and said, "John you're not the father of this baby!" I don't know why she chose that moment to say that but oh boy, what a scene!

I had several interesting experiences in Frankfurt. I was the escort officer for Eunice Shriver who was President Kennedy's sister on their famous trip to Germany in 1962. And I spent a lot time involved in that trip beginning in Bad Godesberg (Bonn) going down around with the Presidential party, spending the night in Wiesbaden. I was the Consul-General's staff aide so I got involved in helping set up the logistics for the Presidential visit The President was to stay in an army hotel, or air force hotel, called the Wiesbaden Arms. It was a high rise building in Wiesbaden and looking at the room assignments, I noticed that the President was on the top floor and there was a Ms. Smith or Ms. Jones in an adjoining room. The secret service had been very plain, make sure that the President has an adjoining room with Ms. Jones. I can remember being terribly naïve but my interest was peaked enough to talk to the chief secret service guy and say excuse me but what's the role of Ms. Jones? "I can't get into that. It's the private secretary to the President," he said. Subsequently I learned it that far from being the President's secretary, she was a German that J. Edgar Hoover believed was an East German agent. I don't remember her name, but she had a fleeting moment of infamy when all the stuff about Kennedy's sex life surfaced.

On that trip I was with Eunice Shriver who was very interested in retarded children. I can remember going to a special school or institute somewhere in Frankfurt, and Eunice walked through and looked at what they were doing for children. And she turned to the head of the clinic, I was her translator, and she said in English, "Dr. Schmidt, your work is so fabulous. I want you to go to the American Embassy, I want you visit America and go to the Embassy and we'll take care of it." Even though I was a junior officer I knew we

couldn't just hand out VIP visitor programs to everybody we liked, so I translated this into German saying, "Dr. Schmidt, you're doing such a wonderful job, I hope one day you'll be able to visit the United States." He answered in German, thank god, not in English, he said, "that's not what she said and I'll see you in your office Monday morning." Which is what he did. He got the grant.

Q: Did you get involved in Protection and Welfare or anything like that?

FISCHER: No, I don't remember that, I don't think so.

Q: Did you find yourself tangled up with German versus American laws on whose a citizen and whose not a citizen in the baby birth thing? Did this cause any problems?

FISCHER: I don't remember that. I don't think so. I met a woman here in San Francisco about six years ago who reminded me of something which I had totally forgotten. She came up to me somewhere I'm so grateful to you, etc. It turns out she did not have American citizenship according to the law because she had resided overseas one day too long or not one day enough or something. I said this is crazy and I issued her a passport. That's why she came up to me here. She was certainly very grateful that I had ignored the law and decided to act with common sense.

It was a rather humdrum. I tell people today who are interested in the Foreign Service, I use Frankfurt as an example of a post where the work was terribly dull. I'd gone to Harvard Law School and then issued birth certificates for six months of my life. For that matter, dealing with the visa applicants was hardly intellectually stimulating. But, what you could do outside that 9 to 5 job was wonderful. I did political reporting. The head of the Political Section in those days was a fellow by the name of Paul Kattenburg, Belgian born and who had been sent to Frankfurt because as an expert on Vietnam, he had told the Department things they didn't want to hear..

Q: Yes, we've interviewed Paul.

FISCHER: And Paul said if you want to do some political reporting, go ahead. So I ended up following the extreme right wing in Germany the so-called NDP, National German Party. They had a fairly big following in Wiesbaden.

Q: From your perspective where did the NDP fit? Were they extremists or were we looking for extremists?

FISCHER: Oh they were neo-Nazis. I can remember there was a mayor of Wiesbaden, Mix, who had also been the major of Wiesbaden once before from 1941 to 1945 but he had been de nazified, but then went on to became mayor again. He flirted with the NDP. I remember once going to a NDP rally in Wiesbaden, and my German was pretty good, I wouldn't say bilingual but I could certainly pass without too much notice. I remember half way through this thing, they had over the podium a huge banner, "Our heroes in war,

Our heroes in peace: the SS." In 1961 that was pretty blatant neo-Nazism. I can remember half way through this conversation, some guy turning toward me and saying, "You're not a German." I said, "no I'm American." I got thrown out. It was a little hairy, a little scary.

Q: So how long were you there?

FISCHER: I was only there for a year and a half and then I was selected for Polish language training.

Q: So this is 61 to summer of 63.

FISCHER: Let me tell you one last story about Frankfurt that I think is one of the more interesting. Since I was the staff aide of the Consular General, I ended up serving as the escort officer for lots and lots of people and this is the year in which the Berlin wall had gone up so that we had CODEL after CODEL, congressional delegation after congressional delegation. I was with John Jay McCloy, former high commissioner for Germany. We were in his hotel room and this must had been October 23rd or October 21st. We had heard rumors, there was some rumbling that something was going on in the world, but we didn't know what, whether it was a crisis Berlin or somewhere else in the world. Of course it was the Cuban missile crisis, as we later found out. So McCloy was in the bathroom of the suite when the phone rang. It was a voice vaguely familiar and said, "Can I speak to Mr. McCloy?" I said, "Who's calling?" He said, "The President." And I said, "The President of what?" Kennedy laughed and said, "The President of the United States." This is where I saw real power. I went to the bathroom and I knocked on the door. I said - somewhat excitedly if I remember correctly - "Mr. McCloy, Mr. McCloy, the President is on the phone!" He said, "I'm busy. Tell him I'll call him back." I thought to myself, anyone who can tell the President he's busy, he'll call back, is someone with a helluva lot of self-confidence!

Q: Were you there during the Berlin wall?

FISCHER: Yes. The Berlin wall had already been built in the summer of 1961, just when I joined the Foreign Service. I can remember traveling to and from Berlin a couple of times. You had to get what were called travel orders which were quadripartite orders marked with the Soviet flag. You would drive across the Helmstedt border between East and West Germany and be stopped at the barricades. It was really exciting stuff. This was really a big deal in those days. I went back to Helmstedt last October and there's no vestige of the Cold War. It's all gone. There's isn't anything left except an old gas station which indicates that this is where the border was.

Q: What was the feeling about the "Soviet menace" when you were there?

FISCHER: Very real. During the Cuban missile crisis, I can remember being on the roof of the Consulate, we took all our papers ready to go. We had the burn barrels on the roof ready to burn on a Friday or Monday night, whatever the major night of the crisis was. I

think all of us were convinced that this was it. We'd been told by the military with whom we worked that there was no way we could stop Soviet armor pouring through the Fulda gap. "These guys are going to come charging through there and they'll be in downtown Frankfurt in forty-five minutes." We believed it, at least I did. It was a very tense period. I was called up, and I had never been in the military. I was called by my draft board to have a physical. I remember calling them in Minneapolis and saying I'm in Germany. They said fine just go to the nearest military facility. I fully anticipated getting drafted, even though I was married.

When I had studied in Europe I had met several guys in the U.S. army, and I had nothing but contempt for them. They were probably enlisted men, but I didn't know the difference between an 18 year old recruit and a 50 year old General. So when I came to Frankfurt, this contempt came with me. My wife and I didn't find many army families that shared our interests, although we lived in a compound filled with army intelligence officers. But through my time there I did come to interact with senior officers who were impressive. Gen. Creighton Abrams was the commander of V Corps in Frankfurt. I do remember that his wife was not too impressive - mink coat, army limousine - that kind of army wife who lorded it over wives of lower ranks. But her husband was impressive in the right way: smart, tough. Thirty years later I had occasion as the Consul General in Munich to work with his son who was a one star. He was one of the brightest officers I ever met. But through my Foreign Service career I got to have a considerable respect for senior military.

Q: In 1963 now, where did you go?

FISCHER: I went to Polish language training. Polish language training and subsequent assignment to Warsaw was a plum assignment, very difficult to get. During my last year in Frankfurt we underwent an inspection. I can remember being called into a hotel room with the Chief Inspector and two of his side-kicks who said, "we want to know some stuff and are you prepared to talk to us?" By then I had already understood this Foreign Service ethic that we protect our own. But the Consul General had done some extraordinarily bizarre things and the inspectors wanted confirmation. So, I said, "I'm not prepared to wash dirty linen in public, I'm brand new to this business, why talk to me?" They said, "because we think you know what's going on and you're prepared to tell us. If you cooperate with us, I guarantee I'll get you any assignment you want, you name it." At which point he said, "Well, what do you want to do son?" I said well, I really want to go to Poland, Polish language training. He said okay. So, I ratted a little bit. Dorsz was effectively removed, as he should of been. So, that's how I ended up in Polish language training. It was a prestigious assignment. The people chosen for Eastern Europe assignments were considered something very special.

Q: I took Serbian in 1961-1962 and we really felt we were the cats pajamas. Just back to Dorsz, without over-ratting, what was the problem?

FISCHER: Dorsz was cheating on his ORE accounts, expenses. He had done some very bizarre things when Kennedy was there. In retrospect, I think he was either approaching Alzheimer's or had some mental aberration.

Q: So you took Polish language training from about 1963 to 1964 more or less. How did you find the language? You say you'd already learned to read some.

FISCHER: I liked that language training. My wife and I, again my wife took it full time which was unusual in those days but we had no children. It was a very difficult language, but intellectually it was a stimulating exercise and I enjoyed it. Other than sitting in the parking garage of a large apartment building and the exhaust fumes coming into these little tiny cubicles where you sat.

Q: There were times when we were evacuated because the levels got to high.

FISCHER: I had a very, very wonderful Polish language teacher who became a close friend later, Krystyna Malinowika. She was totally dedicated to this process. She really loved everybody who went through this course. We all became great friends of hers. We all spoke pretty good Polish. I think there were only four of us in that class. So it was small, intimate and fun.

Q: Were you getting any area studies about Poland before you went out there?

FISCHER: I think there was an area studies course that I ran concurrently.

Q: Did you get any feel for Poland, how things were before you went out?
FISCHER: No, not out of that course. I mean I knew a lot about Poland and I'd read about Poland. It was an area of considerable interest to me. I knew what I what I was getting into and had no surprises.

Q: Where did you go?

FISCHER: Went to Warsaw.

Q: From when to when?

FISCHER: From 19964 to 1968. In retrospect, I know it's always hard to say what your favorite posting was, but Warsaw - both my wife and I feel was the best post we ever had. Partly because of our age, partly because of the people who were in the Embassy, partly because of the experience in communism, Eastern Europe, etc.

Q: It was fun, this is where the action was. Could you describe Poland when you got there? What was the situation as you saw it between the United States and Poland.

FISCHER: Poland in 1956 was the first of the East European countries to revolt against the oppressive Stalinist rule. So it was very much the darling child of American policy in Eastern Europe. The country to which we had long loaned enormous amounts of wheat in

the fifties they had borrowed heavily in the 480 program. It was a country with fifteen million immigrants in the United States so it had an enormous political clout.

Q: Chicago, next to Warsaw, was the largest Polish city in the world.

FISCHER: Right. I think what made Poland so fascinating for me was that it was not a communist country. It was a Communist country in name only by the fact that the government was ruled by the Communist party. But they were so antithetical to everything that Communism stood for, it was just a fabulous time in which everyone tried to screw the system. This didn't include only students and others who were opposed to it. Members of the Party itself. I can remember the editor of Politika, the major Communist party newspaper, in my house one night, railing against the system that had been imposed on them by the Soviets. How nonsensical it was. You had a much freer sense of expression than any other Communist country at the time. The editor, by the way, was Mieczyslaw Rakowski who was married to a famous Polish violinist. Rakowski broke with the system and became Prime Minister of Poland in a post-communist government.

Q: When you were there in 1964, what was your job?

FISCHER: Again it was a rotational job. I spent a year in the visa section, no half a year. Then I spent a half year in the American citizenship Protection Section and then I went to USIA. There was not a USIA officially in the country, but we had USIA officers in a section called the Press and Culture Section. There had always been a political officer in that section of the Embassy to deal with dissidents, students, writers, intellectuals, that sort of thing. That was my job for three years.

Q: Let's go to the visa time. Here was a huge Communist country with a huge population in the United States and plenty of backwards and forwards. What was the immigration situation?

FISCHER: The communist regime in Poland was unique in Eastern Europe in allowing relatively free emigration. Very few restrictions. There must have been some of restrictions if you were working in high-tech or science and technology. But the people emigrating from Poland to the United States were essentially peasants. All from two very narrowly defined geographic regions. I remember we had a quota of fifty immigrant visa interviews a day. There must have been six of us in that Section. So it was a big workload. Lots and lots of people. It was an eye opener for me. I don't think as a diplomat and certainly not in the sixties we could have become so conscious what peasant life was like in Poland. These were extraordinarily poor people. Extraordinarily uneducated. The way in which most of these people flew to Chicago, SAS had an arrangement whereby SAS would fly directly from Warsaw to Copenhagen and then there was a three hour layover. Then there would be a direct flight to Chicago. SAS had a guy who did nothing but stand there and make sure that these people were able to make the transit. At the end of the hour when they landed in Copenhagen, most of them thought they were in Chicago. Literally. They'd all start to run out of the airport. I must say that when I visited the

region these peasants came from - the foothills of the Tatra mountains along the border with Czechoslovakia, it was so beautiful that I wondered how they could ever adjust to Chicago, Milwaukee or Cleveland.

Q: Did you have any problems with Communist affiliations or were these people not that type

FISCHER: No. You did in the non-immigrant section sure but not in the immigrant. These were all essentially peasants. We had an enormous problem with people who were convicted of crimes of moral turpitude because one of the areas which is the center of Polish immigration to America is Zakopane. Zakopane is a mountainous area. People who live in that mountain region, it's a bit like rural Arkansas in the 1950s. It was a Hatfield McCoy situation. At the wedding ceremonies that take place in this particular region, it is considered sport to fight. I remember I had a guy one day who had been arrested for attempted murder, which he denied. "Look," I said, "get us the court papers." I had the court papers in front of me. I said, tell me the circumstances. He said, come on, I was at a wedding, we all had too much vodka. I didn't try to kill him. I picked up a stone and I threw it at him. "How big was the stone?" I asked him. "You know," he said, "just a little stone you find by the side of the road, no big deal, all those stones that say one kilometer, two kilometers, etc." In the end, the issue hung on whether the weapon would have become a lethal weapon in the United States. I figured a fifty pound rock would be considered a lethal weapon!

Q: How about on the Protection side. What were the issues there?

FISCHER: Well we had a very interesting case. Two interesting cases. Most of the Americans living in Poland were retired Polish Americans who'd come back to Poland to live on their social security, rail road pension or whatever. And indeed, Poland had made an effort to attract these people because they built houses for them which they sold for the grand sum of twenty five thousand dollars. They were very nice little houses. As a matte of fact, the Embassy ended up buying a couple of them. But we must have had on any given day, maybe eight or ten thousand Americans who received social security checks. Most famous of which was a guy who lived near Krakow. He was the beneficiary of three pensions, social security, railroad and one other one. He never personally came to pick up his checks. He had one of his two nineteen year old mistresses come to the Embassy. One day I became so intrigued with this I said I have to go visit this guy. So I went down to this little Polish village where he lived. Indeed he was living in a little Polish village where he had built a house. And he was living with these two absolutely fabulous girls. My first question was, "why are you living in Poland?" He looked at these two girls and said, "So at my age, what would you do?" I had to agree that he had a point.

We had another case. We had an American student who was arrested from Poland for attempting to cross the border illegally from Russia. He was innocent, but so be it. We worked out with the Prime Minister that we could get the guy sprung if we pony up a substantial bail. Now bail was unknown in Communist countries. This was indeed a

straight cash for body swap. He was being held in a little rural jail in southeastern Poland in a town called Rzeszow. I went down with a buddy of mine, the other Vice Consul, who was in fact a CIA officer under very deep cover, and we had the money which we were going to hand over to this jailer to get this kid out. We arrived at that jail. There is the kid, the jailer, and a third party, from the Central Bank to receive the money. So my friend from the agency popped open the suitcase and took out a package of 100,000 zlotys, brand new crisp bills, plopped them on the table. The guy form the Central Bank picked up a wad of it and said somewhat threateningly, "Where did you get this money?" We said we got it from the Embassy cashier. The guy from the Bank picks up the telephone and calls the Central Bank in Warsaw. He asked, "How much of ZQ note do we have in circulation?" It turns out 110,000 zlotys of this particular note was in circulation of which we had 100,000 in brand new crisp bills. He accepted the money and we got the kid out. Got him on an airplane and sent him back to the United States. Later I asked my colleague where the hell he had gotten the money. He said we've been printing this stuff in Switzerland for years and years. I guess this was some strange Agency operation to test whether or not it could pass counterfeit zlotys in Poland.

And indeed we were paid out of the American Embassy. We exchanged our money at the CIA office, legally. We were told by the Ambassador and everyone else that the reason we were doing this was that this was PL480 money, left over surplus money from sales of grain to Poland in the late '50s. In order to recirculate this money, we would be allowed to exchange our U.S. dollars at a favorable rate of exchange, less than the black market, but still two or three time the official rate. The legal exchange rate in those was twenty-five zlotys to the dollar. What we didn't know and what you didn't find out until the day you left Poland, was that every dollar that you had exchanged, fifty cents was set aside in an escrow account and returned to you because the exchange rate we were using was in fact eight times the legal exchange rate. And rather than have ostentatious spending, they gave us two or three times the exchange rate which was very generous. But everyone had a check when you left. I left the Embassy in Warsaw in 1968 after four years and I was handed by the administrative officer a letter that said do not open until you get out of Poland. I opened a letter and inside was a check for I think $8,000.00 dollars. Which was wonderful. It was the down payment on our first house. To this day I don't know if we were using agency funny money, although we were always paid in new bills. Maybe this was an operation to weaken the Polish currency, although I don't know ho you can make something which is worthless anyway, somehow less valuable.

The other thing we discovered in Poland, we could take these zlotys which were in essence worthless pieces of paper and go to Wagons-Lit Cook. Wagon-Lits, which was in those days the largest travel agency in Europe, had a travel office in Warsaw. And we discovered we could take this funny money we had purchased and buy vouchers good in dollars overseas. This meant that we were able to travel for 50% or less of actual cost. My wife and I took one very famous vacation. We spent three weeks in Greece with a child and with a nanny we brought with us in the most luxurious hotels we could find on the island of Rhodes, and came back to Warsaw with more money then when we'd left. That goose, that was truly a wonderful goose, that laid the golden egg, was killed by a political

officer who went to Copenhagen with $10,000 of these funny vouchers. He stayed at the Hotel Angleterre, the best hotel in Copenhagen. The first question he asked the Concierge was, "I'm having some silver delivered from George Jensen. Can you pay this out of my hotel bill if I leave you this deposit?" So he managed to buy ten thousand dollars worth of George Jensen silver for abut twenty five hundred dollars. The inspectors came in and found out about it and that was the end of that arrangement.

Q: We'll move to the USIA or cultural side in a minute, but during the whole time you were there was there a concern about security because we had a famous case of espionage in the Embassy, Irwin Scarbeck, some years before. Could you talk about life there as an officer on the security side?

FISCHER: This was no joke. I mean in my four years in Warsaw, twelve officers in the Embassy, not all Officers, but twelve people from the Embassy were either caught in or suspected of being entrapped by the intelligence service and were sent home early.

Q: These are almost all sex ones or fake papers being passed?
FISCHER: Yes, mostly sex but there were lots of ways to get in trouble. Poland was really quite deceiving. On the one hand, there was a society, the most open society in Eastern Europe so you could have access to local inhabitants you couldn't have had in places like Czechoslovakia. Many of them were attractive, wonderful, Polish women or gorgeous Polish men. There was always an effort (and we were always aware of efforts) to recruit us. I used to ride the bus, public transportation in Poland, largely because it was a great way to keep up my Polish and find out what people were talking about. I lived at the end station of a line and in 1965 a guy, two guys riding ahead of me on the bus, the stop before the end station, we were the only three people riding the bus. One of them got up, came back and sat down next to me and said, "Fischer, we would like to talk to you. It's simple, we don't want much we just want an Embassy telephone book or whatever, ten thousand cash right here and now and we'd like to work out an arrangement. You seem like somebody we can do business with." So those recruitment efforts went on all the time and some were successful. Particularly among Marine guards. We had an Embassy bar in a restaurant in the Embassy which was the watering hole for all the diplomatic corps, for the NATO diplomatic corps, with two very attractive waitresses. They were Polish and the turnover was high, because invariably they'd be found in bed with one of the Marine guards. So it was a real and present danger.

I was followed, not initially in my first year when I was working in the Consular section, but when I was transferred to political work with students and dissidents, my wife and I were both followed twenty four hours a day by an entire team of Polish security officers. We got to know them personally very well. It was odd because my wife had discovered by sheer accident that we could overhear our surveillance team's radio on our American FM radio in our car. I remember going up to see the CIA chief, my God I just discovered, you know, we can hear the frequencies. He said, we've known for years, keep your mouth shut, don't tell anybody. And, make damn sure when you park your car, move your radio dial. Don't have it up there because as soon as they see that they'll know we're listening.

So for three years we listened essentially to all our secret police contacts. My wife who had very short black hair was very upset when she discovered her code name used by the secret police was “the crow”. She would get in the car in the car in the morning and say, the crow is leaving the nest. There were some pretty hairy times.

Q: In the Soviet Union they would try to put you on knock out drugs and you’d wake up and you’d have had pictures taken and all that sort of thing. Was this a problem?

FISCHER: No nothing at all violent in that sense. No, it was simply that they would throw at you or put you in situations which were potentially embarrassing. Photographed constantly. My favorite anecdote about this is that my wife gave birth to our first child in Houston, Texas. And of course, in those days, and it’s still true, you can’t fly on an airplane in your last six weeks of pregnancy. So she went home two months early. So sitting in our little house I said, this is going to be great because the phone is going to be ringing as soon as you leave here. When wives left the post, you were barraged with offers by prostitutes, all of whom worked for or reported to the secret police. So I put her on the plane and I sat in that house for the next four weeks. Not a phone call, not a peep. Nobody tried to go near me. So I flew back to Houston for the birth and then we came back to Warsaw with the baby. We arrived on a Friday. That Sunday afternoon about five o’clock, (we lived in a little house that had an electric gate that you could operate from inside the house) at five o’clock the doorbell rang, and I went to look out who it was. And here are two girls not bad looking, in micro-mini skirts, black lace stockings, high heels and they said, "David we’re back!" At which point my wife came to the door. They said "Oh, David we’re so sorry, we thought she was still in Texas."

So I buzzed the buzzer. This is too good, I gotta see what’s going on. We invited them into the backyard. I couldn’t of course talk in the house because there were bugs. So we took them in the backyard and gave them a drink. And I said, "What’s the story?" They explained they were two girls from the acting school in Warsaw who had been paid fifty bucks to come down here and pretend they knew me. They had memorized the blue print of my house so they knew where everything was. The idea was simply to see how my wife would react. It was typical for that type of operation. My wife laughed, thank god!

Q: Let’s talk about the time you were doing the dissidents/cultural thing. Can you first talk in general what was our cultural stance in Poland during this 1964 time?

FISCHER: The hunger for American culture in communist Poland was something to behold. The intellectuals were steeped in reading American literature, the classics like Hemingway and Faulkner. These were "legitimate" American authors, legitimated by the regime.

Q: Jack London.

FISCHER: Jack London, yes, but it went well beyond that because there was an extremely sophisticated intelligencia who was very aware of what was going on in New

York. That was certainly true of the artists' circles, as well. Many of them exhibited in Paris, exhibited in New York. So they all had a deep appreciation and knowledge of western art. We conquered Poland probably more through culture than in any other way. The U.S. government sometime in the early 1960s decided to invest a lot of money in English teaching which was the wisest thing we ever did. Because learning English as a second language became almost synonymous with someone who could rise in the system, antithetical to the communist system. The Voice of America had a disc jockey called Willis Conover who played jazz from 10 at night until 1 in the morning. Everyone - and I mean everyone who counted - listened to that program. In the Embassy we all had movie projectors in our houses, at least those of us in the Political Section and Press and Cultural Section. Every Friday night we'd show an American movie. We could get in that room, members of the Politburo for example. It was extraordinary. Poland was the only country in the world in Eastern Europe where we had real relationships with very, very high-ranking communist officials. And they would come because the loved Scotch-whiskey and they loved to see "Westside Story". And for me, it was wonderfully exciting time in Poland because I had access to people in music, film, literature who were internationally well known.

Q: Well the film business was sort of starting to pick up there wasn't it? During that time you had "Knife in the Water" directed by Roman Polansky.

FISCHER: I gave Roman Polansky a leader grant to come to America from which he never came back. But Polish film was internationally acclaimed, and as a cultural attaché I had access to all sorts of people in the industry. There were lots of good directors: Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polansky and others who went on to become stars in Paris, if not Hollywood. And there were certainly a lot of great looking actresses!

Q: Was there much in the cultural exchange who were Americans, Polish-Americans because these were coming out of a relatively poor area and one does not think of the Poles in the United States as getting too far in the upper society?

FISCHER: I think the Polish intelligentsia, like many European intelligentsia, looked down upon their immigrant brethren in the United States. There were Polish plays and movies and jokes about the language, 19th century archaic Polish which was spoken in Chicago. They had no relationship and no interest in those people. One of the more ingenious ways that the Polish government decided to get back at us because we were making so many inroads, was to harness the "Polish" jokes that were popular in America in the '60s. The American Embassy in Warsaw was on a major boulevard. Outside we had a huge display window that was changed every week by the USIA with photographs of exhibitions. It was extraordinarily popular. It was not unusual to see two or three hundred people at any given time standing outside those display cases. One morning I came to the Embassy and there was a vacant lot across the street from the Embassy. The Polish government had put up a billboard that was about 90 feet long and 40 feet high facing the Embassy. The title of it in Polish, "this is what they really think of us" and

listed on that billboard for all the see was every Polish joke I had ever heard in my life. It was enormously effective anti-American propaganda.

Q: You might explain in the context of somebody that would be reading this at a later point, what a Polish joke meant during this era.

FISCHER: Well of course it was denigrating Polish-Americans as dumb and stupid. How many Poles does it take to screw in a light bulb? Three: one to hold the lightbulb and two to rotate the ladder.

Q: You said you were looking at the dissident groups. How would you define those?

FISCHER: A couple of groups were targeted. One was African students because again in those days, there were an enormous number of Africans who were third world students who were sent to Eastern Europe on scholarships. My job was to get a number of them to defect if you will, to change sides. We offered them scholarships in American universities, the bright ones. The American Embassy became a respite for them, a place where they could come and speak freely, and what not. There was an enormous amount of racism in Poland directly against black, African students. That was certainly a group we dealt with.

The others however, the Polish intellectuals - we weren't trying to recruit them for information. It was simply to give them a window to the west. The Poles, now we are doing this in 1998 when Poland is about to become a member of NATO, but Poland's national psyche has always struggled with who they are as a nation. Are they Western Europe because they're Roman Catholic? Are they part of middle Europe because of their relationship with Germany? Are they Eastern Europe because their language is Slavic? And the intelligentsia very much wanted to be part of Western Europe. So by providing them access to western materials ranging from books in the universities to American movies, it was a way to win friends and influence people.

We had a wonderful program called the IMG program which, in essence, used the money generated by the sale of American wheat to purchase American books, movies and other materials. So in 1965 and 1966 when there was one American movie shown in all of the Soviet Union for the last twenty years, the top six movies in Warsaw every week were American movies. We had made it possible for them to buy that material at local currency.

You had an unusual arrangement in Poland. Any citizen could go to a bookstore and order an American book if he had a voucher. And we made those vouchers available to every intellectual, every university student, every professor we could.

Odd as it may seem in a communist state, American programs were shown on Polish televisions through this arrangement. Dr. Kildare, a soap opera about an American doctor, was the most popular program in Poland.

In 1968, there was a major upheaval in the Communist Party, a lot of student riots going on, and only at that point did the students become really politically active, and we assisted them in every step of the way. We made sure they had access to mimeograph equipment, albeit on a very covert basis. We met with them and made sure their manifestos and messages were played back to Poland over Radio Free Europe. Then that became a very political struggle. In June 1
968 all the student leaders were arrested. But it's interesting because the leaders of that 1968 student movement, subsequently became the leaders of Solidarity and went on to become leaders in a non-communist Poland.

Q: Well, 1968 was the year of the Czech invasion, Gaulle was essentially overthrown because of students, there were major student upheavals in Western Germany, and of course we were going through our own times. This is the time when students were on the rise.

FISCHER: That's right. But in Poland it arose because of a struggle within the Communist Party. The students saw this as an opportunity to effect some major change. And of course they had been encouraged by what they had seen in France, but this was even before the French student riots. But you're right, there was a kind of universal sense of change embodied by a younger generation. But, it became a struggle within the Communist Party. It was the last kind of wave of anti-Semitic pogrom which took place. Jews were beaten in the street and all sorts of terrible things happened. The American Embassy was very much a part of the process because we were reaching out and had contacts to all these groups, be they Jews who felt under threat or the students who were trying to riot.

Q: You mention students getting the mimeograph machine. That's sort of a provocative act. How did they get the machine?

FISCHER: I don't know how we got it to them but we did. So I guess it was on loan to the English department at the University of Warsaw.

Q: Were you able, prior to the 68 period, was there much contact with the students or were they pretty much non-political?

FISCHER: No, we had lots of contacts with the students. Again, because we were the flame to which the moths were attracted. We had invested very heavily in English languages departments in Warsaw and in universities throughout Poland. There were three major universities where we had in essence created English philology departments, and the students in those faculties were studying English language, studying U.S. literature almost as a way to rebel against the regime.

Q: My wife has a master's in linguistics and the Polish linguistics area was really quite well developed. What were the Russian efforts?

FISCHER: They ruled through military occupation and the communist party. But I can remember standing in front of the American Embassy when Khrushchev made a visit to Poland, probably in 1967. The Poles had of course gotten out their work brigades and they had all these people lined them up along the street to hail his arrival. A lot of us were curious and gathered in front of the American Embassy. As the car went by, Kruschev was going through the multitudes, throngs of Poles lined up, nobody said a word. You could have heard a pin drop. Nobody applauded; they just sat on their hands. Until they came by the American Embassy. Just naturally, all of us American applauded and I remember Kruschev turning to his host, President Wladyslaw Gomulka. And of course you couldn't hear it but I knew what he was saying: "Who are those people?"

I tell you a funny anecdote it didn't involve me but it involved my predecessor in this job.

Q: Who was that?

FISCHER: Jack Scanlan who later went on to become Ambassador to Yugoslavia. Jack got a call one night at two or three o'clock in the morning from a friend of his who was a very high ranking Polish Communist Party official, who said "Scanlan, get down to my apartment." Jack was willing to get up in the middle of the night and went down to this guy's apartment. He met him at the entry way to his apartment. "Look, upstairs," he said, "I have three or four high members of the communist Central Committee. Put on this jacket and these dirty boots and when you come in, I am going to introduce you as a good friend of mine - the new Russian cultural attaché. You can play it any way you want it."

Jack spoke fluent Russian, fluent Polish and he could speak Polish with a pretty good Russian accent. So Jack went up and found a pretty good party going on. Jack's in these muddy boots which he proceeds to put on the coffee table and rants and raves for two hours about the Poles and how dumb they are, ignorant and everyone is seething, fuming and there's nothing they can do because he's a Russian. At the end of about two hours of constant abuse, the host said, he's not a Russian cultural attaché, he's the American Cultural Attaché. And of course that brought the house down. Those were the kinds of things that went on all the time, even among members of the Central Committee.

Q: What was our feeling about the role of intellectuals in Poland, intellectuals particularly in France of course, but also in Germany are very important in the political thing where the United States, it's almost as though we don't have an intellectual class.

FISCHER: No, no we don't.

Q: How did the Polish intellectual class fit into the power system in Poland?

FISCHER: Well they didn't. I mean most of them were anti-Communists. The Polish Writers Union, for example, which in other Communist countries was always a rubber stamp of the government, the Writer's Union in Poland was relatively independent and

proudly so. And so, they were the last bastion, if you will, an important voice for anti-communism. There was a Catholic newspaper. A very powerful Catholic newspaper that was of course self-censored. These institutions rarely attacked the government, but they managed to keep the ideas of democracy, freedom and capitalism alive in Poland, I don't think any of us had any illusions that these guys were going to take over power from what was a Russian militarily backed government. But we certainly had our vested interest in keeping the fires of dissent burning.

Q: Was the feeling that Poland was taking the course it was taking only because of the Soviet army there?

FISCHER: Oh yes. The joke at the time in which Wladyslaw Gomulka who was the head of the Communist Party was ostensibly escorting a state visitor, Queen of Belgium, to mass. She's surprised not only that the head of the communist party decided to attend mass with her but he's going through all the service, genuflecting and all. She turned to him, Mr. President, I'm astounded you are appear to be a practicing Catholic. He said you don't understand Poland. "When it comes to communism, all of us are practitioners and none, believers. When it comes to the Catholic Church, none are practitioners, but all are believers."

Q: What was the role of the church during this time? When I say church obviously it's the role of the Catholic church.

FISCHER: Critical. Again in the 1968 student uprising the Church played a very important role. The Cardinal was Cardinal Wyszynski, an extraordinarily conservative Catholic who represented Polish nationalism from the 19th century. That was not a universally held belief. I can tell you about a young priest who was my political contact in Krakow, who subsequently became the Pope. Representing the Church, Church hierarchy, he stood up against the state on numerous issues, for example, religious education in schools. In the 1968 student uprising, Wyszynski went around the country giving a series of sermons on Sundays which were very provocative and about as open a criticism as you can have. There were, however, younger priests in the system who were considered to be modernist and that was title they took. Bishop Wojtyla was a kind of bridge between the younger clergy and the aged leadership, whose views he followed. The once and future Pope translated a number of Shakespeare plays into a modern translations in Poland. That's initially how we came to know him by supplying him books from the Embassy library. But he became a contact of mine so when I would go to Krakow, and I would go at least once a month, I would always made sure that on Friday evenings I would end up with Bishop Wojtyla. He liked scotch and that alone was usually enough to get an invitation. It was a very interesting job.

Q: What was his outlook?

FISCHER: Wojtyla was a nationalist. He allied himself with the conservative wing of the Church. But he had enormous popularity among younger priests and students. But in

Poland, the Cardinal was not called Primate for nothing. The Cardinal ruled the Church with an iron fist.

Q: Were you there during the ultimate events August 1968, the Czech invasion?

FISCHER: No I wasn't. I was declared persona non grate in late April 1968 as the result of a failed secret police action to entrap me. I was at the Lodz film school meeting with faculty and students on a Friday evening showing the latest American film. The Lodz film school, for those that don't know it, is located in a small provincial capital about a hundred miles outside of Warsaw. It's a great film school from which many of the great Polish directors came. We had extensive contacts with that film school. This is early April 1968. One of the difficulties the students had who were rioting in different universities was their inability to communicate with one another. You couldn't talk on the telephone, there was no way to pass information back and forth. If you recall, we had the ability to monitor secret police radios in our cars, and I was lucky enough to overhear plans to intercept me when I left the school to drive back to Warsaw. From what I overheard I was to have had in my car a student who would be carrying anti-government pamphlets. I was to be stopped in a traffic check and the student and pamphlets would be uncovered, thereby linking the Embassy directly to the student protesters. And because I could hear the description of what was going on over the surveillance radio, after I had shown the movie, a very attractive, young student, a girl came up to me, and she said are you driving back Warsaw tonight? I said yes. She said I just missed the last train, can you give me a ride to Warsaw? I said, no I'm sorry I can't. So when I left Lodz, I came around a bend in the road, there was the road block. A policeman opens up my car, looking first of all for the student, who I was supposed to be with and the pamphlets. They let me go after an hour of interrogation. The next morning the Ambassador was called into the Foreign Ministry and told that it was time for Fischer to conclude his tour of duty. That must have been the first week in May

Q: You mentioned trying to help the students and all. How was the student uprising viewed at the beginning by the Embassy?

FISCHER: We certainly did not provoke the riots nor promote them. But we encouraged them, either directly with contacts with the leadership or through broadcasts from Radio Free Europe out of Munich. We knew all the leaders. They were young kids who had come to our houses with some regularity and asked what should we do? "Should we barricade the university? We know they're going to bring in truckloads of armed militia, the para-militaries of the Communist Party. Should we attack them directly, should we give in." It was a very open kind of a dialogue with us as individuals. We weren't under instruction. On the one hand we certainly didn't want these kids hurt, but on the other hand, anything which weakened the government was seen in our interest, I guess.

Q: Who was out Ambassador? Did you have several while you were there?

FISCHER: Yes, the first I served under was John Moors Cabot, a grand old man of the Foreign Service. Cabot had served as Ambassador in more countries - 12, I believe - than any other Ambassador in American history. He was followed by John Gronouski who was a political appointee. He had been Post Master General under Kennedy for about a week before the President was assassinated. Gronouski's major interest at the time was to facilitate a rapprochement Between Germany and Poland which of course was premature. He certainly was not in a position to do so, but like many political appointees he had dreams of grandeur and tended to exaggerate the role of the Ambassador. Still, he was correct in his analysis which came to pass a decade later when Willi Brandt became Chancellor of Germany.

Q: What was your impression of Gronouski?

FISCHER: I really liked Gronouski. He was handicapped because he couldn't speak Polish … not a word … which always surprised Poles who figured with a name like Gronouski he's gotta speak Polish!

Q: He was actually a university professor wasn't he?

FISCHER: Yes. He was an economist, University of Wisconsin. Very interesting guy.

Q: Anything else you remember about Poland?

Warsaw was an interesting assignment because it was where we met the Chinese government, despite the lack of diplomatic relations. From the mid-1950s we held a series of meetings with the Peoples' Republic of China, usually once every four to six months. By 1964 those meetings took on some urgency because of the war in Vietnam. We were trying to keep China out of the war and in 1967 and 1968 hoped the Chinese would be willing to facilitate face to face negotiations between the U.S. and North Vietnam. Despite several tentative feelers, the Vietnamese never showed up, although the Chinese had gone to considerable efforts in Christmas 1967 to arrange such a meeting in Warsaw.

The talks were really kind of funny. I served as a note taker at several sessions, despite the fact that I spoke not a word of Chinese. My role was to write longhand verbatim reports on meetings which often went on for 4 hours or more. Lord knows why we went through this charade, since we taped the meetings by tapping a Russian or Polish bug which had been placed in the meeting rooms. But the meetings were stilted minuets, carefully scripted to allow each side to vent without the slightest possibility of real dialogue or give and take.

The record of the meetings have long since been published - with one exception that never made it into the official record. In 1965 John Cabot, every inch the Boston Brahmin he was served as Ambassador. The Chinese Ambassador was Wang, himself an aristocrat, a wonderful man who was later killed in the cultural revolution. The meetings were

without an agenda which allowed each side to raise whatever it wanted. The Chinese in those days were spouting the line that since they had a billion people, nuclear weapons posed no danger to them.

Cabot listened to this diatribe once day and finally lost his temper. "Mr. Ambassador," he began. "As you may know I was forced to leave Shanghai in 1949 as the last American diplomat on the mainland, as communist hordes swept through the streets and over the gates. My departure was somewhat hasty, and I had to leave behind many of my personal possessions. Among those were my wife's diaphragm, and all I can say is that if you people found it It hasn't done you a damn bit of good!" Ambassador Wang spoke fluent English and fell off his chair laughing before the translator could complete the translation!

But I'll tell you another funny anecdote. In 1965 I arrived at this fabulous palace which was the Radziejowice Palace where the talks took place in Warsaw. It was a crystal clear day, the snow had just fallen. I had a new Chinese counterpart whom I had never met. He was standing in front of a window, and I went up and shook hands. I said to him in English, "Isn't this a beautiful scene?" And he turned to me and answered, "Yes it is but not as beautiful as it is in Beijing where the glorious sun of Chairman Mao Tse Deng shines upon the Chinese people twenty four hours a day." That was the end of that conversation. Years later in 1979 I went to Tanzania as Charge. We didn't have full diplomatic relations then, I guess we did have relations with the Chinese, because we were certainly talking to them. The Chinese Ambassador called me up and invited me to lunch. I went to his residence for lunch. I walked in and he looked at me and he said, It is a beautiful day, but not as beautiful as it is in Beijing where the glorious sun of and he began to laugh. It was my counter part from Warsaw and he said. "I look back often on that conversation. By god, how stupid it was." We came a long way in the intervening years.

Poland was also interesting because Germany had no diplomatic relations with Poland in those days. The American Embassy was the protecting power for West German interests. We had an office in Warsaw which was called the German Permit Office which was staffed by two Americans and about eight Poles. Our job was to register the 650,000 ethnic Germans who were living in Poland in those days. The Poles allowed 20-50,000 of them to emigrate to Germany every year, despite the loud protest of the East German government. I ran that office for about four months. It was for me fascinating to be able to travel through what had been East Prussia, Silesia and Pomerania to talk to these remnants of population that either chosen to remain behind or had gotten stuck there after World War II. They were a very interesting group.

The chief Polish local employee in the Embassy was a German by the name of Fred Zakwie. Fred, whose real name was something like Zakiewicz, had been a U-boat commander in World War II fighting the U.S. in the North Atlantic. He had come from Breslau, a city that passed to the Poles in 1945. Fred returned to Breslau in 1946 and found himself trapped. So he ended up working for the American Embassy who was more

than happy to hire him for his Germanic efficiency. Fred was married to a Pole and had Polish citizenship. Of course, he also worked for the Polish secret police. What a wacky place! A former German U-boat commander spying on the Americans on behalf of communist Poland.

Q: So you leave Warsaw and where did you go?

FISCHER: I went back initially to Washington and served in IN for I guess about a year covering Eastern Europe. It was interesting because it was year of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. I remember that assignment well because I worked for Helmut Sonnenfeldt, a prominent European scholar. On August 17 Hal asked me to write a paper giving our views on the probability of a Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. What the public did not know was that President Johnson and the Russians were going to announce the beginning of nuclear arms talks on August 22nd or 23rd. Hal and I both thought that the Russians placed a higher value of their relations with the U.S. than on the need to quash the Dubcek regime in Czechoslovakia. I wrote the paper that unequivocally predicted the Russians would not invade.

The funny part of the story is that four or five years later I was attending a Chief of Mission conference in London with Sonnenfeldt. He came up to me and congratulated me for that paper. "We really called it, didn't we?" he said. I thought he was pulling my leg but it turned out he really believed we had made the call in the other direction. Boy, talk about selective memory!

So I worked at I&R for about nine months.

Q: Let’s talk a bit about IN. Did you have a particular area?

FISCHER: I covered Poland and Czechoslovakia and East Germany.

Q: Where did you get your information?

FISCHER: Well IN was basically an all source repository. We had access to all the Agency stuff, DIA, State Department and Special Intelligence. There were in those days, and I guess I can talk about it now because it has been published, we had an interesting system called Guppy. Guppy was very compartmentalized special intelligence. It was basically intercepts of the mobile phone line of the Russian leadership in Moscow. The reason I tell this story is that on the eve of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the then head of the Warsaw Pact, Marshal Gretchko had gone around to all the Warsaw Pact members to canvas them whether or not they were going to invade. And when he arrived back at Moscow airport, we were able to intercept a telephone call Gretchko made to Brezhnev. The problem was they were no fools and spoke in a word code - you know, the moon is red or some silly phrase - and we didn't have the faintest idea whether that meant the invasion was on or off.

I think INR in those days had a very interesting group of people. I think extraordinarily talented, particularly in Soviet and East European affairs. People who had really been steeped in this process for twenty or twenty five years: Irene Jaffe, for example was there. Irene was an expert on Eastern Europe. Martha Mautner who was one of the key analysts on Eastern Germany. A lot of émigré people who had enormous knowledge of the region. Then they were supplemented by guys like me. There were two or three Foreign Service Officers in each regional office.

Q: What was your impression of what you were getting from the Agency and what you were getting from the Posts?

FISCHER: I don't know. I can't honestly answer that because it's too long ago for me to remember. Bill Rogers was then Secretary of State, I think. I do remember that when Rogers was Secretary I was one of his morning briefers. Rogers was one of those people who loved to see raw intelligence. He loved to read intercepted messages and all sorts of stuff. He gave enormous weight to this stuff even though it was raw and not analyzed and more often then not he made a lot of mistakes in judgment. He gave enormous credence to a CIA report over a State Department report because he just believed "gosh people were buying and selling this stuff it had to be of greater value than someone who had analyzed it at an Embassy. By and large, though, I was very impressed by the amount of intelligence we were getting out of Eastern Europe from the Agency, and I think it was all very first class stuff. But IN played a valuable role in tempering some of the Agency's judgement about events. They tended to see things in black and white with precious few grays in between.

Q: What was the fit between IN, this is the 68 period, and the Office of Soviet Affairs?

FISCHER: We had very close working relationships. Again, working in the East European section we saw ourselves as part and parcel, an adjunct with, a partnership with the guys on the Desk who were operating day to day stuff.

Q: Because sometimes there's a real gap.

FISCHER: Yes.

Q: Did you have a feeling that what you were doing was getting up and down the line?

FISCHER: Again because in the office I was working in, which was Soviet and East European Affairs, was hot in those days, this was the precursor during the period just before Glassboro summit between Johnson and Brezhnev. The Czech invasion had taken place in 68, there was a great deal of unrest in the Block if you will. One of the issues that did arise was that in 1968 very few officers in the State Department had access to some of the special intelligence. So you had people on the desk that were not cleared to see certain materials, whereas people in I&R were. I think that's one of the reasons that special intelligence was broadened over the years, to give operational officers greater access to it.

Q: I talked to someone whose on the economic side who said special intelligence was very good for them but he found that the CIA because they were not operational, particularly in economics, didn't know what the issues were. So they'd get stuff and they'd make analysis of it that didn't have much to do with the day to day operations. But when you got to someone who understood the open negotiations, they could make better judgments.

FISCHER: I can't comment on that. But the areas we were working on - nuclear and strategic parity, size and composition of military forces - all absolutely required access to so-called "special" intelligence. The U.S. had an enormous strategic advantage in the amount and quality of intelligence we obtained. Did it allow us to make better policy? Perhaps, but it certainly allowed us a more realistic view of our opponent.

Q: Did things go into a deep freeze after this while you were there as far as relations between the United States and the countries that participated in the invasion?

FISCHER: Certainly. U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations were postponed a year, a decision which had major consequences for U.S. foreign policy. Had the negotiations began as scheduled in 1968 before either the U.S. or USSR had tested MIRVs (multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles) we might have been able to prevent their deployment. The arrival of MIRVs was the greatest single contributing technology to the enormous explosion of the arms race.

But I left INR after nine months or so. Hal Sonnenfeldt asked me if I would be interested in working on a special project for a friend of his, Ambassador Jim Leonard. Jim was a Deputy Director in ACDA (The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.) I had no idea what the project would be, but since it sounded interesting, I interviewed with Jim about an independent project. When I was finally told about it, I had to ask myself what I had done to be banished to a "Siberia" in ACDA. Jim asked me to work alone for 6 months or so developing a concept paper for future arms control negotiations with China. I may as well have been asked to draw up a negotiating paper for Martians, since there was little or no prospect that we would ever be in a position to discuss these issues with China. But I did so, anyway, and wrote a paper which was for "President's Eyes Only."

I don't remember what we proposed. Probably some elementary stuff. It was only several years later that I learned, of course, that Kissinger had commissioned the paper as part of a general review of U.S.-China relations that resulted in the opening to Beijing. Win Lord told me years later that the paper had been part of the package Kissinger took with him to Beijing but that it had never been used.

Q: Talking about this, one what was your background? I think we have to point out that in 1968, we had no relations with the Chinese outside of talking in Poland or something like that. So the idea of an agreement there, as you say, would seem far off. But what was

your background because if you're going to propose something you should know arms systems?

FISCHER: I had no background. I think Jim Leonard and another guy named David Limbaugh who I'd gotten to know through my work in IN thought I was fairly bright and decided to give me this assignment.

Q: There you are. There are all these esoteric problem, throw weight, missiles…

FISCHER: Well I steeped myself in the literature and it was a fairly interesting assignment for me. I subsequently went onto to the SALT negotiations as a result of the knowledge I gained. By I think it was a question of looking at previous arms control agreements, reading what the Chinese position was on nuclear testing issues. Of course, I had participated in the China talks in Warsaw. I was a note taker at the China talks in Warsaw for four years and therefore had some knowledge at least of the China hands that were in the business, that kind of stuff.

As for the technical issues, maybe because I didn't understand them, but I always believed that at heart arms control issues were political issues. Technical arguments could be used to buttress one side or another, but the decision to reach an agreement or not was a political one, not technical or military.

Q: Back to this stint with China Disarmament agreement. While you were looking at the subject, as the only person to do that, what were you focusing on as far as what would make sense with China at that time?

FISCHER: Well the idea obviously was to look at issues that would diminish tensions. Nixon was elected in 1968 and it's interesting to note that the first two executive orders on January 20, 1969 were China directed. The first was to stop a series of excursions that we had undertaken for years in the Taiwan straits. We used to take small patrol boats and run them at full speed, forty or fifty miles per hours, up to the Chinese coast to within three miles, to trigger their radars. It was clearly a very provocative act. And Nixon's also halted all of CIA covert support to the Khambas in Tibet. Since the mid 1950s we had supported a group of Tibetan warriors from eastern Tibet. There were about 1500 of them stationed originally on Guam, later in Nepal. That was my first indication that Nixon wanted to look at new ways of dealing with China. So on the basis of that and I guess conversations I had with other people, looking at a series of confidence building measures, which ranged from the sublime to the ridiculous, clearly one of the issues was nuclear testing. Were there ways that we could help the Chinese if you will end atmospheric testing?

As a result of that work, I guess, I was seconded to the first SALT negotiations in 1969. I was the Secretary to the Delegation (in fact, the most junior officer on the talks.) It was an interesting opportunity, since I got to do what few foreign service officers did - go out and look at the enormous strategic arsenal we had compiled. I went out to Wyoming to the

Minuteman silos, up to North Dakota to look at the B-52 fleet. I never got a ride on a sub, although I was offered one. The Navy invited me to go from Norfolk to Portsmouth, New Hampshire on a Trident sub. But I turned it down when I was told there was a very small chance that the sub would be redeployed en route and I could find myself stuck for 6 months on a U.S. submarine!

Q: Can you explain what SALT I was?

FISCHER: SALT, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks were the first major negotiation between the United States and the Soviet Union aimed at reducing or capping the arsenals on both sides. The way in which the SALT talks proceeded, there were five agencies involved, Secretary of Defense, the civilian side, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency The talks took place over three years. We met first in Helsinki, then Vienna and Geneva. The negotiations usually went on for three months, followed by a three month recess, as each side reviewed their options. So there was a back-stopping group of people who were engaged in Washington on a day to day basis providing negotiating instructions for the delegations. So I had an office mate of mine named David Aaron and he and I for a period of two or three years altered on joining the delegations. He would go out on the delegation and I would be one of the members of the backstopping team for ACDA. Then I would go for the delegation and he would be the backstopping team. It was an interesting time.

Q: From when to when were you one the SALT talks.

FISCHER: From the start, which was the summer of 1969, until the completion of the agreement in May 1972.

Q: When you started this what was your feeling and what was the feeling of the team? Was it one of optimism, what was the general thrust?

FISCHER: I think there was an enormous amount of professional dedication. This is probably the first job I had in the Foreign Service where I really believed that what I was doing was important. Whether you're a Political Officer in Warsaw, these are all kind of peripheral jobs. But here you were really engaged in something that was absolutely drove to the heart to national security, and our ability to survive the cold war. I had a more than passing understanding of nuclear weapons, and there were nights when I had nightmares of what might happen in time of conflict with the Soviets. I don't think that anybody, with the exception of the Cuban missile crisis, thought that we would likely go to war, but I was involved in issues such as targeting. I had access to the targeting lists. I had a much better appreciation I suppose than ninety-nine percent of people in the Foreign Service what the consequences would be if diplomacy ever failed. So I think we all entered this with a sense of optimism and hope that we would achieve an agreement.

Q: Had there been any signs as you were doing this from the Soviet Union. Did it look like they had interest in this too?

FISCHER: Oh, yes. I think all of us went into that first negotiation with a sense that an agreement was possible. What became clear very early on in the SALT talks, I would say for the first year and a half, that it was less a negotiation than an education process for the Soviet. When the talks began we didn't know whether the Russians understood, much less accepted, our doctrine of mutual deterrence. There was a strong feeling that the Soviets saw nuclear weapons as a way to win a war. For our part we were afraid the Russians really sought a strategic superiority over the U.S. So the first 12 or 18 months were important ones in getting the Russians to understand our doctrine. In the end both sides came to understand that a nuclear war was unwinnable, that nuclear weapons made no sense in terms of war-fighting capability.

Q: Let's talk about during these talks, were there in 1969 and 1972, a fairly long time, were there stages of agreement, steps which led inexorably to an agreement?

FISCHER: I used the SALT talks as an example in a course I teach the fact that inter-state negotiations are the least of the problems. The real issues arise in intra-state negotiations, trying to get the U.S. government to come to a common position. It was very clear that one of the major issues in this was whether or not the Joint Chiefs of Staff were prepared to put limits on the development, research, testing and development of weapons which they wanted. It was an enormously difficult process. I think as far as the Russians were concerned, the Russians saw those negotiations as far more political than technical. That's to say their primary motive in the SALT talks was to gain political parity with the United States; to be seen as an equal. We approached it, the United States, as a very technical negotiation. Paul Nitre was in those days was the representative from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and Nitre saw himself as some sort of guru in terms of issues like radar apertures, throw weight and all this other stuff. He used this to enormous effect to block progress in the talks. As you know, the SALT talks fairly early on got bogged down, to the point where Kissinger recognized that it was unlikely there was going to be any serious breakthroughs in those talks so he opened the back channel negotiation with then Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. Gerry Smith who was head of the delegation who was not privy to what was in fact being negotiated behind his back. Ultimately it was Kissinger and Dobrynin who make the breakthrough that resulted in an agreement in 1972.

Q: While you were looking at the American delegation, did you see a split hawks and doves, military officers who were opposed to the idea of negotiating limits with the Soviet Union?

FISCHER: The real split in the delegation was between the State Department, CIA and the Arms Control Agency on one side, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, their representative was a General Graham Allison and Paul Nitre who was ostensibly representing the Secretary of Defense. That made negotiations enormously difficult because Kissinger could not afford to negotiate anything that would in any way jeopardize possible JCS

approval and ratification of the agreement. In retrospect, many of us on the arms control side were somewhat naïve as to what could, in fact, be achieved. We had hoped that SALT would place real limits on the strategic forces of both sides. There were lots of efforts to halt the growth in numbers of warheads, none of which were acceptable to the Joint Chiefs. Kissinger lost an important opportunity be allowing both sides to move ahead with MIRVs, multiple warheads on strategic missiles. Once that was allowed, then it became inevitable that the number of warheads would multiply.

On balance, I think the kindest thing one can say about SALT I and SALT II was that the introduced an element of predictability into the U.S.-USSR relationship. There were ceilings beyond which neither side could go. But in reality neither the Soviets nor the Americans gave up a single weapons system that they had planned to deploy. In the late 1960s we were developing the first cruise missiles which were designed as nuclear systems, even though by the 1990s these systems were important because of conventional warheads. We wanted to make sure that we could deploy these systems when they became available.

The talks were successful, too, in limiting Soviet defensive system, the anti-ballistic missiles they were in the process of developing. Of course, having done so we now find ourselves in the position of having to amend or break the agreement because of our own desire to deploy such systems,

Q: What was your impression of the Soviets and the Soviet delegation and where they were coming from?

FISCHER: There were some phenomenal people on that delegation. The head of the Russian delegation was Ambassador Semenov who had been the Commissar, the Russian Commissar in East Germany for many years. He was himself a member of the Academy of Sciences although he was a diplomat, trained in physics. He loved German music, particularly Beethoven. General Ogarkov who was head of the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces was a military representative. Ambassador Grinevsky was there who was a very senior, more or less head of the arms control unit of Foreign Ministry. Very serious very business-like people. I think at the end of the first two or three sessions, we had reached a state of - camaraderie is too strong a term - but mutual respect in which you could really have some very genuine discussions. Certainly within the parameters of the negotiating guidelines. But there were clear limits on the ability of members of the teams to "go off the reservation" by negotiating on their own.

I was the Secretary of the delegation, the junior most officer, arranging all the various meetings, taking notes and the usual stuff that junior officers do. I had a Soviet counterpart. We held a series of social events with the Russians from time to time. Joint parties, joint dinners some of that were hosted by the Finnish government. The Russians came to us and said look. We don't think it is a good idea that put American and Russian military officers together unless we have members of the State Department and the Foreign Ministry present. Their point, which was a damned good one, was that Russian

and American generals had a great deal in common, perhaps more than they had with civilians on their own delegations. I came away from the SALT process with the strong feeling that profession can be a closer bond than nationality.

I want to be clear that I'm not accusing the generals of trying the sabotage the talks, but they certainly made plain their distrust of the process.

Q: So did you rearrange tables?

FISCHER: We arranged the tables. It also put a quick damper on the conversations.
Q: While you were doing this was it pretty obvious they weren't going anywhere the impasse was coming? What did this do to you all?

FISCHER: Yes. Well, it became a kind of pro-forma. Well the negotiations and the real issues that took place, took place in Washington. What had been a plush assignment, to go on a negotiating team, first in Helsinki and subsequently in Vienna, suddenly became the less attractive of the two propositions. Because the real power, if you will, was in Washington where decisions were hammered out between competing agencies. And I think it was the first inkling I had that perhaps the power of the Desk officer was greater than that on an Ambassador. Real power to effect change and make policy wasn't in the field, it was in Washington.

I think there was a certain high level of frustration that we were sent out to go and do what was essentially a fruitless exercise. The issues arose, they'd become very technical and complicated but one of the major problems was how do you control MIRV's. The Soviet Union had not yet tested a missile with multiple warheads. The United States had done so in that intervening period between August of 1968 when the talks were to have started and then in 1969, the summer of 1969 when they really did start. And it was quite clear that the military was not prepared to give up or put any limits whatsoever on multiple warhead missiles. Consequently it became obvious that what was agreed to in SALT in terms of, SALT I limited the delivery vehicles. It limited the airplanes, the submarines and missiles. It did not limit the number of warheads on those missiles. So I think by the summer of 1970 and 1971 it was quite clear to us that the SALT talks would not accomplish what those of us in arms control wanted, which was to put a ceiling on the number of weapons facing both sides.

There was an enormous disappointment I think and indeed Gerry Smith, who was then the ambassador, and I and a couple of people wrote a message back to Kissinger that said is your last chance in essence. You have got to find a way to limit multiple warheads. I'm not certain Kissinger understood the issue. But whether he did or not, his hands were tied by what the Joint Chiefs were prepared to accept. We talked about the idea for example of freezes. There was a proposal that basically froze the systems on both sides as they were. That became a major argument within the U.S. government as an easy fix in order to strike a quick agreement. But again that was rejected.

So SALT I, by the time we actually signed an agreement in May 1972 was far less than those of us who believed in arms control had hoped.

Q: You mentioned Gerry Smith. How did he run the delegation? What was he pushing for?

FISCHER: Well Gerry Smith was representing the arms control agency, he was representing the President, of course, but in fact he was out of the arms control agency was a great believer in arms control. He wanted to see the SALT talks succeed in limiting the forces of both sides. But it was very funny. I'll tell you two anecdotes of how Smith ran the delegation.

We had a secure telephone link between the delegation and Washington. The backstopping group in Washington, the group that was preparing the day to day negotiating instructions, would send out a telegram. We would then present that position to the Soviets. We usually met three times a week. After the meeting with the Russians, we would come back to a secure room, where we would hammer out what we would want to present to the Soviets at the next session. Everybody in that room, the delegation operated by consensus, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Paul Nitze and everybody had to agree on a proposal we would present to Washington. My job was to sit and collate, it you will, those discussions from the delegation and send them back to Washington as recommendations for future proposals. Jerry Smith soon discovered that even though people like Nitze and Allison who was the JCS representative would agree to something in those inter team negotiations, they would get on a telephone and get on the telephone to Washington and say "ignore this telegram just coming in - we had to give in to the peaceniks etc." Gerry Smith discovered this was happening. So he made an announcement at one delegation meeting that he was very concerned that this telephone link back to Washington could be tapped. Therefore, as head of the delegation he had asked that all conversations on the secure link be taped. He would review those tapes from time to time to make sure there was no breach of security. I thought was a marvelous way of cutting that link between the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Helsinki and their counterparts in Washington.

Smith was also a consummate bureaucrat. Sometime in 1971, there was a very key issue that Smith wanted to get across to people in Washington, and frankly, I forgot what it was. So he came in and he handed me a telegram and said, "Send this message." It was very compartmentalized, top secret, Secretary of State eyes only etc. He said send this message. Then he handed me another telegram. "A half an hour after the first telegram has been sent, I want you to send this one." The second cable instructed Washington to ignore this first message and to destroy all copies because it had been sent without his authorization. I looked at him and said this is the greatest bureaucratic maneuver I've ever seen in my life. He said yes it is, but you can only use it once. He sent a telegram with his personal recommendations of where we should go in the talks. But he recognized that this telegram would probably get lost in the entire flood of paper that was coming in from the SALT negotiations. Of course, as soon as people got the second cable, their interest

would be piqued and they'd run all over the bureaucracy to get and read a copy. He guaranteed his first message would be read by the people who counted.

Q: Was it difficult to the morale of the delegation up at all times? You must have been discouraged along the way.

FISCHER: Well it was really quite something. I once offered to write a book which was going to be entitled “ Sex, Sin and SALT”, the true story of American arms control. If you can imagine the situation, you had fifty-five, in those days largely men, there were very few women on the delegation, fifty-five American men locked up for four months at a time in the dead of winter in Helsinki, Finland and fifty-five or sixty Russian men locked up in the dead of winter in Helsinki, it became fairly obvious early on that there was a lot of hanky panky going on. A lot of guys running off doing this thing or the other. So, Gerry Smith became concerned about this. Gerry Smith was a Catholic, very, very strong believer, one of the people who went to mass every morning I think. So Smith arranged out of his own personal funds, that all members of the delegation could bring their families to Helsinki during the summer session of 1970. It was a great morale booster.

Q: Did the Helsinki government which enjoyed having these delegations go out of it’s way to help this monastic life?

FISCHER: No. We the American delegation had taken over and I mean had sequestered the best hotel in Helsinki which was called the “Kalastjatorppa." We had marine guards guarding the front entrance of the building. You couldn’t enter that building without a pass. However, for reasons that were clear, we had one area of the hotel that remained open to the public which was the late night discotheque, called The Red Room. The Red Room was extraordinary. Of course we were working long hours at night. We would all come back to the Hotel and the bar was open and you could order a meal in the Red Room. The word went out very quickly in Helsinki that if you really want to get a date, this was the place to go. So there were fifty-five American men and about one hundred and fifty-five Finnish girls. So it was quite a scene.

In what I believe is a unique agreement during the Cold War, the KGB resident in Helsinki and the CIA station chief agreed in 1969 that neither side would try to penetrate the other's delegation. The consequences of getting caught would certainly outweigh any intelligence that could be collected. As far as I know, both sides honored that agreement. Lord knows there were enough opportunities to entrap some poor American delegate with a buxom Finnish blonde.

Q: Did you get any feeling Washington for the relationship of ACDA with the rest of the State Department?

FISCHER: Well, in those days ACTA was seen for what it was. Left-wing, if you want to say that, an agency that was created in order to promote arms control. That, by and large,

was also the position of the State Department component of the SALT delegation. But I think that was the height of ACTA's power. Gerry Smith basically wore two hats. He was the head of ACDA and the head of the SALT negotiations. As part price for the treaty's ratification Nixon agreed to curb ACDA's influence and power. Henry "Scoop" Jackson was the senator from Washington whose agreement was critical to Senate ratification. Richard Perle was Jackson's staffer and had no love lost for ACDA. Jackson gave Nixon a list of 20 people he wanted removed from the SALT process. They included Ray Garthoff, David Aaron and me.

One of the more interesting things that I should talk about was the famous leak in the New York Times that led Nixon to create the infamous "plumbers" who subsequently broke into the Watergate Hotel. I was on the SALT backstopping team in Washington.. The New York Times published the secret U.S. fallback position in the talks before we had a chance to present it to the Soviets. Nixon went absolutely bananas, as well he should. And although it was unknown to me at this time, Nixon set out to find out who had leaked the story, using every means, legal and illegal. These were the "plumbers". I was one of thirty-one people that had had access to that telegram and to that piece of paper. Unbeknownst to me, I was as concerned as anyone was that this thing had been leaked to the Times, and I knew that people were upset, but I came into my office on a Sunday in ACDA. I walked into my office and I found a guy there photographing my appointment diary. I said who are you etc. He flashed a badge and said I'm from the FBI. I'd like to have a record of who you've met with over the last three weeks or whatever. Needless to say I was a little upset. But I was also naïve enough to believe that this guy really was from the FBI. So I gave him access to my diary, walked him down the hall to use the Xerox machine and everything else. On Monday morning I went down to the State security office to report this and to cover my ass if there was an active FBI investigation. I never heard a peep thereafter. However, the following Saturday or perhaps two weeks thereafter, my wife and I, we had a small house in Bethesda, MD. My wife was with our children in Texas, and I went out to some shopping or whatever on Saturday morning. I came back three hours later and our house had been broken into. I had a small desk, a kind of home office, and all the papers were askew. I called the Bethesda police who came out, nothing was missing, so the investigation was closed. To this day I do believe it was the plumbers who were out looking for who had leaked that paper. I can't prove it, all those papers are still classified, but for the life of me I cannot imagine why someone would break into a small suburban house on a Saturday morning.

Q: Did you ever figure this leak? One, it strikes me of highly irresponsible of the New York Times to publish it. But I guess in those days anything goes. Within your delegation did you sit around trying to figure out where it came from?

FISCHER: I guess we did but I frankly don't remember the issue. I think the people in Arms Control Agency probably thought the Pentagon had leaked in order to kill the proposal. The people in the Pentagon thought the people in the Arms Control Agency had leaked it. I really have no idea.

Q: What was your reaction when you found out that Kissinger and Dobrynin had basically negotiated an agreement behind your back?

FISCHER: Well, we were simply told. I was in Washington and told to inform the delegation that the following parameters have been agreed upon. The delegations were given 30 days or so to come up with the treaty language in time for Nixon's summit meeting in Moscow at the end of May, 1972.

Q: I mean how did this hit your delegation?

FISCHER: Oh everyone was pissed off, terribly pissed off. I think the military was because there were certain “concessions” which they didn’t want to give. And those of us on the arms control side saw that there were issues that we didn’t agree with.

Q: I would assume though that this wasn’t a futile exercise because essentially you were cleaning away the underbrush. Henry Kissinger, Dobrynin and company aren’t going to come up with a final product.

FISCHER: They did. I think as I said earlier, the Russians saw this as essentially a political exercise and I think they were right. We could have argued about technical details forever. Once the fundamental outlines of the agreement were made between Kissinger and Dobrynin, it was a done deal. I don’t remember whether people were angry or felt somehow that their lives were overturned. From my point of view, the ban on missile defenses (ABM) were the greatest accomplishment of the negotiations. That was an enormously important accomplishment. The trade-off in essence was that we would limit defensive weapons systems on both sides in return for which we would have unbounded limits on the number of warheads that each side could produce. That was the guts of the agreement. Those of us in arms control had hoped that we would be able to do two things. Limit defensive missile systems and at the same time put caps on the number of warheads that both sides would be able to deploy.

Q: Looking back on this was this probably as good of an agreement as could have been had given the disparity?
FISCHER: No I don’t think so. I suppose that’s true in the sense that politically it was impossible to do anything else. But it was a really fundamental strategic error on the part of the United States not to limit multiple missile warheads which of course is precisely what we’ve done in subsequent START II agreement. It would have been very difficult, but there was a window of opportunity from 1969 until probably the winter of 1971 when the United States had tested MIRV warheads but hadn’t produced them. And the Soviet Union had not yet tested any. And therefore we probably could have reached an agreement. One of the classic issues of arms control is that once a weapon system has been tested it becomes very difficult to limit it because your opponent doesn’t have any confidence that you, having tested it, couldn’t deploy it very quickly. I think the Russians would have been willing to sign an agreement which banned multiple warheads even though they recognized that we had already tested it, and we might be in the position

sometime in the future to in fact produce them and deploy them. Because the failure to limit MIRV's simply meant the arms race went on in different forms

Q: Were there any developments between 1969 and 1972, I'm thinking of relations between the two counties, the United States and the Soviet Union, that intruded?

FISCHER: One of the really most interesting things that ever happened in the SALT talks happened in Vienna in 1971. Kissinger of course had gone to China. That was a bombshell. I can remember by the way being in Helsinki and receiving a telegram, there was an initial message that gave us one hour heads up. Suddenly I realized, "my god I spent six months writing an arms control proposal that suddenly made sense." It sent shockwaves through the Russian delegation. I remember being at a cocktail party with the Russians after the news came out, and they were literally shell-shocked. But in the winter of 1972 or early 1972, Gerry Smith and Semenov, the Russian Ambassador, attended an opera in Vienna together. They were seated in a box. Semenov handed Gerry Smith a piece of paper with no attribution, it was type written in English, it had no Soviet letterhead. In essence it asked whether the United States would be interested in exploratory talks on ways in which we could jointly react to nuclear weapons not subject to limitations held by other parties. This was seen (correctly) as an invitation to open discussions on joint ways to limit the Chinese nuclear program. We rejected it out of hand. It might have offered some very interesting opportunities for joint discussions about how one dealt with an emerging China.

Q: Well while you were doing these SALT things, did the question of the Brits and French come up?

FISCHER: There was a technical issue because the United State in those days had in fact given Polaris submarines to the Brits, and the French were developing their own nuclear weapons. The Russian position was that these were NATO weapons that had to be included in future limitations. We, in turn, argued that we couldn't negotiate on behalf of the British and the French. Frankly, I've forgotten how that issue was resolved, but I believe we agreed that French and British systems would not exceed U.S. levels and that we would not transfer certain technology to them.

Q: What was your reaction when you found out that Scoop Jackson had declared you persona non-grata.

FISCHER: Oh, it didn't surprise me. I had spent a lot of time with Jackson's people. Richard Perle of course. Dick and I subsequently became friends.

There were two secret agreements made as the price for ratification of SALT I treaty. Elmo Zumwalt was then Chief of Naval Operations, he might have actually been Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff. The story is told, I believe it to be true, that Nixon called him in and said what would be the position of the Chiefs on this agreement? Will you support it or not? And his answer was, well, Mr. President, I really would like to

support you, but on the other hand I really have to worry about navy budgets and particularly the need for two more Trident submarines. That deal was struck then. Subsequently Jackson said he wanted tighter controls on the delegation and here was a list. It made no difference to me because I was up to reassignment and that point I was to go off to Bulgaria.

Q: I'm just wondering on this, these are pretty much professional people.

FISCHER: Yes, but that's the price of doing business.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Jackson's people were sort of monitoring you all?

FISCHER: Totally, completely. There was never any question. People like Perle and Fosdick (she was the Chief of Staff for Scoop Jackson) made it very plain that they could renegotiate this agreement, no matter what was signed by those people in the State Department. Never underestimate the power of the Senate in the ratification process. We had initially considered whether we should have a Senate representative on the delegation, something that Wilson had done at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. We did invite Senators to come to Geneva from time to time to sit in on the negotiations, but that did little to relieve criticism that we had given away the farm. I didn't really care because, as I said, I was slated to go overseas.

Q: In 1972 did you go straight to Bulgaria?

FISCHER: Yes, I think I had two or three months of language training and then went to Sofia.

Q: And you were in Bulgaria from when to when?

FISCHER: 1972 until 1974.
Q: What were you doing in Sofia?

FISCHER: I was the head of a two-man Political/Economic Section. This was one of the more boring assignments I had in the service. Firstly, Bulgaria was an extraordinarily closed system. Having come from Poland, it was appalling to see how totalitarian that country was. Bulgaria was a sleepy little backwater in the Balkans. The United States really had no interest there whatsoever, other than as a type of a listening post. Bulgaria was seen as the most pro-Soviet of all the Block counties. We had some specific interests. Narcotics and drug interdiction became a big thing for a while. We had a few, limited consular and commercial interests, but the political issues were frozen since 1947 when the communist regime took power, arrested most of the local staff of the Embassy and shot them.

The highlight of the tour for me was the birth of our daughter who was born prematurely in a Bulgarian hospital. That, in itself, was an interesting insight into the inefficiencies

and inequities of the socialist system. She got pretty good, basic medical care but there were no amenities of any kind, including anesthesia during the birth. My wife and the baby were kept in the hospital for eight days or so, and that we were kind of on our own. The nearest American doctor was in Belgrade, but he couldn't come to Sofia because he was CIA. The diplomatic corps doctor supplied by the Bulgarian foreign ministry was understandably leery about treating Americans since his predecessor as the diplomatic doctor had been arrested and executed as an American spy two months before we arrived.

Our daughter developed pneumonia shortly after the birth, and the Ambassador - God bless him - went to the Foreign Ministry to request a USAF medical evacuation flight. The last American airplane to have overflown Bulgaria was in 1947, and it had been shot down.

But U.S.-Bulgarian relations had thawed a bit, and the Bulgarians used this opportunity to make a small gesture by allowing the flight to come to Sofia. They were astounded that the U.S. would divert such enormous resources for the life of one small baby. When the plane arrived at three in the morning at Sofia airport, two Bulgarian doctors went with us to meet it. They saw equipment on that plane they could only dream about, and the Air Force doctors were very gracious in showing off their goodies.

Anyway, all's well that ends well, and she grew up a beautiful, healthy child.

Q: How heavy was the hand of the Bulgarian government on Bulgarian people out there?

FISCHER: Well I had come out of Eastern Europe. I had spent four years in Poland where virtually, although I was under surveillance all the time, I certainly had freedom of travel and freedom of association. The Poles were very anxious to talk to any Americans. I arrived in Sofia on a Friday afternoon. I got my Embassy apartment that was in a big high rise-building for diplomats and members of the Politburo, across from which there was a very beautiful park with a tennis court. So on Sunday afternoon I went over to the tennis court with a racket in my hand. I spoke Bulgarian, and I figured I'd pick up a game. There was a guy waiting on the bench. I asked him if he wanted to hit a few balls. He said sure. I felt in all fairness to him I had to tell him who I was. I said you have to understand, I'm an American, I'm with the Embassy. He said I don't care, you play tennis. I don't think we'd gone out and hit more than three volleys back and forth when two guys in trench coats came on the tennis court and picked up this Bulgarian by the elbows and took him off. I realized at that point, "Man, this isn't Poland." Their hand was extraordinarily heavy. This was a dictatorship of the most brutal fashion. It was a tragic, tragic country.

Q: Was there any interest Kremlinology, figuring out who's who in the Party kind of thing?

FISCHER: No. Todor Zhivkov was the head of the communist party and head of State. No question about who was running the show. No one else really mattered much. The Minister of Foreign Trade was a man by the name of Andrei Lukanov who became

President when the communist system began to crack in 1989 or 1990. But there certainly were few, if any, opportunities for U.S. influence.

Q: Who was the Ambassador and DCM?

FISCHER: The DCM was a marvelous woman named Helene Batjer. I had worked with Helene at INR so we were good friends. Helene was one of the few women who had worked herself up the ranks. In fact, she had served in Sofia in 1946 as a code clerk. There was no question she was destined to Ambassadorial rank, but she died of cancer shortly after her assignment in Sofia.

My first Ambassador was a guy, who was a wonderful Ambassador, by the name Telly Torbert. He saw the assignment for what it was, an old backwater but he had that Ambassadorial title. And the second Ambassador was Martin Hertz. I remember Hertz came and I had less than four months with him. Under the rules of the Foreign Service in those days, you had to serve with someone for at least one hundred twenty-eight days before they could write an efficiency report. Hertz had a reputation of being a petty tyrant. He was something of an expert of Iran and had served as DCM in Tehran. This was the only instance in the Foreign Service when I got letters of commiseration, warning me about Hertz. So I think in that first meeting, I walked in his office and said, "Mr. Ambassador, as you know, I'm scheduled to leave here in one hundred and ten days, and therefore despite your reputation as being a son-of-a-bitch, you can't write me a bad OER. Therefore, I'm going to give you the straight, unvarnished truth as best I know it. No BS." He thought this was the funniest thing he'd ever heard, and we became fast friends. He went all out to get the personnel system to allow me to stay on as the new DCM. But he remained one of my rabbis in the service and always looked out for me, even though we never served together again.

He was renowned. He could take dictation better than anyone else. He could type fast. He was sort of scary.

Q: Did you travel around a lot?

FISCHER: You could travel, but of course there were very fierce travel restrictions set up in a way that made it very difficult. The Embassy had a dacha, a small house in the mountains outside Sofia. We had a fabulous house in the woods about an hour and a half from Sofia in ski resort called Borovets. It was a great place to get away and was used on a rotational basis by embassy families. I must say that both Ambassadors were egalitarian and made sure that everyone, regardless of rank, had a chance to use the dacha.

The food situation was terrible in Bulgaria. We really had no fruits and vegetables, no meat. You couldn't buy anything except moldy cabbage. There were diplomatic stores but they were very limited. Again, the Bulgarians from time to time would deny us access to those stores. So we had an arrangement whereby Embassy officers would drive to northern Greece to Salonika every weekend on a rotational basis. The Embassy would pay

your gas expenses and you'd load up the back of your car with fruits and vegetables, which were then given out in the Embassy.

Q: Did you get over to Yugoslavia much?

FISCHER: Very little The road between Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, despite it being the main truck route from southeastern to western Europe was unbelievably bad. It was a slightly improved dirt track which wended its way through the Pirot mountains, and on a rainy night it could get really very frightening. The nearest big city was Nis in Yugoslavia, and we all drove over there once or twice a year when we got desperate. But Nis, which by the way was heavily bombed in the Kosovo war, wasn't exactly Paris or London. But they did have things like plastic toys for the kids.

Q: How about cultural life?

FISCHER: In the entire time I was in Bulgaria, I think I had probably had two Bulgarians to my house. Both of them fairly senior people and cleared by the secret police. I got to know a couple of actors in Bulgarian theater but again the risk for them of anyone associated with the American Embassy was so high. I became friends with a doctor. And we tried to see each other on a personal private basis from time to time but that became impossible. The risk was far too high. We were constantly under secret police surveillance, and anyone we contacted, no matter how innocently, would be arrested and interrogated. So that was one of the few Foreign Service postings where I really didn't know anyone other than the local employees in the Embassy all of whom were secret police types.

Q: David, were there any attempts on the part of the secret police to entrap you or was this just not what they were interested in?

FISCHER: No. In Poland, as I think I said earlier, we had a relationship with a surveillance team. The Polish secret police were human beings. The first weekend my wife and I were in Sofia, there's a large mountain called Vitosha outside Sofia which is snow covered much of the year, and although this was probably September or October of the year we decided on ascending - we'd go up and climb around. So I pulled into the parking lot, and my surveillance team pulled in next to us, my wife and I, in climbing boots and everything else. I turned to them, and I said in Bulgarian, "look guys, we're going to climb up there in the snow. We'll wait here if you want, while you go and rent some boots." They looked at me and said, "are you crazy, we don't know who you are." So two hours later, as my wife and I are trudging through the snow, here are these two guys behind us, ruining their dress shoes. It was a pretty heavy-handed system.

One of the problems was my wife went there, as I said, pregnant. There was in those days in Bulgaria, the Bureau for Diplomatic Services which was the agency through which all Embassies had to operate to get help and services. They had a doctor for the diplomatic corps. Two months prior to our arrival, he had been taken and arrested as a CIA agent and

shot. The Embassy Doctor, the guy from the State Department who normally would have provided medical services to us, was the regional medical officer in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. We arrived in Bulgaria, and the doctor in Belgrade said, "you're on your own because I can't come into Bulgaria." The newly appointed Bulgarian diplomatic doctor for obvious reasons was very reluctant to treat any Americans. We were pretty much on our own. When my wife gave birth in Sofia, we became friends with a couple of Bulgarian doctors who were very helpful when my daughter was born prematurely. In the Soviet system of medicine, natal care was that mothers were kept in a hospital for 10 days. Of course, my wife was chaffing at the bit, I mean this was an awful situation. The hospital was the worst imaginable, and she wanted to get out. So at the end of eight days, I took my wife and daughter out of the hospital, against medical advice and about two weeks later, my daughter developed pneumonia. We were really caught in a jam. We had, in essence, taken her out against medical advice, and the Bulgarian doctor, the diplomatic doctor, was less than willing to see us on a regular basis, but he really put his life on the line for us. He came and visited us twice a day, did all sorts of things. We were all worried that she wasn't going to make it.

I asked for a medical evacuation flight out of Wiesbaden, Germany. You have to understand that the last American military flight into Bulgaria had been in 1947 when a U.S. Air Force plane had been shot down. The idea of asking for a military jet aircraft to land in Sofia airport to pick up a four-week old American baby was absolutely out of the question. I learned that the request went all the way up to Todor Zhivkov who was head of the Communist party. I think partly because of my friendship with some people in the Foreign Ministry and the relationship we had developed with the Bulgarian doctor, that they agreed. So at three o'clock in the morning in early December 1972, an air force jet arrived. We had been taken to the airfield by the Bulgarian doctor and a staff of doctors in an ambulance. I will never forget the look on their faces when this aircraft opened up. I don't know if you know how medical evacuation...

Q: I have to say my wife was air evacuated twice from Yugoslavia.

FISCHER: Then, as you know, they have a team of doctors and nurses, there was a pressurized incubation system on board. These doctors, these Bulgarians, as they looked at this equipment, there was stuff on the airplane they'd only read about. The idea that the U.S. government would send this enormous plane to save the life of one child was unheard of. That was quite an experience. Anyway she got medevaced, was cured and fine and came back to Bulgaria.

Bulgaria was an interesting assignment in the sense that it was a beautiful country. I did travel around. One of things we developed there was close cooperation with the Bulgarians on narcotics trafficking. We brought out a team of U.S. customs officials to help them train the Bulgarian customs people. As a result of that I got to travel around the country more than I might have otherwise.

Q: What was in it for the Bulgarians to try and halt this international traffic?

FISCHER: Well, at the time we thought we had a joint interest in reducing narcotics, especially morphine base and heroin. We later learned that the realized they could intercept the narcotics, keep it and sell it themselves. But at the time, I think they wanted to look moral, they wanted to be on the right side of the angels, and they had no interest that the drugs were crossing their country.

Again, an anecdote. We used to pass intelligence to the Bulgarians, which was unique in those Cold War days. This was the first arrangement we ever had between law enforcement agencies in Eastern Europe. The head of the Bulgarian customs service was a very right and honorable gentleman, an old cop. He was straight. We used to pass him intelligence we would get. For example, I'd get a telegram from the DEA in Frankfurt, reporting that we had intelligence that a certain truck or car, such-and-such a license plate would be crossing the Bulgarian border. So we gave them intelligence one day, and they stopped a Mercedes Benz. We had told them there were thirty kilograms of heroin in this vehicle. They pulled it apart and only found fifteen kilograms. We figured our intelligence had been faulty. Well, the Bulgarians did what all law enforcement agencies do: at the end of six or twelve months they'd auction off seized property, including the car they had caught as a result of our tip. I was sitting in my office one day, and I got a call from the auctioneer. He said, you know that Mercedes you told us about a couple of months ago? There are two guys down here who are bidding for it, two Turks, and they are bidding out of sight for that car. I said, stop the auction. Clearly, you only found fifteen kilograms of heroine and there are still fifteen kilograms somewhere in that car! And that's precisely what they did. They arrested the two guys who were bidding and ripped the car apart even further and found fifteen kilograms more of heroin.

I think the Bulgarians in those days, I don't know, subsequently we've learned there was a Bulgarian outfit that was selling arms, and selling narcotics that they had interdicted. I'd like to think that in those days, '72, '73, '74 they were on the up and up and were stopping that stuff.

Q: How about, were you keeping an eye on the Turkish minority and relations?

FISCHER: That was a big issue there. Again, I guess there was no real crackdown but there were certainly whole areas of the country where the Turkish minority lived that we were not allowed to travel in. Minority rights of both the Turkish minority and gypsies were political issues in those days. But, human rights did not loom large in U.S.-Bulgarian relations, partly because human rights had not become a legitimate subject of diplomatic discourse before 1975 or 1976. We might use them once in a while to beat up the Bulgars, but no one really gave a much of a damn about what happened to the Turks. Except the Turkish Embassy, of course, which would lodge the odd protest now and again.

Q; Well Nis was also nearby, a center of Gypsy culture...

FISCHER: But again, this was not very high on American radar scopes. The Turks had a very active Embassy there, and it was their major task looking out how to protect the Turkish minorities. I always found the gypsy culture a fascinating one. I had run across gypsies when I was serving in Poland, but they were much more numerous in Bulgaria. The Bulgars had tried to end their nomadic life by building ghettos for them on the outskirts of Plovdiv. But, I remember that they were a total failure. The Bulgarians ended up having to build a huge wooden fence to screen off the ghetto from the main road.

Q: Did you ever get involved or in arguments or looking at what is the Bulgarian language and what's being spoken in Macedonia?

FISCHER: Ah, the famous issue of what constitutes Macedonian!

Q: Was Macedonian a Bulgarian language?

FISCHER: Wars have been fought over this issue. In those days the Bulgarian position, of course, they recognized Yugoslavia, they had diplomatic relations, but every Bulgarian believed in their heart of hearts that the Yugoslav province of Macedonia was really Bulgarian. Macedonians were, on the one hand, grateful for what the Bulgarians had done in the 19th century to overthrow the Ottoman Empire. But, they also saw themselves as ethnically separate from Bulgaria and claimed that Macedonian was a unique language. All I know is that if you spoke Bulgarian you certainly could get by in Skopje and other areas of Yugoslav Macedonia.

Q: Of course, the Greeks felt the same way.

FISCHER: Yes. I remember once going into a church in Southern Bulgaria, and it was a monastery. There was an old woman, maybe eighty years old, who was a sort of vestry woman, she swept the place. I fell to talking to her. She, it turns out, had been a partisan in the civil wars in Bulgaria between Greece and Bulgaria in the period right after WWI. I said to her, "how did you take care of the Greeks who were in your village?" She mimicked, pantomimed, picking up a hand grenade in her hand, pulling a pin and rolling it down the aisle. This is an eighty-year old religious woman. And of course looking at the Balkan wars in the 1990s we forget what a powder keg were the Balkans before and after WWI. There were certainly Bulgarians I knew who believed they had a right to the port of Salonika in Greece.

Q: Interesting cross currents in that area. Well, is there anything else, any stories?

FISCHER: No I don't think so. No, as I say it was a bit of a tabula rasa in terms of the assignment. My wife and I both spoke Bulgarian which was kind of unusual in that post. The Bulgarians were strange in that regard. No matter how badly one spoke Bulgarian (and mine was pretty bad), they always assumed you were Bulgarian, albeit slow and half-witted. I don't think they could conceive of a foreigner who spoke their language. Perhaps it was the fact that there were so many Turks who spoke little or no Bulgarian.

And you asked what we did. We did attend the opera; theater, such as it was. I guess the best way to sum up Bulgaria in terms of Bulgarian history; the Bulgarians created a king. They created a monarchy. It was indeed related to the Mountbatten family of Great Britain. But at some point, Bulgaria's first monarch, whose name now escapes me, had taken the thrown of this God-forsaken, backwater Balkan state in 1883 I think. He abdicated his throne, and he ran off with a French bicyclist who was performing in the circus. I always thought he made the right choice.

The Bulgarian communist party was one of the more corrupt regimes in eastern Europe. Todor Zhivkov was a big, hulking peasant type who ruled by fiat. The Bulgarians, however, genuinely had cultural and historical ties with Russia which made them the most obedient and subservient of the Warsaw Pact. In 1947 they had proposed becoming a republic of the USSR, an offer even Stalin refused. In Poland one was hard pressed to find anyone who would speak kindly of the Soviet Union. Bulgarians, even those opposed to the regime (and they were hard to find) tended to see the Russians as allies. Bulgaria also differed from Poland in that there was a sizeable Jewish community that had been protected during the war. The King of Bulgaria was the only Axis leader who refused Hitler's orders to transport all Jews to concentration camps. And it was not only that the Jews had survived. They used their Jewish names with pride. In the rest of Eastern Europe, those that had survived sought to assimilate or hide their origins.

Q: Well, you left there in 1974, where did you go?

FISCHER: Well, I was slated to become a Political Officer at NATO. My career path in those days was strictly geared towards East-West relations, Soviet military affairs, so I was very pleased at the prospect of being assigned to NATO. Looking forward to that. But, one day I received a telegram. As a result of what was called the GLOP program, Global something or other that Henry Kissinger had thought up to broaden the experience of foreign service officers, my assignment was changed.

Q: In other words, there were too many Latin-American specialists and they were trying to get them out...

FISCHER: This came about because Henry Kissinger, I'm told, had gone to a Chief of Mission meeting in Mexico City where all he wanted to talk about was U.S.-Soviet relations. He discovered that every one around the table was falling asleep that none of the, not a single Ambassador had ever served anywhere out of Latin America. So, he decided that we were all going to be mixed and sent around the world. I received a telegram saying that my assignment to NATO had been canceled, and I was being sent to Kathmandu, Nepal. Now to go from one backwater, Sofia, Bulgaria to another backwater was the death knell of my career. I was going out as a Political Officer, head of the Economic/Political Section in Kathmandu, another two man section. A place where nobody wanted to do anything, where we had no interests, whatsoever. I was pretty discouraged. In retrospect, of course, it turned out to be one of the greatest assignments I've ever had in my life.

Q: When were you there?

FISCHER: 1974 to 1977. I was there originally there on a two-year assignment, and I liked it so much I extended for a third year.

Q: How'd you go? Did you have Home Leave?

FISCHER: Oh yes, we went on home-leave. Now this was the opportunity for me to fulfill one of my various Walter Mitty dreams, one of which was to be assigned to some obscure third world country, replete with pith helmet and Land Rover. You have to understand that I'd served in Eastern Europe all my life, and I had worked with so many of my colleagues who wandered through the Department in elegantly tailored bush suits. You know they'd really been out in the "real" world. So I said to my wife, this is it. We have to buy a Land Rover. So I bought a Land Rover and went to England to pick it up in Birmingham, Manchester, England and drove it back with the idea of then driving cross country through Iran, Afghanistan, into Kathmandu. That turned out to be somewhat unrealistic, so we went on Home Leave, and the principal of the school in Sofia drove the car across Asia for me. God knows how he made it through all the border checkpoints in a diplomatic vehicle loaded down with about 800 pounds of valuable gear. I do remember that we rigged up a phony document written in Bulgarian (who could read Bulgarian?) which we sealed with red and gold ribbons and the consular seal. It looked terribly official, particularly to some Pushtu border guard in Afghanistan. When I arrived in Kathmandu, there was my car and all my goods. The head of the school who'd driven the car out for me said, "by God, that's the best document I've ever had. We were sitting out on the Afghan-Pakistan border and there were trucks, everybody was held up. I drove to the head of the line, showed that, opened the gates and drove straight thorough. So if you ever want to smuggle, that's the way to do it."

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NEW INTERVIEWER: ROBERT PASTURING
May 20, 1998

Q: Before proceeding to Kathmandu, please give us some indication of what kind of consular problems you had in Sofia.

FISCHER: I didn't work in the Consular Section so the only consular story I like to tell is as follows.

I was the duty officer one night and about four o'clock in the morning I got a call from the Bulgarian border guards at the Yugoslav-Bulgarian border to say that an American had been arrested trying to enter the country illegally. At eight o'clock in the morning I got in my car, drove up to the border which is about an hour away from Sofia, and I met this guy who was disheveled, unshaven, who was the manager for IBM in Vienna, Austria. He

told me the following story. He was afraid of flying. He covered Eastern Europe, but he decided he was to take the train from Vienna to Athens, Greece where he had a conference. It's a two-day trip on the Orient Express. Shortly after the train left Belgrade the night before, he was in the dining car and met a very attractive young lady. Well, one thing led to another and she invited him back to her compartment. He dutifully went and spent the night with this girl. But, what he didn't know was that after the train leaves Belgrade it split into two sections. One train went onto Vienna and the other train proceeded to Istanbul via Bulgaria. So his passport and jacket and whatever else were in the section of the train going to Athens and he was in the compartment on the way to Istanbul. When the train arrived at the Bulgarian border, he was taken off since he had neither passport nor visa. I assured him this had happened before and that if he paid a three hundred dollar fine we could issue him a passport and have him out of jail that afternoon. He said, "what's the alternative?" I said, "God, the alternative is a month in the Bulgarian jail and you have no idea what a Bulgarian jail is like, worst thing in the world." He said, "No, young man, it's not the worst thing. Trying to explain this to my wife is even worse than that!"

Q: So you were off to Kathmandu in 1974, right?

FISCHER: I was an East European specialist, but the assignment to Kathmandu, Nepal changed my whole career pattern. Initially, I fought the assignment tooth and nail. A good friend of mine who was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Near East and South Asia, his name was Spike Dubbs. Spike had been the DCM in Moscow and was a bit of a rabbi to me. He called me in Bulgaria and said look, "take this assignment. You'll enjoy it; it'll change your life. I know it's out of career, but you're young and don't worry about it." So that's how I ended up in Kathmandu.

Q: As Political Officer?

FISCHER: It was a very small Embassy. Bill Cargo was the Ambassador. Bill was a wonderful guy. We had a DCM. Then I was the number three man in the Embassy, and then there was an Economic Officer and Consular Officer. But, the entire Embassy was dominated largely by the CIA. We had a number of operations going from that country, although most of them were winding down. We had a big operation backing guerilla forces in Tibet. So we were winding down those operations actually before I arrived. But, it was a wacky post. My first experience in the "third world."

Q: Let me just ask, before you went were there health considerations? I mean Kathmandu is up at 12,000 feet.

FISCHER: No, not that high. The city's at about 5000 feet. City! I mean it's a village. We had small children. My daughter had been born in Bulgaria, so we had three small kids. I think it was schooling issues that concerned us than anything else. It turned out, in retrospect, to be the best international school, probably in the world. It's an extraordinarily good school. But, this was the assignment in which I could fulfill all my Walter Mitty

dreams. I mean a lot of us join the Foreign Service with the expectation that we'll be wearing white linen suits, carrying a fly whisk, pith helmet, and this was an adventure. Of course, part of that image had to be a Land Rover, and we had the biggest one they made. I should have read the Post Report with greater care, since at that time Nepal had less than 150 miles of roads. And believe me, a Land Rover may be a great "off road" vehicle but not in the Himalayas. And Kathmandu was a 9th century village with streets no more than 6 feet wide, if even that. I ended up getting a motor cycle. That's how I commuted back and forth to work. But, my wife was stuck with this huge Land Rover. And my wife, for those people who don't know it, is very small, very diminutive, about five feet three inches tall and there she was huddled behind this huge truck trying to make her way out to the local markets.

Health conditions were awful. I endeared myself to my colleagues when I helped get the post differential raised from 15 to 25 percent. Kathmandu was an enchanting assignment, but it was no accident that the World Health Organization had established its worldwide Cholera Program in Kathmandu. We all felt that the differential (a salary bonus based on hardship) should be at least 25%. I went down one Saturday morning to where we bought meat in the local market. It was a place called "Yellow Goat Alley" because the Nepalese dip their raw meats and their sheep heads and goats heads into saffron as a religious device. To make a long story short, I took a famous series of photographs of a woman defecating upstream from the river where the meat was being washed and on the basis of that photograph, the differential was increased to twenty-five percent.

Q: That was one of your lesser duties as a Political Officer? What did the Political Officer really do besides, I assume liaison with the Agency? You didn't have much time to follow political parties in Nepal.

FISCHER: There were no political parties in Nepal. It was one of the last absolute monarchies in the world. The king was an incarnate God. When I arrived, the former king had died, "long live the king." The new king, King Birendra, was coronated there in an incredible ceremony in 1975. It was an unbelievable kind of social event with society people flying in from all around the world. For some reason what passed for "international society" decided that the coronation was the place to be in 1975.

Q: This is the current (1999) king?

FISCHER: Yes, King Birendra is still alive and ruling in Nepal, albeit with very circumscribed powers. He was educated at Harvard and Eton. Very westernized with the exception that he was not about to allow in my time any political opposition or political parties. What did I do in Kathmandu? I did precisely nothing. It was an extraordinary three-year assignment, and I extended because I found Nepal to be an extraordinarily fascinating country. I always tell people interested in the Foreign Service that every assignment has an upside. The office job may be boring, but if you take advantage of living abroad as an American diplomat it can be a lifetime experience. I knew nothing about the two of world's great religions, Buddhism and Hinduism. I had always been

interested in mountain climbing. I organized an expedition to climb Mt. Everest in 1976, which was a lot of fun. But above all, my family would go out on treks for three and four weeks at a shot at least twice a year. And this was ostensibly to go and be able to "feel the pulse of the Nepalese people." In fact, I didn't speak Nepali. The fact that where we went - up in the mountains - there wasn't a person to be seen for days on end. But it was simply, everyone in the Embassy understood; this was one of the reasons you served in Nepal. We had very few, if any, national interests in the country. It was just a chance to relax and unwind. For me it was truly a life changing experience. I mean, our kids today, if you ask them about their Foreign Service career, and their memories of the Foreign Service, the first post that will come to mind is Kathmandu. To climb at eighteen thousand feet! My daughter in those days, well, she had just been born, so she was an infant until age three, and we used to throw her in the back of a Sherpa porter in a basket and go off for two or three weeks at a stretch. It was wonderful.

Q: Did we, the U.S., the Embassy get in between in any way, if there were disputes between India and Nepal or between Nepal and China?

FISCHER: Of course, China in those days was very important. Kissinger had gone to China but we certainly had no diplomatic relations. The Chinese Embassy had a huge establishment there, but it was off limits to us. So we never had any contact with the Chinese. We "watched China," but the Nepalese were both small and insignificant, as well as very discrete. The CIA may have had access to information, but State did not.

Q: Off-limits as U.S. policy?

FISCHER: Right.

Q: And we had no back channels?

FISCHER: I the years I was there it was very tense between India and Nepal. Indira Ghandi's India was both authoritarian and expansionist. These were the days when she abolished democracy and took Sikkim as an integral part of India. The Nepalese were extremely nervous about the possibility that they might be next. India had always accepted Nepalese independence but did so reluctantly. They wanted a Nepal which was politically subservient to India. For their part the Nepalese sought to balance themselves between two powerful states: India and China. They were not above using one against the other. In the mid 1970s the Nepalese were trying to fend off an expansionist India. India used very heavy-handed tactics against the King whom they saw as naïve and inexperienced. Firstly, the stationed one of their most senior and toughest diplomats as Ambassador, Ambassador Rasgotra who was known as the "gray fox." He acted like a colonial governor. Secondly, India gave sanctuary to opposition political parties which were banned in Nepal. Thirdly, in 1975 they imposed a blockade on landlocked Nepal. It was an enormously powerful weapon, since virtually all imported goods had to be imported through India. The Chinese had built a road from Tibet to Kathmandu but was in position to truck in fuel to supply Nepal. One of the impacts on the Embassy, of

course, was a very strict gas rationing regime which I think was 5 gallons a week. That didn't make my wife any happier with her Land Rover!

Q: Were there any Communists in Nepal at that time for the Political Officer to talk to or not talk to?

FISCHER: There were, and I had a couple of friends, one of whom went on to become prime minister of Nepal whom I saw occasionally. I must say one of the real inhibitions and handicaps in living in Nepal, Nepal is one of the few countries that I lived in where I didn't speak the language. English was an accepted legal language of government, but to be an effective political officer I believed you really had to speak Nepali or Newari; the other language spoken in the Kathmandu region. We had two Foreign Service Officers who spoke not only Nepali, but even Newari. Harry Barnes who later went on to become Ambassador in Romania when he was DCM in Kathmandu long before my time, decided to learn not only Nepali, but he learned court Nepali. This is a very special language spoken only within the royal court, and he ended up being the King and Queen's bridge partner because he was the only foreigner, I'm sure that they had ever met, who was able to converse with them in court Nepali.

We had another Ambassador long after my time, Peter Burleigh, Peter had been a Peace Corps volunteer in the valley, and so he spoke the vernacular of Kathmandu valley, Newari. Peter was certainly one of the very, very few foreigners who could speak Newari.

Q: Are Newari and Nepali similar?

FISCHER: No, they are totally different language groups.

Q: At that time did any of the American Officers speak Nepali then?

FISCHER: No. One of the CIA operation officers spoke acceptable Nepali.

Q: Did the King and Queen speak English?

FISCHER: Of yes, the King and Queen spoke English. The King had been educated at series of western universities, including Harvard for two semesters.

Q: What was Nepal's relationship with the United Kingdom?

FISCHER: It had defeated the British in a war in 1813. However, it became if you will, a vassal state to the British raj in India, and it supplied the most famous soldiers in the British army, the Gurkhas. It was an anachronism because the British still had within Nepal a Gurkha recruitment training program. They would go out once a year and interview a thousand young men between the ages of 14 and 16 and out of those thousand they would take a hundred. It was an extraordinarily competitive examination program. The British had this small group of people, and they would walk through the hill stations

and talk to young boys. I was always amused that the British may have given up the Empire "east of Suez," but they maintained the Nepalese recruiting program and even maintained a small base in eastern Nepal until the late 1970s. The Gurkhas had great historical significance for the British, as well they should have.

Q: Hill stations meaning villages?

FISCHER: Villages not in the high Himalayas but in the foothills up to fifteen thousand feet.

Q: What makes Gurkhas such good soldiers, assuming they're good soldiers?

FISCHER: Basically they found kids who had no formal education, they certainly couldn't read and write, and they were looking for young men. Here, they were recruiting at 14, 15, 16, who were inherently extraordinarily intelligent. Courage and bravery for which the Gurkhas are well known was simply a given. And so they were looking for people who had this extraordinary ability to solve problems, and they were personable young men. I was very impressed with the people they got. The stories about the Gurkhas are legion and while some of them may be exaggerated, the fact is that it is still considered one of the elite fighting forces of the world. These were young men who were willing to trade their lives for the opportunity to see the world. And see the world they did. They were stationed everyone in WWII. The initial attack up Casino Ridge in Italy was led by them. They served in Malaysia and Hong Kong, as well as in London.
Q: Let me ask, since you are one of the few officers that's probably had to deal with Kings and Queens, how did you deal with them? I assume you as a Political Officer met the King and the Queen and got to know them.

FISCHER: I did not. The Ambassador was the only one to deal with the King. The DCM and I would occasionally have to go and see the King, but he was an incarnate God. And so, therefore, to be in his presence was a rarity. I dealt with people in the palace who were his personal advisers. The King had three or four people that ran departments. There was one in charge of Foreign Affairs. There was a Foreign Ministry, but it was useless. I mean it had nothing to do with what was going on.

Q: Wasn't Nepal's foreign affairs carried out by India?

FISCHER: No, it was a totally independent country, or at least it tried to be. In fact, they saw themselves as quite independent of India. Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that does not operate on standard time. Nepalese clocks are always 15 minutes ahead of Indian clocks, even though they are in the same time zone.

Q: And they had an Ambassador in the U.S.

FISCHER: Yes, absolutely. We had a fairly large Embassy there in terms of the numbers of Americans. I suppose we had at least one hundred, and fifty Peace Corps volunteers;

we had a very large AID program and I guess in looking back on it, those were the two areas that as a Political Officer occupied my time. I more or less oversaw the Peace Corps program for it's political ramifications, and the AID program I fought tooth and nail because I thought it was essentially money being misspent We concentrated out AID programs in health. Absent a family planning program, this was a bankrupt policy as far as I was concerned, since whatever gains we made in health were being wiped out by the climbing survival rates of babies. Not that this was all bad. Nepal figured in UN efforts to eradicate smallpox, and they were successful.

Q: I want to go back for a second to dealing with the king. How did the Ambassador deal with the King? Was there bowing, was it face to face, could he speak directly to him or was there screen?

FISCHER: Bill Cargo when he was an Ambassador...

Q: Whom I assume was a career?

FISCHER: Yes, career. Bill had been preceded by Carol Laise. She had been married to Ellsworth Bunker when he was Ambassador in Vietnam. They must have been the first "tandem" Ambassadorial couple, but Bunker would fly into Kathmandu once a month or so to visit Carole. She was a grand lady and widely respected in Nepal. She had been quite close to the King, and when she left in about 1973 or 74 relations with the Palace while proper, were not especially close.

Q: Birendra was the son of the former king?

FISCHER: Son of the former king. So when Bill Cargo was there, he did not have that kind of the relationship. I suspect he saw the King on business three or four times a year. We only had one major problem with the King. Nepal in those days was the world's largest supplier of hashish oil. When you went into western Nepal, as I did once, you could stand on a hill, and as far as the eye could see, for tens of miles, nothing but the most magnificent stands of the world's tallest marijuana plants. This was a medicinal product. The Indians had always purchased marijuana and hashish oil from Nepal. Well, suddenly the Nepalese discovered this was worth a lot of money; so there was a lot of smuggling going on to the United States. We had put enormous pressure in 1974 and 1975 on the Nepalese to pass laws making hashish and marijuana illegal.
Of course, prior to that, Nepal had been a Mecca, a magnet for every hippie from around the world. There was a very famous restaurant in Kathmandu called the Hash House, where every dish had been made from hashish oil. Marijuana was available on the street for virtually nothing. People were giving it away. So we put a lot of pressure on the Nepalese to make marijuana and hashish illegal. There was a law on the books, it was passed in 1974, with our pressure, but it was never enforced. Partly it was never enforced because the King's brother who was a royal prince, had control of the hashish trade. We knew that it was being smuggled into Washington in the diplomatic pouch by the Nepalese ambassador. Hashish oil itself is a highly concentrated form of marijuana and

although marijuana was cheap in those days in the United States, hashish oil sold perhaps for as much as a thousand dollars an ounce. It was a commodity of some value. We knew it was being smuggled in the diplomatic pouch into the Nepalese Embassy in Washington. We managed to have a pouch drop on the tarmac at Dulles airport, where the bottles of hashish oil cracked open. And that became a little dicey because we had clear evidence that it was the King's brother who had been sending this via diplomatic pouch.

Q: Diplomats in general at that time in Nepal when hashish oil was legal, were there circumstances when diplomats had to use it to be diplomatic. Was there ever pressure on a person for form reasons to use it?

FISCHER: No. There were a lot of guys at a lot of cocktail parties who were stoned out of their minds. I never used it except one time. We brought a U.S. Customs team to Kathmandu in an effort to convince the Nepalese they should control trafficking. They simply couldn't imagine how widespread the stuff was. There were people on the side of the road in these little villages who were giving the stuff away. It was a commodity, dirt cheap. I had never used drugs. I remember one night the guys from Customs came to my house. I said, I gotta try this stuff; I don't know what it's like. So I took a small vial. It's a thick gummy substance, it looks like tar and I dipped a toothpick into it, and I smeared it down the seam of a cigarette. My wife was upstairs bathing our children in those days, and I smoked this cigarette. It was the equivalent of going from one scotch and soda to about three fifths in about five seconds. My heart began to beat. I know a lot about drugs because I'd been involved in customs side of the issue, and I remembered that it takes four hours for the body to metabolize hashish or marijuana. If you can hold out for four hours, you're ok. Well I closed my eyes and said, "I'm just going to sit here quietly, I'm not going to do anything, and wait for an hour to go by." So I sat there on the sofa and waited and waited and opened my eyes when I thought an hour had gone by, looked at my watch and one minute and thirty seconds had gone by. So I went upstairs to my wife who was bathing the kids in the bathtub, and I said, "I'm going to die. My heart's going." She looked at me and, "said you idiot! Why did you take this stuff?" I remember walking out in the backyard, and I walked in a circle for four hours. This was my first and last experience using drugs.

Q: One more question. I *heard you say that as Political Officer you helped or supervised the Peace Corps program. My experience in Latin America that would have been a no-no. What did you really mean by that? Did not the Peace Corps complain and when you said you supervised it, were you able or did you or was the intention to find out from them what was going on in places you might not get to? Tell me more about that because in many of the places where I have been, I may have done those things, but I didn't talk about it at that time.*

FISCHER: The relationship between the Peace Corps and the Embassy was the closest of any country I've ever lived in. My experience is, by and large, yours. There was a distance, the Peace Corps wanted to be politically independent, wasn't going to take any instructions from the Embassy. But, Kathmandu because it was so remote, was a special

case. I don't mean to imply we were giving the Peace Corps orders what to do, but we certainly did include it in policy planning efforts, especially in our economic assistance programs. We had from a hundred to a hundred and fifty volunteers...
Q: Doing what?

FISCHER: Road building, English teaching, agricultural development. They were, by and large, college kids. In other words, they were not highly specialized or trained. When they came, they did their in-country training in Kathmandu for six or eight weeks. The Embassy got to know them because again it's a very small expatriate community. As a result of that, we all had a better, closer relationship with Peace Corps volunteers than in any other country. When we did go up country, we would always carry goodies to the Peace Corps volunteers, we'd sleep with them overnight. Politically the Peace Corps director sat in on country team meetings, and we didn't have any political interests in what was going on in Peace Corps, but we had development interests. We wanted to know that those programs were consistent with our AID program. I think Kathmandu was one of the places where we experimented with this where the Peace Corps programs became an integral part of our aid development policy. We certainly didn't use the volunteers to collect information, but we listened to their stories which gave us a better sense of what was going on in very remote areas of one of the remotest countries in the world.

Q: What were they doing? Like building water systems?

FISCHE*R*: Like building water systems. It was a very informal arrangement. I had a particular relationship with two Peace Corp directors because they were mountaineers. A lot of people wanted to come out as Peace Corps directors because it was a chance to climb in the Himalayas. Was there any direct policy intervention? No. But, the directors were certainly aware of broad policy guidelines.

Q: You can't help but exchange information.

FISCHER: Yes. We had one crazy volunteer who was way, way up along the Nepalese-China border. Nepal is bounded by the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world. There are only six or seven passes that go across the Himalayas. We had one Peace Corps volunteer in a village, and his job was I guess animal husbandry, working with goats and yaks or something. It became apparent to me and to the people in the Embassy that this Peace Corps volunteer in order to go from the village where he was living to the meadows where he was operating and working, he was going everyday through Red China, through Tibet at a pass at 17,500 feet. So we called him in and said is this true? He said yes. I said, you can't do this. If you get caught by the Red Chinese, the world will start a nuclear war. He said, "No problem, the People's Liberation Army, I watch them on the roads down below. I even know the truck traffic. They send patrols perhaps as high as eight or nine thousand feet, but I'm up at seventeen thousand feet in the meadows so they never bother me."

Q: To summarize the Nepal time and I understand very well, and I have one more question. How much of an accomplishment was it to climb Everest? A lot of people talk about out of area assignments. What did you get out of it? How did it help later? Obviously, you seem to have enjoyed the assignment very, very much.

FISCHER: It was lucky that I went to Kathmandu when I did because there was a period in the seventies when there were virtually no promotions in the political cone for a seven-year period from FSO 4 to FSO 3. Now that was an important promotion in those days because that was going from Junior ranks to middle ranks or something; it was a key promotion. So I was stuck in Kathmandu, and it didn't make any difference where I was because I wasn't going to get promoted anyway.

What I got out of it was simply an appreciation of a culture. Kathmandu in those days was a beautiful place. And frankly, it also changed the way in which I chose assignments. My wife and I and family were one night sleeping in a Sherpa house at 16,000 feet in a little village called Namche Bazaar. We were sleeping under an attic under dried yak carcasses, while in the room below us there was an exorcism done by Sherpa Tibetan monks of a guy who had developed some illness, and we went down and watched the ceremony. I turned to my wife and said, "God, we're in National Geographic." This was the ultimate in terms of Foreign Service experiences. As a result, I no longer became so concerned for a promotion for a benefit politically as to make sure the post was interesting. The head of USIS in Kathmandu was a wonderful guy, Kent Obee. Kent was a passionate mountain climber; his wife was a very good writer. And every year we used to get Christmas cards subsequent to our assignment in Kathmandu. Kent was assigned in Tanzania, and their Christmas card was filled with exotic stories about camping out in the African bush. I ended up going to Tanzania largely because of the sense of adventure. We as a family, at least I did, and I think my wife did, wanted to experience some interesting places. In my particular field, in those days I was involved in Soviet and Eastern European affairs, the standard career path was to go to Bonn, to go to Moscow, to go to Prague, to go back to Bonn, to maybe go to NATO, to stick within one geographic area. So the GLOP assignment changed all of that for us, we said, "Hey, let's take advantage of a career that let's us live in interesting places." It is kind of odd when I read travel magazines to realize that we lived in some of the world's most exotic travel destinations: Nepal, Tanzania and east Africa and finally, the Seychelles. And Munich, of course, isn't exactly a tourist backwater.

Q: So it certainly did not hurt your career?

FISCHER: No not at all. As it turned out, although I discovered this only after I retired, Carol Laise, who as I said had been Ambassador to Nepal and was the Director General of Foreign Service, in an incident which I'll describe shortly, came to Kathmandu to try and ferret out the story of this crazy Ambassador we had, and she stayed in her old residence. She invited me to breakfast with a group of officers. We were talking about problems in the Foreign Service. I was at that point fairly bitter because of the promotion

block. I let loose I was quite frank in my criticism of how personnel were treated in the Service. I forgot about it and never saw it as some sort of "major" attack or anything.

When I retired, for those officers who don't realize it, you can sign a piece a paper to obtain all your personnel records. And so when I retired, I received two or three boxes of documents from the Department. I discovered five memorandums from Carol Laise, the Director General, regarding me. She had apparently been impressed by my conversation, and I became what she called, at least in these margin notes on my assignment cables, one of her "boys." She watched over me without my knowledge. The only time I ever interacted with her again was when she put me on a selection board. And yes, I was active in a group trying to rectify the assignment barriers to women officers. But in reading my personnel folder, it was clear that she intervened from time to time to see that I got a good assignment. I wouldn't have gone to Tanzania as the DCM, I don't believe, without her support.

Q: I want to hear about Everest.

FISCHER: Well, Everest was a joke. Frankly, I happened to be in Nepal and a friend of mine, Phil Trimble was the legal adviser for the State Department. Phil and I had gone to Harvard Law School together, and Phil was a mountain climber, and I loved climbing. So Phil sent me a telegram, a Department of State telegram one day, asking if I would I try to get permission for an easy 8,000 meter peak in Nepal. In those days, the Prime Minister controlled which mountains in Nepal were climbed. There were only two permits given every year for Everest, and the waiting list to climb Everest was about ten or eleven years long. So I went to the Foreign Ministry and said I wanted a permit to climb A, B and C mountains, and a friend of mine who ran the mountaineering division said he had just gotten a telegram from the French who had withdrawn their permit to climb Everest the following year in the summer of 1976. I wrote the required check of $500 on the spot, got the permit and sent a telegram back to Phil. "Congratulations," I wrote, "we're on for Everest summer of 1976." I didn't hear and didn't hear. I waited a couple of weeks figuring Phil might have been on leave or whatever. Finally, I sent a second telegram. I said what's your response? I got a telegram back, he said," you're crazy! We wanted an easy peak; we thought you were kidding." To make a long story short, with some help from Phil and a couple of other guys we got a team put together, twelve people, and Roone Arledge of ABC sports underwrote the expedition for $200,000 with the view of broadcasting for the first time from the summit of Everest. That, by the way, turned out to be impossible, given the technology then available. I was not all that involved in it. I became the base camp manager and logistics operator and got all these guys set up to climb the mountain. We got two guys to the top, and nobody killed. But, it was one of those crazy things that happened.

Q: So, you were sitting in Kathmandu and you got a telegram saying you were going somewhere else?

FISCHER: First of all I want to tell you about our Ambassador. She was a rather infamous Ambassador, considered by many to rank at the top of a short list of very strange political appointees. Her name was Marquita Maytag. I had first met her at the coronation of King Birendra in 1975 when she was a low ranking member of the official U.S. delegation appointed by President Ford. I subsequently found out that she was a strong Republican powerhouse from Idaho who had thrown the Idaho delegation from Reagan to Ford at the 1976 Republican convention. For this she received her "just" reward: Ambassador in Nepal.

I really can't describe some of the events that took place in her short reign in a "family" oral history. Suffice is to say she was a mid-50s oversexed divorcee who figured anyone in town was fair game. Her targets ranged from Marine guards to Nepali airline pilots and within 6 weeks of her arrival our fellow diplomats were sniggering behind their backs at every diplomatic cocktail party.

One night, all of us in the Embassy had movie projectors, and one of the ways which we entertained, because there were no movie theaters in Kathmandu, was to show modern American movies. We could get any political leader in the country to come out to our houses to see an American movie. It was a Friday night, and I was sitting at home at eight o'clock and the doorbell rang. There on my doorstep was the Prime Minister of Nepal. He said, “Mr. Fischer, are you showing a movie tonight?” I said, “No, I'm not, Why do you ask?” He said, "I thought I was invited to a movie tonight, and I thought it was at the Ambassador’s residence but I went down there and all I could find was that she was there with three airline pilots and two Tibetan whores. I counted around, and I realized there was one more woman than a man and I was going to have to end up with her. So I was hoping you were showing a movie tonight."

And the second story about her. The King of Nepal as I described is an incarnate God, and the young son-God king made his first trip abroad as King. He was going to fly from Kathmandu directly to Beijing, over the Himalayas. It was a Sunday because Sunday had been chosen as the most auspicious day by the court astrologers for him to fly. This was a big deal. I remember the flight was to be at eleven o'clock in the morning. Well, at about 10:10 a.m., I was at home, and got a call from the Chief of Protocol who was at the airport. He asked if I could come to the airport as quickly as possible to "resolve a small problem." So I arrived at the airport just as the King was entering the airport complex on an elephant which was covered with a gold throne. It was extraordinary. The diplomatic corps were lined up in morning coat, mind you, this was a very formal occasion, and I suddenly realized that the American Ambassador was "missing in action." So I ran to the Chief of Protocol to ask what was wrong. He said, "Oh, my God, I've locked her up in the VIP lounge. You go in and deal with her." I walked in, and there was the American Ambassador, she was not an unattractive, fifty-five or fifty-six-year old, but gravity had taken its toll. She was in a pair of blue jeans, and a t-shirt with no brassiere and across the t-shirt was emblazoned this slogan "keep you tips up." She had on a pair of Chinese flip-flops. She was livid. She blamed it immediately on me or the DCM or whoever because

we hadn't told her, although she had instructions as to what to do. This was typical of this woman. She was an absolute shrew.

Her final denouement came with the election of President Carter in 1976. She refused to provide the usual letter of resignation required of all ambassadors and did whatever she could to stay on, despite the change in political control of the White House. She wrote an infamous telegram on January 18th or so two days before the inauguration in which, among other things, she proposed that the United States erect a six-foot fence around Nepal to preserve it as an international people reserve. She also pleaded in the most dramatic terms that she be reappointed Ambassador.

Cy Vance and Peter Tarnoff were sitting in the office on a Sunday afternoon going through by accident the list of political appointees overseas, as to who was going to get canned and when. Nepal, needless to say, was way down the list of changing Ambassadors in key posts like London and Paris. Peter got a call from the Operations Center in the State Department which said, "We've got a cable down here you have to read." Well, the telegram came up, and he showed it to Vance, who said, "Who is this person? Move them to the top of the list."

So Marquita Maytag became the first political appointee in the Carter administration to be fired. And that afternoon the telegram went out saying, “Your resignation is accepted. Get out of Nepal. You have thirty days to leave.” Well, twenty-nine days went by, thirty days, thirty-two, and the Ambassador refused to leave. Her argument was that having resigned as Ambassador, she had the right to "house sit" the Residence until such time as a new Ambassador arrived. We pointed out to her there was a violation of the law. She said that was crazy. “When everyone else goes on home leave or you leave the country, we always have Embassy people staying in houses and as long as this house is unoccupied I intend to stay there” and there she sat for six weeks.

In the meantime, we were sending telegrams to the Department explaining the situation. Art Wortzel was the head of Personnel and asked me to come to New Delhi to meet with him. To make a long story short, he gave me orders to have her evicted from the Residence by the following Friday and, if necessary, to use the Marine Guards to effect the eviction.

The Charge, the DCM, was a good friend of mine, Jack Eaves, and I said Jack these are the instructions. Jack, who had suffered under this woman more then anybody else, said, "That's it. We send in the Marines." She refused to answer the telephone or answer the door at the Residence, so Jack sent a junior officer over with a note that said, “You have until 9:00 a.m. on Friday morning or we're coming to move you out of the residence.” So the Marine Guards arrived with two trucks on Friday morning, 9:00 a.m., and the locks had been changed, so they broke the door down, literally. It was full-scale military operation. There was the Ambassador sitting in the living room on the sofa, again in her usual outfit of t-shirt, no bra and blue jeans and they moved her lock, stock and barrel. They gave her two or three hours to pack a suitcase. Then they put her in a truck with her

personal belongings and put her in a hotel called the Yellow Pagoda Hotel, I'll never forget that.

Q: Didn't she have parties?

FISCHER: She did, but none of us were invited and God knows what she did, other than pass around marijuana and cookies.

That was Marquita Maytag. I can tell stories for hours and hours and hours about this woman. I guess I should do two versions of this oral history: an expurgated one and an X-rated one. Really, most of the stories I have about her reign would make a hardened Marine Corps drill sergeant blush. It was at the time a living hell. She stayed on in Nepal for almost two years, living out of the tourist hotel. I guess she finally rented an apartment somewhere. But, the poor Nepalese government didn't know what to do with her. When she left, she took out an incredible collection of Nepali art and artifacts illegally, but the Nepalese government wasn't about to stop her. She was without doubt the worst Ambassador I have ever heard of, much less experienced. Thank God Nepal was not a country of vital importance to the United States.

Q: Before we go on, and it's just probably the way in which you're retelling these anecdotes, but it seemed as though the Political Officer was doing a lot of things in this case that normally a DCM would do. Is that in the way you're telling it or did the DCM put it on you?

FISCHER: No we were all in the same boat together. The poor DCM was in a very difficult situation. He was about to get fired if he did anything, so he shared the burden around the embassy as best he could. The administrative officer had proof positive that she had been charging things illegally to her ORE accounts but decided discretion was the better part of valor. No, she was really a piece of work.

Q: Let me ask one more thing on this, and this goes to the substantive part. Did this woman, this Ambassador affect policy or affect relations in any profound way or over any long term?

FISCHER: No, because the Nepalese rapidly realized that she was crazy. Again, you have to understand this was 1976, the King is all those things I've talked about. Marquita led a woman's strike in front of the palace for women's rights. It took us an hour to find about it before we could get the Marines down there to pick her up and throw in the back of a car. But, those things were not kindly seen but as soon as the palace spent five minutes with her, they realized that this woman was nuts.

Q: Let me just ask one more question from a related issue, assuming there was some issues that had to be discusses between the two governments did the Nepali government use the Embassy?

FISCHER: They dealt with the DCM.

Q: They still dealt through the Embassy in Kathmandu but only through the DCM. So now, you were not in the teepee when you got you onward assignment.

FISCHER: I decided that I wanted to go back into arms control. It was the Carter administration; it was a great time for arms control and that was an area that still interested me. There was an Assistant Secretary of State in charge of political-military affairs by the name of Les Gelb. Les was a powerhouse in Washington, seen as a bright guy. So, he asked me to come back and serve as one of the two backstopping officers for the SALT negotiations. So that's what I did. It was an assignment I looked forward to and I thought it would be a lot of fun. I was again in my milieu, back in the element, arms control was for me, one of the things I enjoyed most. I enjoyed the tactical problems of negotiation, and I was a pretty good person in terms of the inter-agency game in Washington. I knew my way around. Arms Control Agency, the CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense. Having served on SALT I I knew my way around the bureaucracy. The fifty or sixty people concerned with SALT were all people with whom I'd worked in the past. So I went to work for Les Gelb. I'll never forget; Les and I became very good friends as a result of the following experience.

I had never known Gelb at all. I wrote a paper my first day in the office, and I'd sent it up to the front office maybe at 3:00 p.m. Gelb wanted to talk about it. Well Gelb didn't really start working until about five o'clock in the afternoon and I'm someone who likes to work in the mornings. In any case, I sat around and sat around until six thirty. My car pool had left, and I lived way out in Virginia and how was I going to get home, etc. I was called into Gelb's office perhaps quarter to seven, and this paper was literally thrown at me. I was subjected to the most outrageous diatribe, screaming, yelling, every other word was four letters. It was extraordinary. So I stood up, I said, Mr. Gelb, I don't know you from Adam but I know one thing, I don't work for you and I quit. Gelb said, you son-of-a-bitch, you can't quit you're a Foreign Service Officer. I said, I didn't say I was going to quit the Foreign Service, I'm sure as hell not going to work for you and I walked out of the room. The next morning I came in I think I was literally packing up my desk; I was prepared to go down to Personnel. Gelb came into my office and he was carrying a bunch of flowers or some peace token. He put it down on my desk and said I hope you'll reconsider. It turns out that we became fast friend, largely because Gelb was a New Yorker, a guy who didn't like many people in the Foreign Service because he felt they were obsequious, yes people and if you stood up to him, you became a hero. And he and I used to have knock down, drag out fights, and he was a wonderful boss. He was extraordinarily creative.

Q: Before we go into some of the issues you dealt with, let me ask two questions. Did you get any special training to go into disarmament, what did you need and how did you get it? And also, maybe this goes back to other transitions, how was your transition? I assume it was in the summer, and you put your kids back in school and you went back to a house. Was it difficult? Was it any different than most transitions that we go through?

FISCHER*:* Yes.

Q: You were coming back after five years I suppose?

FISCHER: Yes, five years overseas. As a family we had always tried to time our reassignments with an eye on our children's' education. We didn't want to strand any of them in a school with one year to go to finish. That was not a particularly bad transition that I can remember. We owned a house so we went back to it. But, our kids by and large had never really lived in the United States. We'd been overseas. We'd lived in the States form 1968 to 1972, but our kids were either not born yet or either very, very young. So for them it was a transition.

You asked about special training for arms control. When I went into the Arms control Agency, I asked for some special training. I had been given a SIOP clearance which was the Integrated Strike Operations Plan so I had some knowledge of what the capabilities were, and I had very high security clearances. But, I basically went out to Strategic Air Command, I went to Cheyenne, well it wasn't called Cheyenne mountain in those days, but it was the North American, NORAD joint defense, went into missile silos at Whitman air force base, went up to Montana. I remember going out to Sandia Labs in New Mexico and getting some training in weapons technology. For me it was an interesting period.

Q: And all that was useful? You needed a lot of that?

FISCHER: Yes, in order to make some decisions in terms of which weapons systems we were going to control. And the most important thing was to know what weapons systems were in development. Less so in the '70s but in the late '60s when the SALT I talks began we had just began test MIRV missiles. You had to know what was coming down the pike in terms of research and development.

Q: And was this entirely focused on the SALT II talks?

FISCHER: I spent, I guess from 1977 to 1979, ninety percent of my time working on, as a back up if you will, the State Department representative on the inter-agency process for SALT II. I guess what I brought to that process was more political than technical. I had a better sense then ninety-nine percent of the Foreign Service Officers that I worked with on the importance of the American public opinion. Arms control has never been popular with Congress, and during the Cold War there was a significant body of opinion in the country that we shouldn't negotiate with the USSR. Any agreement we reached would, of course, be subject to ratification by the Senate. In those days there was a guy who was working in the policy planning staff named Sandy Berger and Sandy and I had a little mini group with Cy Vance to try and get him to understand the importance of laying the political foundation for eventual ratification. So I ended up being a speech writer. Sandy and I wrote the Secretary's congressional testimony. Then we ended up doing speeches for him. And I took over the task of working with the Policy Planning staff, the Counselor's Office and the office of congressional liaison.

Q: And the policy planning was small "p" not into the Planning Policy Bureau?

FISCHER: I literally shared an office that was the borderline between PM and SP. We were in the same floor together. I wore two hats. On the one hand I was working with policy planning staff in preparing Vance's testimony and speech writing and then at the same time working for the political military affairs.

Q: Wasn't PM at that time a relatively new bureau?

FISCHER: I don't know. It was a powerful bureau in those days. I mean PM has gone up and down through the years. But, you had a very strong Assistant Secretary Les Gelb; very close to Vance so it was an integral part of policy making.

In the summer of 1978, Vance called me into the office and asked if I would be willing to consider a transfer to go down to Public Affairs. Hodding Carter was then the Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs. Gelb, Carter and the Secretary all wanted to beef up the Department's public outreach efforts. I was asked to restructure the office to push or promote two foreign policy issues. One was the Panama Canal Treaty, and the other was the SALT II treaty which had not yet been signed but was in the final stages of negotiation. So I ended up working for one year in what was a highly politicized operation. We had about twenty people working for us. Eighteen or seventeen civil servants and I brought in three Foreign Service Officers. We set up another office with eight people in it which was to target specific congressional districts. The idea was to mount a full court press to develop public support by offering speakers around the country, meetings with editorial boards and to the extent possible, getting our point of view across in radio and television programs. It was successful, well we were fifty percent successful. We sold the Panama Canal Treaty that passed the Senate. The SALT II treaty did not, it failed, because in the summer of 1979, or winter of 1980, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.

But that was a very interesting job for me because it gave me a chance to travel around the United States. Frankly, it resulted although I didn't know it at the time, in the job I had after I retired from the Foreign Service, to run the World Affairs Council in San Francisco. We had a lot of money. We had a budget of about 1.3 or 1.4 million dollars. I enjoyed it. We worked with some people who became good friends. Brian Atwood who went on to run AID, Brian was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs. The Counselor of the department was a guy by the name of Matt Nimitz. We treated it like a war. It involved creating a coalition of key staff people on the Hill and key people in the administration. This wasn't anything new in Department politics, but it was new to me. When I say it wasn't anything new, I may be wrong, since this was the first time that I'm aware of that the Department became proactive. We formed alliances with key Senators who helped us target states where public opinion might be critical in how a given senator would vote.

Q: This brings up a couple things. You were at this time and FSO 2?

FISCHER: No I must have been an FSO-1. I know that I didn't get into the senior foreign service until my appointment as Ambassador in 1982.

Q: And you got to testify at a full congressional hearing? This was the first time in your career you had done that?

FISCHER: I only testified once and that against my will and over the strong objections of several senior people in the Department. As part of our outreach effort, I had briefed Senator Glenn of Ohio. Glenn's vote on the SALT II was critical. And Glenn saw himself, because he'd been in a space suit, as an expert on anything regarding rockets. He didn't have the vaguest understanding of the politics of verification. This is an area that I knew a lot about. So I was sent up to brief him. The whole issue of verification was complicated by the classified nature of the systems we used to monitor Soviet activity. I have long forgotten what the issue was the bothered Glenn, but I had convinced him that whatever it was could, in fact, be verified. So as I walked out of his office, he said, I want you to come up here and testify to the full Committee the day after tomorrow. I said, look, it's not my place. He said, no, no, you're the only guy whose ever explained this to me, so I want you to come up. Well I went back and told my bosses who of course turned pale at the idea that an FSO 1 was going to go up and testify on verification. So I was sent up with someone, maybe Les Gelb, I know we had three air force Generals there as well. It was a classified, top secret briefing. Gelb and the three Generals are sitting at the table, and I'm sitting in the back because they're not going to let me testify. Glenn walked in and looked at me and said welcome, why are you here? We want to hear from FISCHER. So I was moved to the table. It was fine; I knew what I was talking about.

Q: In that case, you obviously wrote your testimony?

FISCHER: Well, yes.

Q: And did you carry most of the conversation?

FISCHER: Yes. It was a half-hour of me explaining the issue.

Q: This leads me to another question, and I have my own strong opinion on this. During your public affairs time and even before that when you were in PM, you must have had a lot of contact with the Hill.

FISCHER: Yes, a great deal.

Q: Was this with Congressmen and/or staffers?

FISCHER: Both.

Q: And had you had any training in that?

FISCHER: No. I had had no training in it, but before I joined Foreign Service, I had been involved in politics. One of the reasons I think I was effective, is because I think I understood intuitively the political process. I was terribly frustrated by the fact that it was tough to find Foreign Service Officers who could carry on a conversation with a Senator in a way which you can understand. And, I'll tell you a story. One of my tasks was when Senators wanted briefings; my office chose who in the department was going to go up and make the briefing. Senator Fritz Hollings wanted a briefing. So we sent up a Foreign Service Officer who really knew his stuff. Or, I should say, he knew the technical details but obviously lacked the political skills to sell his ideas to a senator! I was sitting in my office when the phone rang. I picked it up, and it was Hollings on the phone. He said, "FISCHER, I don't know who you are sending up here, but I got a guy in my office who couldn't sell pussy on a troop train in World War II!" As always, Hollings was direct and succinct! We tried to be more careful about who we sent up to brief.

Q: Is there a way to train people to know this? Or, does it really come because you have a political intuition and you're interested?

FISCHER: Lord knows, we tried, but I think the latter.

Q: I mean I have seen that most Foreign Service Officers could not this. I know many of them when they first did it they were not really ready or qualified, I was one of those, had to do it. But, there must be a way somewhere in FSI to give people a way.

FISCHER: I'll tell you what I did do. The other problem exists in terms of public speaking. We had a budget. And Hodding Carter was a great guy. Hodding said, "Look, we can't go out and send the typical Foreign Service Officer to speak on television, radio etc." So we brought in a woman- I hired her in New York. She was a former opera signer, and she had made it big in television as a talk show hostess. She ran a public speaking program for senior people in the Department. It was a training program, and we ran about seventy-five Foreign Service Officers through it. We ran the Central American types through it, and we ran the Arms Control people through it. What we discovered, which was something I knew from my experience, it was not important that people know the substance. You can train anybody and give them a briefing paper to answer the ten questions that you're going to get from a public audience about the Panama Canal Treaty, but you needed people that could go out and sell pussy on a troop train. They are precious few in our business. It's extraordinary to me that diplomats, we live off the written word, who are supposed to be articulate and persuasive to foreign governments fail when it comes to dealing with the American public. That was true also on the hill. You know how the hill operates. You're dealing with Senate staffers who have a very good political sense, but they want to make sure that technically, and factually they're on safe ground but when you get up to the level of the principle, the Senator, you're going to bore them to tears if you talk more the thirty seconds on the issue. He wants to know how's this going to play, how's this going to impact such and such a bill. I think that Foreign Service

Officers, we're a little like lawyers, we want to have all the “t’s” crossed and all the “i’s” dotted. We tend to ignore the political forest and focus on the trees.

Q: But it's also because we're worrying about our asses sometimes.

FISCHER: Yes, I suppose so. I don't know. I'm not certain that's true in my experience. I think it's more that our personalities are such that we just don't relate well to that kind of situation. We’ve all had to deal with congressional delegations (CODELS) overseas, but there are precious few Foreign Service Officers who are going to stay up until three o'clock in the morning and knock back bourbon and branch water and all that. Congressmen want to have people who they feel comfortable with. The average Foreign Service Officer makes congressmen very uptight. They are intimidated by the knowledge that we have.

Q: Well, you answered my question that there is a need for training and it can be done to learn how to deal with the Congress. I've always thought that one of the problems that Foreign Service Officers also have is that we're overseas and we lose contact. You come back after five years, there's a different set of congressmen. Especially now with term limits. Let me ask you now how large a policy input did you have in either in the SALT II negotiations, as opposed to describing the policy and the perception of the policy.

FISCHER: The SALT negotiations were handled by a very small group, partly I suppose because they were highly technical. It was very free wheeling. In the Carter administration dialogue and debate was very open and very encouraged. I think there was a sense that the days of Kissinger were over. Kissinger had run a very tight ship. He had done everything back channel. Those of us who had negotiated the SALT I treaty for three years were just basically window dressing because the real negotiations were taking place between Kissinger and Dobrynin. The Carter administration changed that. Jimmy Carter was himself a nuclear engineer. It was my first chance, for example, to meet a President of the United States. And when you went to inter-agency meetings, even if you were a back bencher, I was certainly not the principal, you were encouraged as a back bencher to speak up. Vance was very open. Vance was the first to admit he didn't understand the technical issues, so he would rely on us much more. I do think we had a chance to influence policy. I'm trying to remember some issues which again were technical. Whether you were going to limit ground launch cruise missiles. In those days we thought it was very important stuff. Of course in retrospect it wasn't.

Q: And in this period it sounds to me like you dealt most of your time, all of your time with other Americans. How was the State Department relationship with the Pentagon both the Secretary's office and with the Joint Chiefs? Who ran the policy? Did it come out of the NSC? Who had the predominant weight in saying, “This is the negotiating position, this is what we'll accept; this is what the bottom line is?”

FISCHER: The NSC ran it without question. They were in charge of all the inter-agency negotiations. It was run by a friend of mine, on this particular aspect of it, two friends of

mine, Brzezinski was the NSC Director, who I knew, David Aaron with whom I'd worked on SALT I, was the number two guy and Aaron ran the inter-agency process. Working directly beneath Aaron on a day-to-day basis was another friend of mine, Roger Mollander, who had also come from the SALT I delegations. And at the Defense Department on the Secretary's side, the civilian side, were all friends of mine. That why as I say it was a very small group of people and we had all grown up in this arcane science of arms control, so it became very informal. The CIA representative on the SALT II negotiations was again someone with whom I worked for three years, but the odd person out was of course, the uniforms, the JCS. The JCS did not keep people in those jobs, they moved on to other commands. So they were the odd person out. Particularly during the Carter administration, what was happening to them was seen as anathema in terms of what they wanted, because their primary function is to preserve any and all weapons systems, and it was, as far as they were concerned, a bunch of left-wind democrats, civilians that didn't understand the problem. In reality, of course, what happened throughout the whole history of American arms control is that neither side, neither the Russians or the United States, even limited or changed their military planning one iota. The only thing the arms control process did was to make sure that both sides would go ahead and do what they were planning to do anyway, but wouldn't do anything more. And that's the way the process worked. The entire arms control process throughout this period did accomplish one thing. It injected a predictability into the strategic equation that would not have existed otherwise.

Q: Who was the Secretary of Defense?

FISCHER: Harold Brown. Again, Harold and I shared an office for three years together in Helsinki during the SALT I negotiation because Harold represented the Secretary of Defense, he was then Professor of Physics at Cal Tech. So it was a very internecine kind of arrangement and very informal.

Q: Could you see from your position at State and PM the tension or the conflict between the uniforms and the Office of the Secretary of Defense? Were you pulled in? Did you go in trying to affect it? Or was that up to the NSC?

FISCHER: Yes, definitely. That was the NSC's job, but we tended to side, State did, on ninety-nine percent of the issues with the Office of the Secretary of Defense. When there was a conflict between the JCS and the Secretary's office, invariably we would side with the civilian side. That's not to say that on issues we didn't disagree strongly with the Pentagon. The uniform services suffered because they didn't have the intellectual heavy weights that were required to make an argument at a level where you had Harold Brown, Paul Nitze, Paul Warnke, these were really smart guys. Warnke was at ACDA, he was the head of the delegation. In both rounds of the SALT negotiations, the JCS did not have the intellectual muscle power that others agencies had. On the other hand, they had the money and they had the hardware so they could hold their own politically. But in terms of the articulate and the intellectual arguments of how many nuclear angels could stand on the head of a pin, they suffered.

Q: But their relations were good with Congress?

FISCHER: Yes, of course, they called the shots. How many either uniformed officers or DOD civilians serve as permanent or semi-permanent members of congressional committees? It's extraordinary.

So that was my career in arms control and public affairs. I worked for Hodding Carter; a guy I still see and have enormous respect for. Wonderful, funny person. I did an enormous amount of public speaking across the country. I think I logged in about 200 speeches in one year and about the same number of television and radio appearances. I enjoyed it a great deal.

But, it was a highly politicized operation. I remember that Bill Diaz was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Hodding Carter, and he was nominally my boss. Bill was a good old boy from Alabama. Bill Diaz is rather famous in the Foreign Service because no matter where he was on assignment, he always managed to get an official trip to return the United States in time to see the Alabama-Auburn football game. But, Diaz was a good old boy from the South and he decided, which made sense, that the way to get SALT and arms control accepted was to go to the Southern Baptist convention and to get Southern Baptist ministers to agree. Politically they were very conservative and very anti-arms control, but Diaz thought we had a good chance to get their support if this would be couched as a moral issue. So Bill and I flew to Dallas, Texas one day and we met with the then head of the Southern Baptist convention which is a huge political force in the South and we spent four hours and we ended up getting the endorsement. It was extraordinary. It was a political operation. I went into districts, places I would never have thought possible. I remember going with a black, democratic organizer down in the Delta of Mississippi, because we needed some Mississippi support and the Southern Senators were on the fence on issues like this. But for me it was a fascinating experience to see America and travel across the country. I remember I was struck by the fact that most Americans in those days feared the Soviet Union. It was clear that it was our archrival, our enemy, but people didn't really understand the Soviet Union with one exception. Farmers in the Midwest were probably the most liberal, free thinking people about the Soviet Union. Why? Because the USSR was an enormous market for American farm products. These were the days when we were selling surplus grain. A lot of them in fact had been to the Soviet Union; they had had relationships with grain buying institutions. It always struck me as being strange that you would think a group that was so isolated would not have strong views about U.S. foreign policy, but I found them the most knowledgeable Americans I saw.

Q: In this vein, how controversial were these speeches and these visits? Was it on the front page of the next day paper? So it did create reaction? How did you handle that? You obviously didn't stay around and respond. You were jumping from one place to another. Did Washington somehow respond?

FISCHER: Yes, they were controversial. Let me first tell you a little bit about the operation because it's still used today. My office invented a concept called town hall meetings. The idea was to take senior Department officials to the American public. We talked about issues that concerned us: Panama, SALT and disarmament, and usually one or two issues that might have been local in focus whether it U.S.-Mexican relations if we were in Florida, we might be talking about something else if we were in another part of the country. We ran a series of meetings for four, or six hours a day and we used that opportunity when we went to a town, my office's job was to make sure we got onto every radio talk show; we got onto every television show. One thing that a lot of people don't know in this country, it may no longer be true but it was true then, every local t.v. market had three local talk shows. One ran from 9 to 10 in the morning, another one usually ran as a trailer to the noon news, in those days, local t.v. stations broke at twelve o'clock to run a local news show. And before the days of Oprah Winfrey and Jesse Rafael from 4 to 5 before the local news was usually another local talk show. So we had an enormous opportunity to get on and make our pitch for the importance of foreign policy. And these shows of course are looking for content. We never had a problem putting a “real live diplomat” on a local show. Then, above all, we had editorial board meetings in each city we visited. In an age when the Department is concerned that the American people have no interest in foreign affairs, it might behoove them to do a bit more in generating or promoting that interest. I know that when Madeleine Albright became Secretary she made a big deal about creating an “American Desk,” to go out and speak across the country. I think she came to realize that her time might be spent more wisely, but I did applaud the spirit of her effort. It isn’t necessary - it isn’t always even effective - for the Secretary to engage this way. The Secretary will always have to read a prepared text. No, our idea was to send out mid-level officers who could talk off the cuff, could explain policy is ways which made it relevant to their audiences. At least, that was the idea, but as I said earlier we were hard pressed to find 25 officers in the Department who could speak frankly and articulately about policy in ways the average American would find compelling.

So this was a highly politicized operation. In fact, Jesse Helms, who was then a Senator from North Carolina, threatened to sue us, and I was named in a law suit, he sued the Department of State for violation of a federal law which prohibits lobbying for any particular piece of legislation. He was absolutely right; we were lobbying. That created some difficulty for us down the road. The way we got around it was we were then confronted by a group of people who were called the Committee for the Present Danger. They were, by and large, Republicans who subsequently began to run arms control in the Reagan administration, people who felt the SALT II treaty was wrong. They included people like Richard Perle, Paul Nitze and eventually, General Ed Rowny. We basically agreed that we would not run these town hall meetings as only the voice of the administration, we would engage in public debates.

So we jointly targeted key states. They were doing the same thing we were doing, they were going after those congressional districts where Senators were on the fence, and we found that very helpful. They had access to conservative Senators who they hoped they were going to convince to vote against. We had access to liberal Senators who needed

strong public support if they were going to vote for the Treaty. Frankly, I think it was one of the more useful exercises in public diplomacy because we took, experts on both sides of an issues out to the American people. And these debates would go on for two, two and a half, three hours often in a university atmosphere, sometimes in a World Affairs Council. I remember we did a debate here in San Francisco; I think we had eleven hundred people in the audience. We lost the debate in a sense since the SALT II treaty was not ratified, but it was fun. I got to know the people on the other side not only as bureaucratic and ideological enemies, but also to a certain extent as friends. Richard Perle, the man with whom I disagree about ninety-nine percent on almost any issue, Richard and I used to travel together. He and I were pitted against each other. He and I were roughly the same age, we look alike, we were both short, squat and fat. But, he was a gourmet cook. Richard used to schedule debates in towns where he heard there were great restaurants that he hadn't visited. I loved to eat too. We used to go out together after the program, scouting out great obscure restaurants. I think we were in Albuquerque; New Mexico and Perle said there's a great Mexican restaurant in a drug store. We went down this little tiny place in the barillos there. There was a woman there named Rosalita she cooked up enchiladas, a fabulous meal and then of course, we went off and killed each other on stage the next day.

Q: As a career Foreign Service Officer, did this strike you at all as being part of the job or not being part of job?

FISCHER: Partly because it was my job, but also because fundamentally I believed it. I cannot stress enough that this is critical to the success of foreign policy. I watch debates today where it's NATO enlargement, whatever the issue maybe, I think that it behooves any President to make the case publicly. I ultimately came to the conclusion that the American public who they don't understand the nuances, they don't understand some of the consequences and details, they fundamentally have a gut reaction that more often than not, is ninety percent right. Was it right to reject the SALT II treaty, something I'd spent years on? Yes it was. This was not something that you wanted to undertake at a time when the Soviet Union was expansionist and invading Afghanistan. And although I argued against it, that they should be separated, the American people were essentially right. The Panama Canal Treaty, as you remember far better than I do, an issue of enormous emotion in this country, but fundamentally most Americans understood that the days in which you could control the Canal were over. The Treaty was carefully crafted to give the U.S. 25 years to hand it back to Panama, and most Americans came to believe it was fair and in our national interest. I think that most Foreign Service Officers are very good political officers overseas. They understand the importance of public opinion. But, when it comes to the United States, they don't have the vaguest understanding, and they don't care. So I think that kind of elitist quality of papa knows best, we're in Washington, this is too complicated is absolutely, fundamentally wrong.

Q: Let's go on to the next assignment. Being in Washington there, I assume you arranged the assignment yourself or did you go through the State Department Personnel system?

FISCHER: I'd been in Washington only two years. It'd been anticipated that I'd spend another two years on this. A couple of things happened. One, I saw that the mood of the country was against arms control. I thought it likely, overwhelmingly likely that, Jimmy Carter would be defeated as President. Although I was not political, all my friends were democrats, I myself was a democrat, and I was very close and linked as being close to the democratic administration. Then I was elected President of the PTA of the Annandale elementary School. I suddenly realized that I didn't want to be President of the PTA. I decided that I wanted to go overseas. It was really a combination of things. I had always wanted to go to Africa. When I was at Harvard Law School, knowing I was coming to the Foreign Service, among other things I had studied Swahili, just as an intellectual exercise. I was interested in Africa more or less as an intellectual exercise, it wasn't a continent that I felt passionate about, but I looked forward to an "exotic" assignment. In the Christmas of 1978 we got a card from this friend of mine who was in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It sounded fascinating. It was lions in the bush, all sorts of stuff.

A guy by the name of Dick Viets, who was a rather famous FSO had just been named as Ambassador to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Viets was a middle east expert who'd been DCM in Tel Aviv who had a reputation of being extraordinarily tough but a very bright guy. I heard on the grapevine, and I don't know how I heard about this, that he was looking for a DCM. So I think I picked up the telephone and called him in Tel Aviv where he was Chargé. I don't think anybody had ever called him before; I mean called him directly. He was struck by the fact that I was direct enough to pick up the telephone. He said his political officer is coming to Washington by the name of Bob Blackwell. "I'd like Blackwell to talk to you." Blackwell walked into my office and proceeded to interview me, if you will, whether or not I'd be suitable to be his boss's new DCM. I threw Blackwell out of my office. I said this is unacceptable. If Dick Viets wants to hire me as DCM, Dick Viets can talk to me and not send a little surrogate like you. Blackwell went on to become Dean of the Kennedy School of Harvard among other things, and Deputy Director of the National Security Council. Bob is a friend of mine but that was our first meeting and not very auspicious. Long story short, I got picked. And in those days, Ambassadors didn't have to go through any committees, you could pick whoever you wanted to be your DCM.

Q: And by this time you had been in the Foreign Service twelve years?

FISCHER: Fifteen years probably.

Q: So this was fast track?

FISCHER: No, I don't think I was fast track officer. It did happen that I was blocked as an FSO 4, and there were a whole bunch of us blocked. And when that log jam was broken, I was promoted in one year and then two years and then two promotions back to back which was highly unusual. I went off to Dar es Salaam as Dick Viets' DCM. Again, it was an out of area assignment. I was essentially a Europeanist. I had, however, made the decision or was at least thinking seriously about the decision at that time, of retiring from

the Foreign Service at the age of fifty. I had watched a lot of our colleagues who had stayed in the Foreign Service and because of selection out, and time and class size suddenly found themselves at age 58 or 55 out of the Foreign Service and too old to start a second career.

So I had talked as early as that time at looking of the possibility of retiring at age fifty and then going into the private sector. It wasn't that I was disappointed in the Foreign Service, I loved the Foreign Service as a career, but I also was realistic enough to know that even if I made it to the Ambassadorial ranks, I was never going to be an Ambassador in Europe. There wasn't going to be anything that exciting to keep me in and if I wanted to retire at age fifty, I felt it very important to have the title of Ambassador, to be Chief of Mission. The only place to do that was Africa, so I decided I would get my leg in the door. It wouldn't hurt to go with a guy like Dick Viets who had a fabulous track record in the Department in terms of his corridor reputation, he was a comer, this is a guy whose really good. And Viets and I fortunately hit it off.

Q: And you have never met him before personally.

FISCHER: Never met him before. Before I left for post …en route from Washington to Dar … Viets invited me and my wife to meet with him in New Hampshire where he was on Home Leave. I don't doubt that if he didn't like what he saw he would have tried to get the assignment killed, although it was a little late in the game, given the fact that the entire family left from that meeting and drove to New York to get on the plane. I learned after I retired that Carol Laise, who again was somebody who was acting as my rabbi in this business, without my knowledge, had pushed me very hard as the person to go. Now to be a DCM in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to anybody listening today, does not strike them as being a hot shot assignment. But it's important to understand the background. Dar es Salaam for some strange reason, largely because frankly, it was a very important listening post for us in Africa against the Soviet Union and against the Chinese we had had a string of extraordinary DCM's - Tom Pickering, Bill Harrop, Herb Levin who became Counsel General in Hong Kong, Ambassador in Burma, Frank Carlucci, these were hot shots. So to be the number two in Dar es Salaam was seen in the Service as being a very good assignment.

Q: And you had Julius Nyerere.

FISCHER: Julius Nyerere, world figure. Received eight hundred million in foreign assistance when I was there. For me an interesting assignment because Dick Viets saw this correctly as an R&R post for him. He had been Political Counselor in Amman, DCM in Tel Aviv and it was clear that he was going to become an Ambassador in the Middle East, and Tanzania was his first Ambassadorial assignment. It was a chance for him to rest and relax. He'd been in very high pressure positions. And that's was Dick did. Dick was the first to admit it. I think in his first staff meeting he said, “look folks this is not rocket science as far as I am concerned and I'm going to have a lot of fun.” So I ended running the Embassy. Dick Viets was a very unusual throw back. There were a couple of

guys in the Foreign Service, of the recent generation, Viets being one, the other being Frank Wisner, who saw themselves as kind of upper class, British, Anglophile, rich players. Viets came from Vermont, who was married to a wonderful woman who was Polish born. Viets was somebody who hunted with Purdy shotguns, dressed immaculately and was a character. I'm sorry to say I don't know many characters left in the Foreign Service, but Dick was a character. We had a couple of tasks; I had tasks as DCM. One was dealing with Julius Nyerere and at that time in history, we were engaged with Four Power Talks to bring about an end to the civil war in Rhodesia.

Q: It's interesting that that particular task was delegated to the DCM given the importance of Nyerere, probably large than Tanzania, given a very political Ambassador who doesn't only want to not block the copy book, he does want a little bit, yet he delegates it to the DCM.

FISCHER: He didn't delegate it. But, he did see the job as one of equality. He was quite comfortable in letting me handle high level issues directly with Nyerere if he wasn’t available. People will always tell you that the best job of the Foreign Service is the DCM. I also think it's the worst job. But, Dick felt very strongly that the DCM was his alter-ego. We had other issues, as well. The CIA station in Dar es Salaam was on of the largest end most important in that part of the world. Why? Because we had easy access to Russians and Chinese and other people whom we were recruiting. Normally as you know, the DCM is not clued into to all the Agency operations. But, Dick made it very plain from day one that we would both get daily briefings from the Chief of Station. So he was wonderful in that regard. And he was relaxed. He would be up country, and he knew that I had to be involved. He took me out whenever he met with Julius Nyerere. I always accompanied him. He wanted to give me the stature that he knew was going to be required when he wasn't there. He also knew I suspected that he was only going to be there for a year. He went to become the Ambassador in Jordan. This was really a holding place for him, and I think he knew it. In any case, Nyerere was very important because we were negotiating the end of the Rhodesian civil war. There was the so-called four power group, France, the United States, Germany and the U.K. We were involved in negotiations on a local level with Nyerere who was central for the African side. What else did we do in the country? We had a very large AID program, about $30 million a year in direct assistance. Dick and I both felt it was badly mismanaged and decided we would do whatever we could to get it refocused.

Q: What were you able to do about that?

FISCHER: We totally stopped it. U.S. AID in 1979 policy was the most cockamamie policy I've ever heard of, at least how it was interpreted in the field. It was the end of the Carter administration, and AID had as a matter of worldwide policy adopted programs which would only serve the “poorest of the poor.”

Well that sounds great on paper, but when we arrived in Dar es Salaam, I asked the Director for a list of the AID projects we were engaged in ten years ago. I got in a Land

Rover, I went around the country, I couldn't find them. I literally could not find any physical sign of the majority of the AID projects. So I realized that aid was being wasted. Then every year AID had to come up with a country plan. The AID Director decided to take it to heart that all our aid, which in those days was forty-seven million dollars, would in 1980 and 1981 be directed at the poorest of the poor. The poorest of the poor were defined by the AID mission as being people who lived out in the bush area. Of course, they were the poorest of the poor because they couldn't subsist as farmers. And we had a program that AID wanted to promote fifty-million dollars in building some damn irrigation programs in an area of desert. The AID Director had briefed Dick and me on a Friday, and on Monday morning Dick called me in and asked what I thought about the proposed AID program. I said I've been thinking about it I threw him some notes. He said that's funny I have been too. We sat down and in forty-eight hours wrote a telegram, a rather infamous telegram, and we attacked the fundamental concept of developmental assistance in Africa, why it had failed, this crazy idea of providing aid only to the poorest of the poor. Well, we threw the whole thing into a cocked hat. AID programming in Tanzania was essentially suspended for a year while the bureaucracy churned out how they were going to respond to this telegram. When the Reagan administration came into power, AID changed its whole approach and in the process, made equally disastrous decisions which reduced aid levels in Africa for all the wrong reasons.

We never did get it right in Africa, nor, I hasten to add, did anyone else. The Swedes were Tanzania's largest donor, and they saddled the Tanzanians with projects they didn't need, couldn't maintain and which ended up costing them a lot of foreign exchange they could have used elsewhere. Viets was an unusual Ambassador. Viets really took to heart, as I think all good Ambassadors should, the premise that he was the representative of the President of the United States of America. As happens in many places, AID, which had an enormous amount of money, ten times the personnel the State Department did, they really had run the show in Tanzania. The Ambassadors sign off of various AID projects was more or less pro forma until Dick Viets arrived. He used to get in a Land Rover because he loved to travel, and he'd head up country in the bush somewhere, and he'd sit down with local mayors and the AID Director. If he didn't like what he was hearing that was it. There was no way that project was going ahead.

He did the same thing with the CIA. Dick taught me a very valuable lesson. As most people may or may not know, an Ambassador is clued in general terms about Agency operations. However, sources and methods are off-limits to the Ambassador unless an Ambassador has reason or is likely to meet a CIA source, in which case he is informed that he is working for the CIA. However, Dick Viets also believed that he had a letter from the President of the United States that said he's in charge. So on his second week there he was in the office, and he called in the head of the CIA. He talked to him and said he worked forward to working with him, etc. really schmoosed him and he started to leave the office. Excuse me Bob, can you back for a second, one other thing. Can I see your operations traffic from yesterday? Ops cables are of course, the way information is really transmitted to the CIA and the station chief said; you're not authorized to see operations cables. Dick looked at him and said, "Gee Bob, I thought we were going to

have a relationship here, but I guess if I can't see you're ops traffic, could you write a cable for me?" "Of course." "Send a cable instructing that you want immediate reassignment, that you are no longer acceptable to the Ambassador." I have never seen such raw power at the Embassy level, and this guy gulped. By the way, he was an extraordinary CIA officer, one of the really great, great people. He said, "Yes sir, Mr. Ambassador, I'll have that ops traffic up to you in 20 minutes." From that point on, Viets saw all the ops, not all of it, didn't have too, didn't need to. One of my first decisions I had to make as a Charge was to approve a CIA covert operation. I should never have done it, but I was young and naïve. At the time, I thought it was a crazy idea with a helluva risk potential for very little reward, but you know it's tough to say "no" to a bureaucracy like the Agency. And being human, I didn't want to alienate the COS with whom I'd have to work for the next two years. So I approved it and ended up having to pick up the pieces when it went sour. It taught we a valuable lesson in future workings with the Agency.

Q: You obviously had a very close relationship that obviously became more than Ambassador-DCM but in the beginning if you had never met him, it was a professional relationship and nothing more.

FISCHER: It was, but Dick tested you very early on. I had arrived first; I came to the Post first. So I was Charge for about six weeks. I think Dick liked me because one of the things I did the first staff meeting I had when I was Charge I said, "Gentleman; I am John the Baptist. I have met Jesus Christ, and he is arriving at the Post in six weeks." Well Dick heard about that and of course that endeared me to him. But, he tested you early on. If he liked you, you were fine. I wouldn't have lasted. He would without hesitation removed me in a matter of weeks.

Q: Did you both sit down and sort of divide up assignments? He obviously knew your background, and I am thinking of this more in terms of him having to have confidence in you. I mean you were stuck with him.

FISCHER: Looking back on it, I guess it was a testing process. We were in the process of building a new Embassy. When Dick Viets and I arrived, the American Embassy was in the national bank building of Tanzania, and our predecessors had signed what probably was a corrupt, although there is no evidence of it, had signed a contract with a private contractor to build a new Embassy building on spec. And when we arrived this was in shambles. I mean there is no way to describe what this God-forsaken structure was. I guess his first day, Dick had gone out to look at the new Embassy, turned to me and said, "I want this Embassy finished one year from today, and I don't care how you do it, I want it done, do you understand?" I said, "Yes, Sir," and I snapped to. I used some fairly unorthodox methods to get that building finished. At one point I offered the construction workers 10 kg of marijuana each week that they met the goals. That may be why there isn't a 90 degree angle in the whole building. The irony is that the Embassy was bombed in 1998 and survived more or less intact. I guess it was better construction than we gave it credit for. When it was dedicated a year later, Viets and I wanted to put a plaque on the wall which said the "American Embassy constructed during the period Richard M. Viets,

Ambassador, David J. FISCHER, Deputy Chief of Mission. We are not responsible." But, Dick tested you and he tested me on writing. Dick was someone who really valued your ability to articulate ideas. I think his first week there he asked me for a policy memorandum etc. He tasked me very hard. I was very nervous with Dick. This was a make or break assignment for anybody in the Foreign Service and although Dick had a reputation as being a very, very strong and hard task master, and had I failed that maybe I could have recovered. But, as you well know, you've gotta succeed as a DCM. I think he just set out a series of tasks for me. He was concerned about a number of issues, and I gave the right answers.

Q: Tell me a little bit about Nyerere. What did you think of him, how he treated us, how relations were? Also, maybe touch on things like did he have any in put into this AID program and what did he think when you and Viets junked it. How did he react?

FISCHER: Julius Nyerere was seen as a giant among African leaders. He was a truly extraordinary man. I came to have enormous respect for Nyerere because he was so disarmingly simple. He was a man who lived in very humble circumstances. He had a little house outside of Dar es Salaam on a beach. I'm talking a little house; it was certainly a lot smaller than the house I lived in as DCM. He returned at least for one month of every year back to his farm. He spent his time planting, hoeing and weeding. He had been a giant intellectual figure in the African independence movement. But, he made some incredibly stupid errors. I guess to sum it up. He was one of the most extraordinary political figures in Africa in the twentieth century and one of the world's worst economists. What made him so disarming was that he admitted it. There was a program called Ujama which has now been taken over by the American black movement now, was a pseudo socialist effort to move people into villages and consolidate services. On paper it made a lot of sense.

It's a lot easier to build a school in a place where you have people living in a village than it is to build it in an area where they are scattered around the countryside. And Nyerere who was fiercely non-aligned, this was his answer to socialism. He was certainly left leaning but not by any means pro-Soviet. But, he rejected capitalism as well. So this Ujama movement was seen as an African answer which was based in African roots because Africans are more communal than people in the West. All to this was total bull shit, but none the less, this is how it was sold, particularly to Scandinavian aid donors. In retrospect, what the West, particularly the Swedes and the Nordics, who loved Julius Nyerere, failed to realize that this was a brutal policy. You were uprooting whole villages of people who had traditionally lived very close to their farms and forcing them to move into villages. By the time I arrived in 1979, the country was totally bankrupt. The Ujama movement was dead. No new villages were being created. The cooperatives and the various other things that had been created more or less had been disbanded. The first month I was in Tanzania I went out to try and find an extant Ujama village. By 1979 most of the peasants had pulled up stakes and fled back to their original holdings. Anyway, I did find one: a depressing sight if ever I saw one. Fields of maize untended, a school house with no students. It reminded me of the worst of collective farms in Bulgaria.

When I came back to Dar, Nyerere called me out to his house to ask about my impressions. He asked if I had visited an Ujama village. Trying to be polite, I said I had but made no comment about my impressions. "Good," he said. "I guess there's one still left in the country. Was it as bad as you expected?" Vintage Nyerere!

Q: You were Charge for a long time there, weren't you?

FISCHER: Yes. Viets left at the end of a year to go onto Amman as Ambassador. This was the early years of the Reagan administration, and it took a good year and a half to get a new Ambassador out to Post. His name was David Miller, a political appointee but at least someone who had some African experience. Miller had been in charge of Westinghouse in Nigeria. He was a died in the wool Reaganite, but he was smart enough to know that trickle down economics wouldn't do a helluva lot in Tanzania.

Q: How was the transition? Did you have trouble transitioning to a new Ambassador, to a new Administration?

FISCHER: Viets had pushed me for my own mission. I had hoped that I could hold Miller's hand for a few months and get my own Embassy. But, the new Assistant Secretary, Chet Crocker, wanted me to stay on for at least a year. I agreed to do so, hoping that at the end of that time I would get my own Embassy. Miller and I worked pretty well together. David was certainly ahead of his time in that he recognized the importance of the private sector in promoting economic development. He didn't see eye to eye with Nyerere, of course, but he was not antagonistic as were many in the Reagan administration. Miller soon recognized that he had about as much chance of promoting private investment as selling iceboxes to Eskimos.

This was a period in which Nyerere engaged in a major fight with the IMF over the issue of conditionality. Nyerere refused to accept IMF interference in what he saw as the country's social goals. The whole fight, which generated a great deal of press and is still talked about today, grew out of a personality conflict. The IMF sent out an American ... I think he name was Peterson ... to negotiate terns for a loan which Tanzania desperately needed. The economy was in shambles, partly as a result of Nyerere's war in 1979 to overthrow Idi Amin in Uganda. That war had been expensive, but the economic mismanagement of State run businesses was at the root of the country's troubles. Nyerere had nationalized everything, including the plantations that provided hard currency for export crops such as sisal. The IMF soon recognized, too that like most African states, Tanzania kept farm prices down to subsidize urban populations. As a result, it was no longer self-sufficient in food. The Tanzanian Minister of Finance was named Jamal. And Indian by origin, Jamal was no fool and understood that the country had to change its policies. But, he could never hope to convince Nyerere. The IMF loan, or so thought Jamal, was just the ticket he needed to get Nyerere to loosen up. Jamal laid the entire burden of carrying an unpleasant message on the poor visiting IMF rep. And when he did so, Nyerere hit the roof. Jamal, rather than backing up the Fund, agreed with Nyerere. Nyerere held out for nearly four years, during which time the economy simply got worse.

Nyerere should be condemned for having taken what was a rich, vibrant economy and running it into the ground. On the other hand, he was the first President in Africa to step down voluntarily and to allow multi-party elections after he left office.

You asked about the transition to a new Ambassador. I had been told that the best thing to do with a new Ambassador after having been charge for a lengthy period was to meet the new person at the airport, show him his office and get out of town. It really is good advice. I can remember taking Miller to meet the Foreign Minister, Salim Salim, prior to presenting his credentials. Salim and I had worked together for two years, we were on a first name basis and throughout the entire conversation, I don't think Salim looked at the new Ambassador once. He was, as is to be expected, more comfortable working with someone he knew, rather than a new face. So shortly after Miller arrived, I went back to the U.S. for an extended Home Leave.

Q: Wasn't it tough going back to being number two after having run the Embassy for so long?

FISCHER: Sure, but that's life. I really relished the role as Charge. Dar was a fairly remote post, and Washington wasn't looking over my shoulder every ten minutes. It gave me an opportunity to hone my management skills, since the Embassy had about 200 Americans and another 80 or so Peace Corps volunteers. In terms of policy, the major task was to get Nyerere to agree to various proposals concerning the Rhodesian situation. He was quite convinced that the British who had negotiated a cease fire and subsequent elections, could not be trusted and that they would rig the elections. I remember the morning after the elections telling him the result: that Mugabe and ZAPU had won. He couldn't believe it. He backed Mugabe over Joshua Nkomo, although he always told me that Mugabe did not have the intellectual stature required to run Zimbabwe. For some reason, Nyerere distrusted Mugabe. But then again, there were few African leaders Nyerere considered his equal. And he was right. He hated Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, although the feeling was mutual. Nyerere greatly admired Chissano on Mozambique who was killed in a plane crash. Nyerere always said that Chissano was the smartest man Africa had ever produced.

Q: What else was on your plate in Dar?

FISCHER: Dar was one of the few places where I had an active relationship with the Diplomatic corps. In most posts, I've simply ignored them, but in Dar (probably because it was a remote post with few diversions) we had close friends in the British and German and French Embassies. Our closest friends were the Dutch DCM and his wife. I had a thrice weekly tennis partnership with the Swedish and Australian ambassadors. There was a terrific sense of camaraderie in the diplomatic corps that didn't exist in other posts. We had a close system of informal consultation on matters such as aid. My only frustration as the American Charge was that every other embassy looked to us to provide them political information. Some of my more senior colleagues resented the ready access we had to Nyerere. I can remember the Spanish or Italian Ambassador complaining that he had met Nyerere once in his entire tour. Well, one of the great advantages for us, of course, was to

represent the most powerful country in the world. Nyerere cared what we thought and saw to it we were kept informed.

And of course, we had a great CIA station with excellent local sources. The station wasn't really interested in local politics, but they passed on whatever they picked up. The CIA did good work in Tanzania in those days and recruited some very good eastern block agents.

Managing AID was a big task; I assure you. Dar was also the first (and last) time that corruption within the Embassy became a problem. The AID director was involved in several corrupt practices involving the black market, and after I left, the GSO was found to have embezzled several thousand dollars. Both were subsequently indicted.

Q: Did you ever have a real battle with Nyerere?

FISCHER: Shortly after the Reagan administration came in, there was an election for a new Secretary-General of the United Nations. Salim Salim, Tanzania's foreign minister who had served at the UN for nearly 15 years, was the "African" candidate and widely seen as a shoe-in for the job. As you know, the election of a Secretary-General takes place in the Security Council, is secret and subject to the same veto power as any other Security Council issue. Salim (and Nyerere) had courted the new Administration as best they could. Salim had met with Alexander Haig who was the head of the NSC and told me that he thought the meeting had gone "very well." I knew, however, that the meeting had been a disaster. Haig and the Reaganauts would never forgive Salim for having lead the demonstration in the General Assembly following the decision to admit Beijing and expel Taiwan. Haig and those around him, most notably Jeane Kirkpatrick, saw Salim as nothing short of a communist stooge. We were going to veto his election, and I received a telegram so informing me and saying that under no circumstances could I confirm or deny our vote to Nyerere. Well, after the first round of voting Nyerere called me out to State House to bemoan the fact that a superpower had chosen to veto his hand-picked candidate as UN Secretary General. But, he told me he thought it was the USSR that had done so. He asked what we could do to convince the Soviets to drop their veto! This put me in an awful position, since I couldn't do anything to confirm what had really happened. I wrote a cable to the Department pleading with them to give me permission to inform Nyerere that we had cast the veto and to explain why. But, they never did allow me to do so, even after it became public that we had cast the vote. Frankly, I think it was silly on our part not to have briefed Nyerere if not in advance, then at least after the fact. He later told me that he bore no grudge against us for having rejected Salim but that he would not forgive us for having failed to explain our motives. It was a dumb thing to do. Salim, by the way, would have been an excellent Secretary-General, a lot better in my view that Boutros Ghali. But that's the luck of the draw. Salim, far from being anti-American, loved the U.S. and spent a good many years of his life there. He was married to an American and saw to it that his children were educated as Americans. Certainly, he disagreed with many of our policies, but he was someone who saw the moral decay of the Soviet system quite plainly.

Q: How did you mesh with the new Administration? Their policy towards Africa was certainly different from the Carter years.

FISCHER: I will never forget the first high-level visit by the new Reagan people. Chet Crocker came to Tanzania prepared to read Nyerere the riot act for a whole host of sins having to do with southern Africa. Crocker, of course, believed in “constructive engagement,” a slogan that Nyerere saw as a cover for continued support for the white regime in South Africa. Anyway, I had no idea who these people were and as a good democrat, I figured they were all right of Attila the Hun. One of the guys on the delegation was a black Foreign Service officer whom I had never met before. I tell this story as an example of the racial stereotypes we all adhere to. I figured he's black, there's no way this guy could have voted for Reagan, He was a houseguest of ours overnight at the residence, so after a cognac or two; I asked him, "how crazy are these people? Are they all fanatic right-wingers?" The punch line of this story is that his name was Alan Keyes. Keyes was by far the most right-wing of anyone I ever dealt with in the Reagan years, the wrong guy to ask!

Q: But, how on earth did the Reagan administration appoint you as Ambassador, given your politics?

FISCHER: The story of how I got a mission is probably worth telling. By the way, if you recall early on the White House asked each potential appointee how he had voted. Some career foreign service officers, rightfully, objected and the practice was dropped. But, they certainly did everything they could to vet their appointees.

As I said, Chet Crocker was the Assistant Secretary and had asked me to stay in Dar for a year with David Miller. Chet and I, I wouldn’t say friends, far from it, we were acquaintances and I think he probably respected my work but didn’t know him very well. Crocker came out on a trip to Tanzania. He was a tennis player. David Miller, was also a tennis player and I was a tennis player. So we arranged to have a game of doubles, Miller and I against Crocker and somebody else. As I was lacing my shoes, Crocker sat on the bench, we were playing at the Australian Ambassador’s residence, and he leaned over and asked what do you want to do when you leave Dar es Salaam. I said, "Well, I want my own Embassy." He said, "well I’ll tell you what, how good a tennis player are you? I said, "I’m not bad, Miller and I are pretty good." " Ok, if you win you go to Botswana; if you lose you go to Uganda." So I laughed. We got drubbed. Must have been six love, six one. So as we came off the court, Crocker said, "We’ll put your name in for Uganda right away." I said, "Hold it, I’m not going to Uganda." Uganda in those days was run by a guy named Milton Obote, whom I knew. Obote was a friend of mine, and I would have been a logical choice for that. But I said, "Not on your life, I have a wife and family and people are being killed and dying." So that was the end of that. I then got a call from again Crocker, and he asked if I wanted to go to Botswana. I said yes, Botswana is an interesting country. I’d be very happy to go there. He said alright; we’ll put your name through to Botswana. Well, you know this process takes weeks and weeks and weeks.

And, I didn't hear for some time. Then one day out of the blue I get a call from Frank Wisner who was then the Chief Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. "I have bad news, David. We have a political appointee who was on a list to go to Kenya, and he just discovered that there's no big game hunting in Kenya, it's forbidden. So, they only place in Africa we can send him where he can shoot animals is Botswana." So I said, "That's simple, I'll make a swap. You send me to Kenya and send him to Botswana." Well that didn't work. Well, I really got pissed. One of the few times where I really got angry at the Foreign Service.

I sat down and wrote a letter. It was a personal letter, not an official letter to Frank Wisner. I said you guys have diddled me. I was basically assured I was going to get a mission, and now it's late in the process; I think it was March of the year I was going to leave Tanzania. I said there's nothing open as far as I know, and I've gotten screwed. So Frank called me on the phone, and he was in high dungeon. He was not happy about receiving the letter. He said the Foreign Service doesn't owe anybody anything, and these things happen to everybody and yes, we were doing our best for you and that was it. Crocker got on the phone, same phone and said, you're right, I disagree with Frank. We do owe you something. There's only one Post open and that's the Seychelles. Now this is a little tiny post, seven Americans. But, I had decided early on that I wanted to have that title of Ambassador. I knew it would be important for me in subsequent assignments. I always thought that I would retire from the Foreign Service at age fifty, because I wanted to have a second career. So, I was willing to take anything. I talked to my wife. Seychelles had a reputation of being a wonderful tourist spot, one of the most beautiful countries on the face of the earth without question, extraordinarily beautiful place. But, we certainly didn't have any idea what it was going to be like in a post and country as tiny as the Seychelles. But we took it, and I was nominated. But Ronald Reagan, for reasons which I've never quite understood, Reagan had put forward the rule that the Ambassadorial nomination process, nothing could happen until he had personally talked to his nominees on the telephone.

And so the Presidential phone call we were all waiting for, March became April, May and then the first week in June. And still no presidential phone call. I was giving a kind of a farewell party for myself. We had, I think, twenty-four Ambassadors around a table at nine-thirty at night, my cook comes running out. We had a huge terrace overlooking the Indian Ocean, very formal dinner. Cook came padding out, weighed about three hundred pounds. He said, "Mr. Fischer, the President's on the telephone." I turned to my guests and said, I'm sorry, the President calls me frequently for foreign policy advice and I went into the library. This was the first time I'd ever received a presidential phone call. The White House operator, as efficient as they are, said, "Mr. Fischer? President Reagan would like to speak with you." This big booming California voice said, "Dave. I've read this, and I don't think it makes any sense." I said, "Excuse me?" I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. But, he continued, "Well, I don't think we should go ahead with this." I realized there was some miscommunication here. I said, "Mr. President you're speaking to David Fischer in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania." He said, "What the hell are you doing there?" I knew there was another David Fischer who was Dave Gergen's

Deputy as the White House Press Spokesperson. So Reagan figured he was talking to the other David Fischer. Reagan said, “Why am I calling you?” I said, “Mr. President, I’ve been named Ambassador to the Seychelles and whatever.”

Reagan than became Reagan. The thing that made this guy such a good President was that he was so terribly human. He got very flustered. He said, “David, I’m so sorry. Nancy and I have just come back Venice.” The G-7 meeting had been in Venice that year. He said, “I couldn’t even find my underwear this morning. The bags are still unpacked, I’m not operating on all cylinders.” But, he finally found a three by five card and asked if I’d be Ambassador to the Seychelles. Now I’d been told by some Desk Officer in the State Department that Reagan had been in the Seychelles at some point, maybe as Governor of California. I figured this is my only shot to talk to the President of the United States. So I said to Reagan on the telephone, “Mr. President I understand you’ve been there and I’d appreciate your view on the strategic situation there,”

I made up some bull shit. People have to understand; talking to the President on the telephone for the first time is a very frightening experience. So, there was this pregnant pause, it must have lasted all of twelve to fifteen seconds. It seemed like an eternity to me. Reagan said, “No, who told you that?” The upshot of this story, by the way, is that when I went to the Seychelles, it was a myth that Reagan had in fact visited the island. The Seychelles airlines magazine had a lead article entitled "When Presidents Seek Paradise" or something. I never could understand the origin of the mythology that Reagan had been there. Until one year, my family and I wanted to go to an outlying island called Praslin, a beautiful, beautiful island, over New Year’s. But, all the good hotels were booked. So my Seychelles secretary said, “I know a hotel.” I said, “what’s it like?” She said, “I don’t know, but it can’t be bad because Reagan stayed there.” I told her I had it from the horse’s mouth that he had never visited the country. She said, “No, this is where Reagan stayed when he visited incognito.” So I got out to this hotel, and it was a flea trap. It was something out of Tupelo, Mississippi in the 1930. Huts built on mangrove poles over some swamp. Mosquitoes the likes of which I’d never seen before. So, the next morning I went down to the reception desk to talk with the owner. There was a French planter, vanilla planter, who owned this hotel. I said, “Monsieur, I understand that President Reagan stayed here.” He said, “Yes, yes, Reagan came here secretly. I have the guest book.” And sure enough, there was the guest book signed R. Reagan, Santa Barbara, California. The problem was that the signature ahead of it was M. Mouse, Disneyland and the signature below was D. Duck, Disney World. So three drunken Americans clearly washed ashore and decided to sign in as Ronald Reagan. So anyway that was my story of how I got named as Ambassador to the Seychelles.

Q: Before we really go on to the whole confirmation process and your being in the Seychelles, you mentioned at the beginning that we no longer have an Embassy at the Seychelles. Would you say why, given it’s still an independent country?

FISCHER: I was the first resident Ambassador in the Seychelles. Seychelles had for years been covered out of Kenya. It was one of the few countries in the world where we didn’t

have a resident Ambassador, and the only reason that we had an Embassy in the Seychelles at all, was the fact that we had a U.S. air force tracking station, satellite receiving station which was ostensibly secret. In other words, the purposes of the station were secret. In fact, there was no way to hide this because it had three huge geodesic domes on top of the largest mountain in the Seychelles, and you could see it from forty miles away. But, it had two hundred and twelve Americans working there from Ford Aerospace, private contractor. And the Commander of the base was an Air Force Colonel. The reason why this station was so critical during the Cold War was that it was the easiest location on the face of the earth where we could receive satellite information from stationary satellites poised over the Soviet Union. There was one particular satellite that allowed us to read the plumes, the infrared signals of missiles coming out of the silos. The only place on the earth where that signal could be relayed down in real-time was somewhere within a sixty or hundred mile band of the equator. The Seychelles was there.

The history of our relations with the Seychelles is rather interesting and, frankly, a lot of this is no longer secret, but it has never been widely publicized. The Seychelles was a British colony. But, it existed within an area called the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). The BIOT were a bunch of rocks in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and one of the rocks was called Diego Garcia. We negotiated with the British in which to obtain access to some islands in the BIOT, in return for certain other favors. In those days; in fact, the Navy was unalterably opposed. They did not want to put any bases in the Indian Ocean To make a long story short; we had a trade off with the British. The British basically gave us access to Diego Garcia, in return for which we agreed, among other things to build an airport on the Seychelles. A little rock, little country. There are ninety islands in the Seychelles, population of sixty thousand people. We would build an airport there which would open up that country for tourism. It would also make access to the tracking station for supplies easier because heretofore, that tracking station had been supplied by a ship that went in once a month. When I arrived in the Seychelles I soon learned that I wasn't briefed about everything. I think I wasn't briefed, not because they were hiding something, simply historical memory had lapsed. People didn't know. And when I arrived on a Sunday in the Seychelles, I remember landing on this air strip, with a runway that was twelve thousand four hundred feet long. One of the longest runways in the world. I couldn't figure out, it didn't register. I presented my credentials the following day on a Monday. In a private conversation with the President of the Seychelles, he turned to me and said, "I want you to know, Mr. Ambassador, that I will honor all our commitments." I figured he was talking about the arrangement we had for this secret air force tracking station. I said, "Yes Mr. President, we understand you're commitment to the tracking station, etc." He said, "No, no. Of course I'll honor that, but I'm going to honor all our commitments including the secret one." So, as Ambassador, you have to think on your feet. I said, Mr. President, that's the best news I've heard, thank you very much. We went onto other subjects. I went back to the Embassy and sent a telegram to ask what the hell is the President talking about. What secret commitments? It turns out we had built the runway in the Seychelles as a recovery base for B-52 bombers which were going to take off from somewhere in Northern Canada, fly across the Soviet Union and bomb it and then glide thousands of miles into the Seychelles. This was a recovery

base which we thought would be safe from radiation and fallout. But again, nobody in the State Department had told me about this.

Q: But that agreement had been made with the President?

FISCHER: With the President maybe ten years earlier.

Q: But not with the same President. Not with the man whom you'd made your presentation credentials.

FISCHER: No. We'd made the agreement with one president who'd immediately been overthrown coup d'etat by the existing president with whom I was talking.

Q: Whose name is?

FISCHER: France Albert Rene. Until the early 1990s when we developed new technology, we still had a need for a satellite to read missile plumes. But, it was now technologically possible to download signals directly to another receiver. So with the closing of the tracking station coupled, with a cutback in U.S. Embassy/U.S. State Department abroad, obviously one of the Embassies on the list to be closed was the Seychelles. A decision which I support entirely. Having lived in that country for three years, I saw very little reason for us to have a resident Ambassador. There was a lot of controversy in the State Department about whether its necessary to have resident Ambassadors, particularly in Africa, now fifty-six or fifty-seven independent countries. This policy was begun under President Kennedy. In the 1960s when Kennedy came to power, there was decolonization. The French, British and Portuguese and others were leaving their colonies and creating independent countries in Africa. And Kennedy felt strongly that it was important that we had visible American presence. Well, whether or not that required a resident Ambassador is an issue that I have some doubts about. But it existed. Up until the early '90s this was a fundamental policy. Every country in the world, just as they want to have a national airline, they also want to have a resident American Ambassador. Of course throughout the Cold War, as I witnessed in places like Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia, these became important pawns in a Cold War conflict, Cold War competition. And frankly, the level of some American Embassies was in direct proportion to Soviet Embassies.

In 1969, Bill Macomber, the Assistant Secretary of State for Administration, was asked to undertake a series of reviews looking at, among other things, American presence overseas. I was assigned by Bill to be on a task force to look at this question of whether or not we should, as the British do, the French, many, many major counties, adopt the idea of multiple accreditation. You have an Embassy in a country, but it's headed by a Charge d'Affaires. You've got a resident Ambassador in a neighboring country who covers five or six countries in the region. Among other people that we interviewed as part of this task force was a guy named Thomas Karamessines. Karamessines is a rather famous man. He was the Director of Plans, head of the covert side of the CIA. I can remember going out to

see him. I asked him, how important is it to you that we have embassies and I named three or four countries in Africa where we had absolutely no political interests, and he said, "It's absolutely vital. We have to have an Embassy there because it's the only way in which we can have CIA presence. The KGB is there, and it's competition." Jokingly, I proposed something along the lines of the strategic spook reduction treaty whereby we should have gone to the Russians and said, "Look you guys don't want to be in this rinky-dink country. It's hotter than hell, there's no air conditioning, the electricity doesn't work, the brewery's broken down, why don't both agree to get out." That never happened until 1991-1992 when resources began to shrink, we had no crisis situations, we had thirteen new countries in the former Soviet Union. These were important places. So tradeoffs were made. The Seychelles, the Comoros was another country that I had at one time had overseen and that was closed.

Q: You oversaw the Comoros from the Seychelles?

FISCHER: No that was when I was back in the Washington as Director for East Africa. But, I think this is a valid question. One of the things that the Foreign Service, because it is a hierarchical institution, a lot of us toil in the vineyards for twenty years and you finally get named to be a fairly important title. If you look what goes on in private business, and I'm struck by this after I'm out. Private sector does a wonderful thing. They identify their fast trackers very early on, and they spend an enormous of time, any major corporation, on making sure they pick out the best and the brightest, and they move them along quickly. One of the things that I think the Foreign Service ought to consider is that they do that process regardless of grade. You take you best, and your brightest and you take them out to run a mission. They may not have title of Ambassador, they don't have to have all the perks, they don't have to have a flag pole; they may not have to have a car and a driver. But, it gives them a sense of responsibility, it gives them management experience. And maybe that's one of the things we should be doing as an institution.

Q: But not necessarily in a full Embassy.

FISCHER: Exactly. I think you could justify having a reduced presence in the Seychelles. We owned a house, we had a residence, you had an office building that didn't cost anything. So you'd maybe take two or thee people and send them out there and give them some sense of responsibility

Q: Before we go on, why don't you give us the background of the Seychelles, the economic situation, the political, any other interests that the U.S. might have had there?

FISCHER: Again this is the stuff of a novel. The Seychelles was a rinky-dink little country. A capital city in Mahé that had twenty-thousand people. On the other hand it had eight international banks, which is another story I'll get into. Credit Suisse, Credit Lyonnaise, Barclays' Bank, BCCI, I mean there were all these international banks for reasons that were unclear to me when I first arrived. I went there in 1982 and again, unbeknownst to me, six weeks before I arrived, the South African government attempted

a coup d'etat by sending in 50 armed mercenaries in a botched operation. I had asked specifically if were we behind it. Was this CIA operation? I was told up and down no. But, as it turned out, we had provided some logistical support to the South Africans. We were certainly aware of the planning of the operation. The President of the country knew damn well what we had done. He had captured seven of these kids, and he had interrogated them.

Seychelles was an incredibly interesting country. The Seychelles in a way was the jewel in the crown of the British Colonial Empire in East Africa. It was a beautiful country, but it was an island country that had no airport until the mid-1970s. The old PNO, Pacific and Orient steam ship company which was the steam ship company that put all the British colonials into India, stopped there three or four times a year. It used to ply back and forth through the Suez canal, where the word "posh" comes from, Port Out, Starboard Home, those are the initials for posh. Anyway the dregs of the British empire washed up in the Seychelles. They were alcoholics, they were people who got off the ship to or from India. The Seychelles was an island of free love. It was a most unusual culture. It was a mixture of French, African, Indian, Chinese, and British. The islands had been French until the war of 1812. So you have French planter stock. The British were the colonial power, so you had Brits there as well. The British freed slaves. There was a great anti-slave movement in England in the 1820s-1830s. When slavers were captured, the slaves were released in the Seychelles. So you had a very strong African stock. The Chinese came to the Seychelles in the early part of the twentieth century to work as construction workers. And then, you had the Indian population. It was a melange. It was truly a multiethnic culture and a very interesting one.

The President of the country at independence in 1976 was a playboy, a rather famous guy by the name of Jimmy Mancham. Jimmy Mancham was overthrown in a coup d'etat when he was off in England at a Commonwealth meeting by his arch-rival, a man by the name of France Albert Rene. Rene was the bastard son of a French planter and of a local woman. He was extraordinarily bright. He had been educated in England as a lawyer. Among other things in the early 1960s, when as a member of a colony he could live in England, he worked for Midland Bank. He developed for Midland Bank the concept of offshore banking in the islands of Guernsey and Jersey. However, Rene came to power ostensibly as a Socialist. So he had all sorts of crazy Marxist rhetoric. I remember asking him one day, "What the hell are you? On the one hand you're an English trained lawyer and a banker, and on the other hand, you claim to be a Marxist." He looked at me, and said, "To understand me, you have to understand I'm red on the outside and green on the inside." He is an extraordinarily venal man with a horrible human rights record who basically was an opportunist. In the wake for example, of this South African coup attempt, he got terrified. He was convinced, probably with cause, because the United States was knocking off little tin pot Marxist dictators around the world, and some day the search light would fall on the Seychelles and we'd send out some guys to overthrow him. Which is another story. But, he decided to bring in some mercenaries of his own. So he had one hundred twenty North Korean troops on the island, the only place the North

Koreans were outside North Korea, I think. Absolutely wacko people. His bodyguards and his intelligence were East German and Cuban. That was the kind of atmosphere.

The diplomatic corps, such as it was, again the stuff of a Somerset Maugham novel. Somerset Maugham, by the way, had lived in the Seychelles at one point. The diplomatic corps consisted of: on one side of the room, the British the American and the French Ambassadors. On the other side of the room, the Russian, the Cuban and the Libyan Ambassador. I guess between were the Indians and the Chinese. We had an Embassy, as I say, of seven people. We had a CIA station. We had a Peace Corps program. We had sixteen Peace Corps volunteers on the islands in the years I was there. We gave the President basically two million dollars a year through an aid program. That was the quid pro quo for maintaining the tracking station. And of course, the tracking station with two hundred some Americans was the largest economic entity on the island and produced enormous revenue for the country. The Russian Embassy, on the other hand, had fifty-five people in it. And their fundamental task was to find ways to recruit any American who worked at the tracking station as an espionage agent. And at the same time, they set up technological ways to intercept or prevent the signal from being received. Indeed, one of the things that arose, we discovered in the Seychelles, was that the Soviet navy had free and ready access to the port, the American navy did not until I arrived because of our policy of our unwillingness to declare whether there were nuclear weapons on ships. The Soviets dealt with this issue by simply saying we don't nuclear weapons. Of course, we were able to track precisely how many nuclear weapons they had on their ships in the harbor. The Soviets I guess at one point in 1984-1985 experimented with using laser beams as ways to blind the American satellite that beamed down to the Seychelles. This was a violation of all sorts of treaties, and ultimately they did end it.

But, we had very little interest there. Our sole interest in that country was to maintain the tracking station. But, the President understood that if he in any way threatened the tracking station, he'd be cutting his own throat, the largest economic source of foreign exchange, and at the same time he'd bring down the wrath of the United States on his head.

Now when Reagan was President, Jeane Kirkpatrick was at the UN, known as being a very tough lady. However, she had a bit of soft spot in her heart for the Seychelles because the only other female Ambassador at the United Nations in those days was a woman by the name of Giavinela Gontier, who was the Ambassador from the Seychelles. Jeane Kirkpatrick, at some point, shortly after the invasion of Grenada, decided that the Grenadian operation had been so successful and had given the Americans such great press, wasn't it time that we took care of little countries like the Seychelles that voted against us consistently in the United Nations that spouted all sorts of Marxists rhetoric. So I was host for example to a very senior member of the Defense Department accompanied by a group of people who were ostensibly there for scuba diving. There was going to be a vacation. In fact, they were six navy seals who spent a week scouting out the island if for some reason we ever needed to use force in that par of the world.

Q: What's the size of this island?

FISCHER: The main island physically was seven miles long and three miles wide with a mountain range of thirty-five hundred feet right down the middle of it. One town, twenty thousand people, and then villages scattered around. But with a very high standard of living. Ironically, the Seychelles had the second highest standard living in Africa outside of South Africa because when you got a GNP of $220 million dollars divided among sixty thousand people that's a very high standard of living. The average per capita income was over three thousand dollars when I was there. We were shocked having come out of Tanzania which was truly a country of economic disaster. I can remember the first day my wife and I walked into a supermarket; they actually had a French supermarket. They had bread from Paris, caviar from Moscow, lobster locally caught. It was really quite posh.

Q: The GNP came from the tracking station and tourism? No other economic endeavor to speak of.

FISCHER: Not that we knew of.

Q: Except the offshore banking. Did that make money?

FISCHER: We were not aware of the fact that there was off shore banking. One of the questions I asked myself and the CIA chief, was to figure out what the government was up to. Well, we had a two-hour lunch period and one day, my CIA guy had gone off on one side of the island to a beach for lunch, and I had gone out on the Embassy boat to the other side of the island for lunch, and we came back and met in the Embassy at 2:30 p.m. I should give you idea of the Embassy. When I arrived it had wall to wall carpeting which I immediately ripped up because our wet bathing suits after lunch dripped all over the place, and the carpet was mildewing. We put in a linoleum floor. This is a pretty relaxed place.

But, the Agency guy said I had the damnest experience. I saw a guy who looked an awful lot like Michael Papa. Papa was wanted by Interpol, and the CIA had instructions to report him to Washington if he washed up somewhere. The most enigmatic figure in the country was an Italian with murky business interests. His name was G. Mario Ricci. Ricci was a tea plantation owner; an Italian with an enormous beard ,very close to the government. We didn't quite understand what his relationship was, we didn't know what he was doing. He claimed to be a member of the diplomatic corps. He claimed to be the honorary Ambassador for the Knights of Malta.

Michael Papa was a guy whose was known to Americans because he had tried to arrange for Billy Carter to invest in Libya during the Carter administration. Papa was an international arms smuggler. He was thought to be widely connected to an operation in Italy called the P2 which was a chapter of very conservative neo-fascists who'd been involved in a number of anti-government activities in Italy. As a result of that chance circumstance, we began to investigate what was going on with this mystical figure, G.

Mario Ricci. Like an Eric Ambler novel, where an innocent character suddenly stumbles on something, and he becomes involved in a huge conspiracy, that's precisely what happened to us in the Seychelles. By that chance encounter, we soon discovered all sorts of stuff, ranging from money laundering by the Gambino family in New York to gun running to Libya. We reported all this stuff to Washington via State Department and CIA channels, but no one seemed to care. Foreign policy in the early 1980s didn't dirty its hands with issues like money laundering or drug smuggling.

Q: As it is today.

FISCHER: As it is today. However, at one point in, I guess 1983, I received a telegram asking me to return to Washington for urgent consultations. Now that's highly unusual for an Ambassador in a rinky-dink country. But, U.S. Customs wanted to talk to me. I can remember going into a meeting in the State Department in which I was braced by two Customs Agents, both of whom were wearing not only shoulder holsters, but also ankle holsters. They had file upon file regarding a very large Mafia heroin scheme which involved shipping heroin as fish, canned fish, into New York and also laundering money out of the Seychelles. Now what I'm about to say sounds so ridiculous, that I hesitate to put it down on a piece of paper, even an oral history because; frankly, I don't have the answer to this question.

When I was in Washington on that trip, I went out to see a man whose name was George Hazelrigg. George had been my Chief of Station of the CIA in Tanzania and then had gone on to become the Chief of CIA in Rome, Italy. George was on home leave. I don't know how we knew about each other's visits. I went out and had lunch with him at the agency headquarters. After lunch, Hazelrigg pulled me aside. I can remember walking with him to the parking lot. He looked around and said, "I just want to tell you that everything you send out of the Seychelles is blue streaked." Blue streaked in CIA terminology meaning a report was marked for the attention of the Director, then William Casey. "Why? I don't know. I only know that your stuff out of the Seychelles has highest top priority."

To this day I speculate as to why that was the case. I don't know. In any event, I went back to the Seychelles. As we began to dig more and more in to operations, a bank appeared on our radar scope called BCCI, Bank of Credit and Commerce International. We had access to some bank records. I don't know to what degree that helped or precipitated the ultimate investigation of what was clearly a major fraudulent banking operation. But, I know it played some role. But, we began to get more and more out of this Mafia stuff. Then one day, my CIA Chief came to me and said, "I've just gotten the strangest message in operational traffic." He threw it down on my desk. It was personal, to the Chief of Station, from the Director, eyes only, William Casey. "You are hereby instructed never to report, never to use any assets or any resources to pursue anything regarding international fraudulent banking operations in the Seychelles." It was an injunction that they could do nothing. Why? I have one idea. People can draw their own conclusions.

We had a source in the Seychelles, a CIA source, who alerted us that Interpol's most wanted criminal, a man by the name of Michael Pacienza, was in the Seychelles. He reported that Pacienza was living secretly in the Seychelles in a beach house owned by the President of the country. He wanted us, because he couldn't do so, to send a message to Interpol to say that Pacienza was there. Interpol in the form of the Italian police acted open our tip, flew into the Seychelles on a Tuesday and arrested Pacienza. He was taken to the local police station. The problem was that the Alitalia flight didn't return to Rome until Friday so he had to be held locally. We were cognizant of what was going on. Pacienza was in jail so far as we knew. The Chief of Police was cooperating with us. On Wednesday morning I realized that something was up because the Italian Ambassador who was resident in Kenya arrived in my office, having chartered an airplane to come out to the island. He was not aware of what was going on, and he wanted to be briefed. He was the Italian Ambassador, I figured what the hell, this is Interpol business, he should know, so I briefed him.

At about five o'clock in the afternoon the Chief of Police came running into my office, screaming," What have you done?" I just had the President of the country come down to the jail and said he wanted this man released. He said if you don't release him, I'll shoot you. He was accompanied by the Italian Ambassador." The Interpol agents were in my office twenty minutes later saying we understand he's been released from jail, etc. Mr. Pacienza disappeared. We subsequently learned he was taken by the President of the country to an outlying island where he was kept in one of Rene's guest houses. The Italian Ambassador denied any intervention in this. He said he was never in the jail. Pacienza was apparently taken off by a boat and was subsequently arrested in Chicago two years later traveling on a Seychelles diplomatic passport. He was held in a number of crimes in New York involving the Gambino family. That was the kind of crazy place it was. There were things going on in that island. Most of it was just out of some second rate spy novel. You'd see the tip of an iceberg, and you'd have no idea why people were using this little island to do this kind of stuff.

One last story. In New York this must have been 1984, there were a series of murders called the Pizza Murders because they involved drugs that were run out of pizza parlors in northern New Jersey. Somebody found a body. The way in which the Mafia took care of these guys, killed them in a gang wars, was to shoot them in a place called Secaucus, New Jersey in the swamps, put them in the trunk of a car and that would be it. Well, I got a telegram one morning that said we would like you to inform the President of the Seychelles that we have just picked up the body of Johnny whatever and in his address book on his body, we found the private telephone number of the President of the Seychelles. So I went up to see France Albert. " I just want to tell you something, you're over you're head with this Mafia business. You're in with Ricci.: Rene used to smoke big Cuban cigars. He never said anything, he was a very cool negotiator. I just laid it out. "You know when they're finished with you, they're going to kill you." I said I just want you to know that we found a guy in the trunk of a car, and he's got your private telephone number. It was the only time I saw France Albert Rene flinch. But, his answer was don't

worry about it, I can take care of it. Well, I guess he was right. We're doing this interview in 1998, and he's still President of the country. He's managed to pull it off.

Q: Going back to Pacienza, you got this message from Interpol how?

FISCHER: Through the American Embassy in Rome.

Q: So you were responding to another U.S. government official, not Interpol?

FISCHER: It was sent by the FBI in Rome.

Q: Did the Department have any interest in this stuff?

FISCHER: Initially, no. But the investigations by Customs, the DEAD and Justice began to focus peoples' attention on the Seychelles. It was clear that all the banks, including British and French banks, were moving a lot of hot money in and out of the country. Everybody had a little piece of the puzzle. All the threads pointed to this man G. Mario Ricco and his relationship to the President. Beyond that we didn't quite understand and we didn't know all the details of what was happening. People were killed. This is jumping a head a bit. The head of the CIA and I were invited for dinner at Mr. Ricco's house one night. It was very clear that without our wives, stag evening and whatever. 1984. We had a very pleasant dinner. He was married to an Ethiopian woman who was a good cook, very attractive. She served the dinner. After dinner we went onto the patio, he had a beautiful house. His English was very limited. He said, "Just a minute I want to show my CIA friend something." He went back to his office and came back with a file folder about an inch thick and handed it to the CIA Chief. He looked at it, read it, going through pages and closed it. I didn't look at it. "I only hope that you didn't pay more than a thousand buck for this because this is all bogus information," he replied. Mario Ricco said, "I paid a lot more than a thousand dollars for it and you and I know this is not bogus information." My COS said, "Ridiculous, You get forgeries like this all the time." We finished our cognac, and we got back into the car. I was driving. As we left the driveway I asked, "What the hell was in the file folder? He said, "Every CIA operational telegram I have sent of this Embassy over the last two years. Every single one." Well, it was a leak through the CIA station in Rome. We were copying anything to do with this financial fraud thing which was sent to the CIA station in Rome because it was an Italian who was running the operation. They had a liaison with the Italian Intelligence Service which had been penetrated, so it was all coming back to Ricco.

One day in early 1985 the CIA Chief came into my office and said, "I have good news and bad news." I said, "Okay, what's the good news?" He said, "You're number three." I said, okay, what's the bad news?" He said, "You're on a hit list for the Mafia." Well, I kind of blew this all off until the number one guy on the list was shot in downtown London, machine-gunned. I knew who did the killing. The Thompson submachine gun was purchased by an arms dealer in South Carolina, and the name on the export license was France Albert Rene.

Then the number two guy who was the former Foreign Minister who had defected from the country, they tried to kill him in the South of France. They got the wrong house and murdered the family next door. So, I realized this was serious business. No question they were going to kill me because we were getting very close to stuff they wanted to keep hidden. I was out on a boat one day with my CIA Chief on an outlying island. We pulled into what is the world's best beach, if you look on lists of beaches in travel beaches, top 10 beaches, this is always number one. There is Mr. Mario Ricco who was gutting a huge hammerhead shark. It was out of a novel. Here's this bearded guy, wearing shorts, he was very muscular, gutting with this knife that's sharp. I came up to him, and at this point I knew I was leaving the Seychelles. I'd been there for three years. I said, "Mario, I want you to know that I'm leaving." He came over with his bloody hand, he patted me and he said, "Ambassador, that's good news for me but it's much better news for you!"

It was truly weird. I can remember one time, this was the Pacienza incident. I was invited to lunch at a very swank Italian restaurant with Mario Ricco. Ricci and I were always skirting around each other. In this restaurant, a waiter came up to me I was sitting there, my napkin had fallen on the ground. I reached down to pick up my napkin as the waiter did, and the waiter put in my hand a piece of paper. Now, I'm not trained in espionage, but this is called a brush pass. So I took my napkin out, and I read the note. It said, "I want to meet you immediately, I'm in the men's room." Not signed, what the hell. I excused myself and went into the men's room. It was a modern, beautiful Italian hotel. All marble etc. The men's room must have had twelve to fifteen stalls and as far as I can see, I look under the stalls and I don't see anybody. So I walk down the stalls and kick the doors open. About the fourth or fifth stall here's a guy squatting on a toilet with an AK-47 in his hand, pointed at me. He says, "I've got to talk to you." My name is Franco whatever. I said, "I don't know who you are. I don't talk to people in men's room and I sure as shit don't talk to anyone in a men's room with a gun. You want to talk to me, you call my Embassy." He said, "I can't." But, he handed me a slip of paper with a telephone number on it - area code (703) and said it was the contact number for his CIA handler. This guy who wanted to see us in the men's room, needless to say never showed up at the Embassy. However, when I went back after lunch, I gave the CIA the card and asked that they run a trace and find out what the hell this was all about.

The next morning we got a flash message from Washington. For those people who don't follow history that closely, there was an American General, General Dozier. Dozier was the head of all U.S. forces in Italy who'd been kidnapped in 1979 or 1980. We made an enormous effort to get Dozier free, and we did. Among other things that were done, the Mafia was used to find information and penetrate the Red Army or whatever outfit had kidnapped him. The guy who I had met in the men's room had had a CIA contact. They confirmed it, they knew him and he had been helpful. He had been one of the CIA's contacts in Italy on the General Dozier case. In 1979 there were a number of books written about this, lots of novels written about it. But, there was a bank called the Banco Ambrosiano. Banco Ambrosiano was a Vatican bank that lost about $8 billion dollars of money - embezzled. This was being investigated by the Italians. The man who had been

the chief target of the investigation who had been the President of the Banco was a man by the name of Roberto Calvi. Calvi had been killed in London, hung from the Black Friars Bridge. In the telegram we got from the Agency, saying yes we know so-and-so (the man you met,) we want to talk to him at all costs. We believe he is the man who killed Roberto Calvi, pushed him off the bridge. Do whatever you can within the law to try and contact him and get him to defect. Tell him we will provide what he wants. He wanted permanent resident alien status in the United States which they had denied him, he hadn't done enough for the Dozier case. But, if they could interview him and he will provide us with the information we think he has, you are authorized that we will seriously now consider this application for permanent resident alien status. I don't know how we contacted him. I wasn't involved. But, the Agency did reach him. He agreed he would go to London. He would be met in London by the CIA and interviewed there. British Airways flew from the Seychelles on a Friday evening. We made arrangements for him to board the flight, but he never arrived. I don't know where he is. I don't know if he was killed.

But, the whole issue involving Banco Ambrosiano, a big issue in Italy and in Italian politics, clearly what was going on in the Seychelles had a direct connection. After Calvi's death, and as the Italians began to investigate Banco Ambrosiano and the P2 Masonic lodge, about 3.5 billion dollars was missing from the accounting. Agnelli who was the President of the Board of Fiat had ostensibly lost money. The claimed that this money they had invested was missing. We had very good reason to believe that a lot of that money ended up in the Seychelles or was being laundered through the Seychelles. Among other things, Warner Brothers Communication opened up a casino in the Seychelles. Now you ask why you would have a casino on an island with sixty thousand people most of whom are relatively poor, yes you had European tourists, but they were one hundred thousand people a year maximum and only ten percent of them gambled. But, this was a thriving, wonderful casino. The reason they had the casino was as a money laundering operation. If you were an illegitimate businessman, you'd be flown out to the Seychelles. At the end of the year you could tell your tax authorities I lost this, or I won this. That operation lasted about nine months and then they closed it down.
But, there was a lot of stuff going on. This is all the stuff as I say. One day I will write a novel. A lot of it is loose ends. Pacienza was arrested in the United States and served some time here. He was then freed on appeal. He lives in America I'm told. I subsequently told because I have done some background investigation that in the early 1980s there were a couple of Americans that were private security consultants who were working, trying to get a contract in the Seychelles for body guard services and intelligence services. Some of those people became very close to William Casey before he became Director of the CIA. Some of those people became important figures in the Reagan administration. So I suspect that Casey's interest in what was going on in this country was generated as much by what may have been some covert operations or things that I'm certainly not cognizant of, that took place in the late 1970s or early '80s. It is true, however that Bill Casey was a very important figure in the Knights of Malta, the legitimate Knights. This bogus group, this guy Ricco who claimed to be an Ambassador

for the Knights of Malta in New York, was in fact, a spinoff. But that's how I spend my summer vacation, three years, living in the Seychelles.

Q: The other Foreign Service Officers must have been two or three, is this training for them or is this a waist of time early in their careers?

FISCHER: It wasn't a total waste of time. My GSO has gone on to become Ambassador in two African posts, partly I like to think because I pushed him to become an officer with broad interests, beyond the administrative duties he had.

Q: But there are others like this?

FISCHER: Well except this was really carried to an extreme. Even in a country for example, let's say, until the genocide took place, Rwanda was a country that was often thought of where you didn't really have to have a resident Ambassador. Nothing had ever happened in Rwanda. Nobody cared, we had no interest there. But at least you had a large Peace Corps presence, fairly large aid program and it was a legitimate way to train younger officers. In the Seychelles we had none of that. The aid program was bogus. The aid program was just a way to cover up what we all knew was taking place. We had a Peace Corps program there but not with a resident Director. They were all on their own. They were highly skilled computer engineers. Frankly, there wasn't anything legitimate to keep people occupied. We had a CIA station there because of the Russian presence. No this was a waste of time.

Q: For your career, what did you think this was going to do for your career or to your career and what did people think later? What did it mean to have been Ambassador to the Seychelles, as far as it affected you in your career.

FISCHER: Well, my career choices this was the late '70s, early '80s, I'd looked fairly rigorously and realistically at what the future was for the Foreign Service, and I wasn't exactly enthusiastic about what I saw. I took the Seychelles job for two reasons. One because it gave me a title. And if I was in fact going to leave when I was fifty, then that was fine. The other option which in fact, I pursued, there was a section of the law which said, if you having served as Chief of Mission, if you are not offered an equivalent position within ninety days you have the right to retire. I was forty-four years old. I saw this as an opportunity to retire from the Foreign Service and begin a lucrative job either in nonprofit or private sector.

Q: Even without the twenty years?

FISCHER: Well, I would have had twenty years, but one had to be fifty years old to get a retirement benefit. In fact, I applied for that provision and they said no. You have a position that is equivalent and that is a Country Director, and we hereby declare that a Country Director is equivalent to a Chief of Mission. What happened to my career? I got promoted. I think when I went there I was probably the only FSO 1 Ambassador. That

meant immediately I was promoted to Sr. Foreign Service. I ended up it turns out, working in African affairs, which was something that I didn't really want to do. I think I had envisaged that I would be an Ambassador in Africa. I'd go back to Washington perhaps to an assignment in the European Bureau which was my real field. Then having been an Ambassador in a small rinky-dink place; I had a shot of being Ambassador in Czechoslovakia or Poland or Romania or someplace in Eastern Europe. In retrospect I was offered many other Embassies and I turned them down for personal reasons because I wanted to get out of African affairs. What did it do for me? It allowed me in my second career when I became President of World Affairs Counsel in San Francisco, I would not have gotten that job if I had not had the title of Ambassador. I said to my colleagues in the Foreign Service today, I think it's wrong that people put a lot of emphasis on the fact that you have the title of Ambassador, but it's the real world. You can say all you want to that I was the Deputy Chief of Mission or I was the DCM, or I was the Deputy Ambassador people don't care. So that's the reality.

Q: Before we leave the Seychelles. Seychelles obviously had one vote in the United Nations. Did we worry about getting their vote? Did we have their vote? How much time did you spend getting their vote, if any?

FISCHER: I spent a lot to time on it. They had a Foreign Minister in my first year and half there who was a very decent man. His name was Maxime Ferrari. The world owes him a debt of gratitude because he is the man more than any other individual, who stopped the hunting of whales. Seychelles was a member of the International Whaling Commission. Ferrari got through, through compromise the end of whale hunting around the world. Maxime was very sympathetic to our point of view. He knew that the Seychelles government was this wacky Marxists. So he would try to work with me to in ways to get them to moderate their position in the United Nations. They automatically, I think they had instructions, that whatever the position of the United States, vote against it. The Ambassador to the Seychelles who was known in the halls of the UN as a raging radical Communist-Marxist who was this woman Giavinela Gontier who had been educated the United States at Wheaton college and was married to an American. She was a legal resident alien of the United States. There was talk at one time of lifting this woman's green card. Giavinela Gontier defected in 1984. She simply quit. After the fact, she and I became good friends, and she would tell me horror stories. But, it was a visceral knee-jerk reaction. There would be issues on Puerto Rican independence or embargoes against Libya or whatever it was a lost cause. I would go up, and I had a relationship with the President where I could go up and talk to him.

Q: That was my next question. Talk a little bit about how you related to the President of an independent sovereign country, what I would call a banana republic.

FISCHER: Exactly, total banana republic. But, we were not the dominant power. This is not like being the American Ambassador in Guatemala. The Russians were the dominant power. Yet Rene knew that despite the Russians providing him physical protection against the potential of an American attack or coup, as bazaar as that might be, you have

to understand that this is a guy who did experience a coup attempting 1982 that the United States was at least aware of and did provide some support for. Even paranoids have their enemies. On the other hand, he needed the United States because of course, we were the main economic power. So Rene was very adept at playing off the Americans against the Russians. I would get a call maybe once a week. My office was right at the base of the hill where his state residence was, so I would go up. He was always surrounded by Cuban body guards. It was a very strange room to go into a room and there was his office. At one end of the room a curtain, big velvet curtain, and I knew that on the other side was a big burley Cuban body guard. It was a little bazaar. Occasionally I would go up, and my primary function was to try and maintain decent working relations with this guy despite the fact that he had an abysmal human rights record, and despite his dealings with the Mafia. We needed him. We needed that tracking station. So my three years there was to try and convince him that his paranoia about the United States was misplaced. We had no intention of overthrowing him. I don't think I succeeded in that task at all.

Q: But you saw him once a week? On a regular basis? You had dinner with him?

FISCHER: No I never had dinner with him.

Q: Out of your choice?

FISCHER: No, he never had dinner with anybody in the diplomatic core. He was married, and he had a girlfriend in the last years I was there. His marriage was very rocky. He subsequently divorced his wife and married his girlfriend. So he was somebody you didn't have a friendly, cordial relationship with and yet because of the size of the capital city, you'd bump into each other all the time. He and I lived on the same road. I lived about 1000 yards below him. But whenever he went to or from the office, the road was blocked by outriders and Cuban body guards and an army personnel carrier. So occasionally I be waiting to go down the drive way, and you'd hear the sirens. You'd back off, and he'd wave or whatever.

However, in 1983, my son Keith, who was a student at Oberlin College, who was in the Seychelles on summer vacation. Everybody in the Seychelles knew who he was, everybody knew who I was. On a Thursday, two young kids approached my kids on a street. We have to get an urgent message to your father. We are going to kill the President on Sunday in church at Mass. We expect the U.S. to come in and save us from this Marxist dictator. My son told me, and on Friday I called in the CIA Chief and said what you we do. He said don't give this information to Rene, he'll kill these kids. I believed that our overriding interest is to see that this guy survives. Maybe we don't like him, but we have to work with him.
I went to see the President on Friday morning, and I said, I don't know who these kids were; they approached my son. I'm just telling you I don't know if the information is true. I'm just telling you exactly what I know. He said thank you very much. On Saturday night, he arrested those two kids. He knew who they were. They had a third kid person, a

young, innocent kid. To make a long story short, the secret police beat the kids to death with tire irons and soaked their bodies in gasoline and then threw them in my backyard. The one kid who survived and who is working in Cambridge, Massachusetts, we smuggled him out of the country. He was an interesting kid, beaten to within an inch of his life.

On Monday morning I went to see the President without instructions. I said can I sit down. I read him riot act. I don't think ever in my years as a diplomat I have ever been so blunt. I was so pissed. Rene smoked big cigars. He took it. He sat there stone-faced. If we provide you information, we're not here to overthrow you, etc. At the end of maybe fifteen minutes of this he stopped and looked at me and said can I talk to you. He spoke impeccable English. "Can I talk you not as President to Ambassador but as father to father? " Of course. "Tell you're fucking son to watch out, he's next."

Q: Did you report all that to Washington?

FISCHER: I did and I got back a flash message. I remember it very well. It said, paragraph one, eyes only for Ambassador, deeply disturbed to hear a President's threat on your son. We believe, underlined, you must get your son off the island on the first available flight. Paragraph two, in accordance with 3 FAM, Foreign Affairs Manual, this shall be at the employee's expense because we already paid for one educational trip.

Q: I want to make one more point. Because this is 1983, we did or did not spend much time as a policy on human rights?

FISCHER: We did. We had the annual human rights report which most Embassies wrote, did a moderate job to give to a junior officer. I of course, because I had nothing else to do and because I felt very strongly, wrote a human rights report which was one of the best things I ever wrote in the Foreign Service. It was well documented, involving murders, disappearances, etc. I used all sorts of sources. When it was published, you got an advanced copy which you were supposed to give to your local government. I gave it to the Foreign Minister. Knowing full well that I would be summoned by the President, he was going to be pissed off.

Nothing happened, nothing happened. Weeks went by. I didn't raise the issue. I just wanted to see what was going to happen. Well within three months, the Foreign Minister to whom I'd given this document, defected to France. The next night, what had happened when he had defected, they went into his office and they pulled out his desk drawer. There was the human rights report, which nobody in the country had read up to that point. The next night, I'm sitting at home with my wife.

Q: But it had been published in Washington long before?

FISCHER: It had been published in Washington but they didn't have an Embassy in Washington and Giavinela Gontier in New York unbeknownst to me was also opposed to

the government, so she wasn't about to do anything with it. Well, I didn't know any of the background. I'm sitting at home. The phone rang at eight o'clock at night. It was the President's wife on the telephone. She used the foulest language I have ever heard a woman use in my life up to that point. "You... You don't like it here, you can get off this island. If you think we're going to kill people, you're going to get killed. We'll bury you at sea."

So the next morning I went to see the President. I said, you know I got the most interesting phone call from your wife. He said, yes, I know, I was in the room. I said, you know it seems to me that if you have a bone to pick with us on human rights, maybe you and I and the Foreign Minister out to sit down. "No, you just pissed my wife off and I can't control her. And remember this, even though you're the American Ambassador, the power of America doesn't extend to this woman." He said I know you go to the market every Saturday morning. You and your wife and I see you down in that market. I want to tell you if I see you in the market, Juanita or whatever her Cuban bodyguard was, she has instructions she's going to blow your balls off!

Q: We never though as a government took any sanctions because of the human rights situation. Anymore about the Seychelles? Were you happy at the end of three years to be leaving?

FISCHER: No, no sanctions whatsoever. Boy was I happy to be leaving. This is an assignment that if I'd gone out there, and I've said this to friends of mine who've been assigned to banana republics, who've taken jobs particularly in successor states of the Soviet Union in the early days, in Uzbekistan or Tajikistan, where things were really tough, look go out there for three months, you got the title of Ambassador, quit. There were many days I wanted to quit. My wife hated the Seychelles. I've never been in a situation where my wife was so unhappy. There was nothing for her to do.

Q: How frequently did the two of you get off of the island? Out of the Seychelles?

FISCHER: We had an arrangement that we would go the United States once a year, we would go to Europe once a year. Every six months and then we would go to Kenya. You can go to Nairobi relatively easily but that wasn't much. The only saving grace was that my daughter, when we went there she must have been in seventh or eighth grade, there was a one room schoolhouse run by British woman. An extraordinary school. It lit up in my daughter all sorts of talents that she hadn't realized. In a tiny country like that, she ended up acting on stage. There was an amateur theater group in the country. She did Alice in Wonderland. She was the only blond, twelve-year-old in the country that you could fit the bill. She'd been swimmer in suburban Virginia. When she swam in the national competition, she was heads and shoulders above the local swimmers. I always joked that if we stayed, she could represent the Seychelles at the Olympics!

Q: And then, from the Seychelles you went back to Washington?

FISCHER: I went back to Washington. Again, I was trying to get out of African affairs. I had two tours in Africa and frankly that was enough. I was not an Africanist. I think a lot of people who had been in the European bureau, and the Asian bureau had gone to Africa to become Ambassadors. And it was unfair. I think it's wrong, frankly, to have interlopers drop in out of the sky, and you got the title of Ambassador even though you've never served in Africa before. And that's what I did. And I think that was unfair.

Q: But you had served in Africa before.

FISCHER: Well, I'd served as DCM. But, even that I was not an Africanist. But, when it came time for an assignment, Chet Crocker was the Assistant Secretary of State. Chet and I liked each other, and he said I want you to stay in African affairs. "I've got some problems in the Horn of Africa: we've got Ethiopia, Somalia, will you come back as the Director for East Africa?" This is the only time I've really ever interviewed for a job.

I remember I was back in Washington on consultation or some such thing, maybe it was a Chief of Mission conference. He said, "would you take this job?" I said, frankly, I have serious doubts about whether I want to work in Africa for this administration. I don't believe in your policy towards South Africa, which is constructive engagement. We were opposed to the embargoes. And he said, "I respect your differences. I will assure you that you will not have anything to do with South African policy unless you want to. I will also give you assurances that if at the end of the year, you are unhappy, we'll give you another Embassy, no grudges." I went to work for Chet as Office Director for East Africa.

Q: For which countries?

FISCHER: Everything from Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda all the way down to Mozambique. The office had responsibility for about thirteen countries. It was a diverse portfolio, but I was jaded. I'd been in the Foreign Service for twenty years, twenty-two years. I did not believe that anything in this region of the world warranted any serious U.S. attention, jeopardized serious U.S. interests, with one exception.

In 1985, when I became Country Director, all of us on the ground knew that Ethiopia was going through a tremendous famine. It was not a famine caused by drought; it was not a famine caused by local aberrations. It was caused by the misguided Marxist policies of Mr. Mengistu with whom we had very bad relations. Our relations had been downgraded to that of Charge d'Affaires. The issue we confronted was whether the U.S. had a moral obligation to do something to feed what clearly was going to be one of the world's largest famines. At least a million people were threatened to die. I believed, and Crocker did and others that we had to. There were those who argued that we should use the famine as a political weapon, either to harm the regime or as a means to change their ideology. Although that issue was clearly argued very much within the confines of State Department. But, we agreed that we should do something to prevent this famine. And, if the famine took place, we should do something to try to ameliorate it. But, we couldn't get

anyone's attention. George Schultz, Secretary of State, had bigger fish to fry. The only issue in Africa that was any concern to the Secretary was clearly the ending of apartheid and the whole question of what was going on in South Africa.

But, as the famine got worse, the media coverage increased and with it, political pressure on the Administration to do something. We had been engaged since mid-1984, but it was not until 1985 that we rolled out a massive relief effort. So we ginned up an enormous rescue and relief operation which I think I'm proud of. I think it was well worth doing. Ultimately, the Mengistu government fell victim to the forces that ended the Cold War. Absent Soviet support, Mengistu was overthrown. He really was a horrific dictator who should be charged with crimes against humanity.

The other second major issue was what to do with Somalia. Somalia was a country ruled by an equally incompetent dictator, Siad Barre. All of us involved in it knew this was a very tenuous political situation that ultimately there had to be some change which would probably be violent. That's actually what took place eight or ten years later. We certainly didn't do anything to precipitate that. We did begin to cut off all foreign assistance to Siad Barre. You asked earlier to what degree human rights played a role. It played a role in about 1985 or 1986, and we simply were not about to provide military assistance to someone whose human rights record was just abysmal. The real reason for the cutoff, however, was our fear that if we armed Barre he would be encouraged to invade Ethiopia again. He had precipitated a war between Somalia and Ethiopia in the late 1970s, had been roundly defeated with help of Cuban forces and was itching to recoup his losses in yet another war.

The third issue was the question of the civil war raging in Sudan. Sudan, too, had been ruled by an ineffective dictator, Mr. Nimieri. Nimieri had received assistance from us (he was anti-Soviet) but had been overthrown in a coup in 1984 or 1985. Sudan had been wracked (and still is as of 2000) by a civil war between Muslims in the North and animist, Christians in the South. Sudan is a dividing line between black Africa and Muslim Africa and has suffered enormously as a result of the political and religious conflicts. This has generated. I spent most of my two years in this office attempting to negotiate some sort of a cease-fire in southern Sudan. The issue was further complicated by Ethiopia which was offering a safe haven and arms to the rebels in the south. Ethiopia had its own civil war going on between the central government in Addis and Eritrean separatists in the north who were being supported by the Sudanese.

There has been a lot of speculation about U.S. covert assistance to various groups in the Horn. As far as I know we stayed the hell out of it. Partly because the Eritreans were a Marxist group and the Sudanese rebels were fighting a government we were trying to support.

Q: And Sudan of course is a very large country? We're not talking about a rinky-dink place in size or population or importance.

FISCHER: Yes very large although I questioned whether the U.S. had any strategic interest there. But, it had enormous strategic interests to the Egyptians. And the Egyptians were not happy having a country in political chaos on its southern borders. I had several meeting with Mubarak, the President of Egypt, who was looking for ways. The Egyptians and Americans could cooperate to overthrow the government of Sudan. We told them no. We shared intelligence; we did a number of other things with them. We saw all of this through the optic of the Cold War. Sudan and Somalia sided with the U.S., Ethiopia with the USSR. Absent the Cold War, I don't think we would have given a tinker's dam what happened there, aside from sporadic famines to which we felt a moral responsibility to respond. It was a crazy kind of time. The U.S. military, the Defense Department was increasingly concerned at the issue of basing rights in the Middle East. The only base we had in that part of the world was Diego Garcia. Diego Garcia, as useful as it was for aircraft, was not very useful for U.S. military ships. It took six days for them to steam into the Gulf of Amman, the Persian Gulf. So the military was looking for basing rights. One of the places they decided to look was Somalia. Somalia had the potential not only to give us access to the sea, but it also had vast areas of desert where we could do low flying and bombing training. Somalia - at least to those who had never been there - looked attractive as a possible staging and basing in the region
I'll never forget a conversation that George Shultz and I had with Siad Barre who came to New York to the United Nations General Assembly meeting in 1986. He wanted masses of increases in U.S. aid which we were not about provide. In a kind of bleating conversation he turned to Schultz and said you know, I understand that you want to have basing rights. I want you to know that you cannot buy Somalia, but you can rent us.

Barre had obviously read that Shultz had worked for Bechtel, a huge construction company based in San Francisco. Now as much as I admire George, while he's great at reading a balance sheet, he wouldn't know the first thing about engineering. But, Barre arrived with a set of blueprints for a dam he wanted the U.S. to finance, and with great bravado, unfurled these plans to Shultz. He asked him some damn thing about how many feet of concrete should they use for the footings. I don't know who looked more uncomfortable, Shultz or Barre. But needless to say, the dam never got financed. Shultz hated Barre.

After the meeting (at which I was the note taker) Shultz asked me where I lived. I told him in suburban Virginia. "Do you ever have some guy offer to sell you "seasoned " firewood off the back of a truck or to blacktop your driveway?" "Well," he continued, "we just met a guy selling firewood off a truck," referring to Siad Barre. And it was a very apt description.

Siad Barre really was a piece of work. Chet Crocker and I went out to Mogadishu to berate Barre for his human rights record and to warn him not to try to attack Ethiopia. We knew this would not be a very pleasant meeting, but we were invited into a small gazebo on the grounds of the Presidential Palace. It must have been 120 degrees, and we were kept waiting, sitting on a large overstuffed sofa inside this gazebo. When Barre arrived, cold drinks were passed around - for everyone but us. We spent about 90 minutes of very

tough talk, and I thought I was imagining that every minute we spent there was getting hotter and hotter. When we stood up to leave at the end of the meeting, I glanced behind the sofa we had been sitting on and that son of a bitch had turned on an electric heater behind the sofa, just to make us even more uncomfortable that we were!

Somalia has always been a tragic case of misguided policy of outside powers, coupled with an internally corrupt regime. It had been a Soviet client state which was forced to switch sides in the Cold War after its defeat by Ethiopia. The Soviets had loaded up the country with weapons it didn't need, gave it a Marxist economic system which didn't work and allowed the military to rule with an iron fist.

When we became involved we were almost as bad. We took over a Russian listening post in the north, gave them our weapons and allowed the same corrupt military in power. We had absolutely no strategic interests in the region, although both we and the Saudis were trying to make some up. We gave them too much military assistance and what foreign aid we provided was wasted. I don't believe we have to shoulder too much blame for what happened ten years later when the country essentially imploded, but we bear some responsibility. Frankly, I don't think anyone could have done much for Somalia, a country in name only. It was and is a loose collection of factions, each of which is fighting for power.

Q: Was that also a time of the Eritrean insurgency against Ethiopia? Did we get involved? Tigre Province?

FISCHER: Tigre Province. Yes, we got involved. We were trying to find ways, frankly, to negotiate a settlement which would do two things. It would get rid of Mengistu and at the same time end the civil war which was a contributory factor to the famine. But I argued, and I think I argued successfully; this was a snake pit we couldn't seek to influence. Every colonial power that's ever been involved here has gotten bogged down. Don't forget that it was in Khartoum that Gordon was killed. Let's just stay out of it. We had a very, very good Ambassador, Hume Horan, who was the Ambassador in Sudan, who shared my point of view. So, it was a marginal issue in American foreign policy and I tried to keep it marginalized.

A lot of people, it's human nature, but when you're working on a problem, I've discovered that a lot of people begin to think that this important problem deserves high level attention. I used to tell Mike Armacost, who was then the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, would occasionally call me up and say," what's going on in Somalia?" I would say, "You don't want to know. Don't worry about it." That's a view that Crocker shared to a certain extent, as well. Crocker's focus was on Southern Africa, and he just wanted to make sure that nothing else on the continent rocked the boat that was going to draw people's ire or attention. There were a lot of crazy things going on.

We had a rather famous thing which has been written up called Operation Rose, I think this was in 1985 or 1986. Ronald Reagan got it in his head that we should do away with

Qadhafi in Libya. Absolutely wonderful policy. To make a long story short, Reagan thought we could entice the Egyptians into invading Libya. We went out to Cairo to sound out the Egyptians who, needless to say, thought this was a completely hare-brained scheme. It never went anywhere.

Q: You mentioned human rights. Was this a major focus of the U.S. in East Africa in the 1980s?

FISCHER: Not a major focus, but it certainly was an element of U.S. policy. We were concerned that the more corrupt the regime, the greater likelihood that it would be unstable. And we had human rights problems everywhere. Uganda was the worst example. Following the Tanzanian invasion and overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979, a new government was formed by Milton Obote. I knew Obote who had been in exile in Tanzania and in fact had spent the last night before he went back to Uganda with him in Dar es Salaam. Obote was western educated and knew that the U.S. was suspicious of him that having spent all those years in exile in Tanzania, he would impose a socialist regime in Uganda.

But Obote, as I said, knew he needed U.S. support, and he talked a great game. He was not going to make the mistakes that Nyerere had made in Tanzania. Uganda needed multi-party democracy and a market economy. Of course, he went back to Uganda and began a systematic massacre of at least 200,000 Ugandans. That was one of the few times in my career when I was totally taken in by someone.

President Daniel Arap Moi was another President that gave us headaches. Kenya was a key country in the region, pro-U.S. and very much in the western camp. But, even by 1985 or 86 it became increasingly apparent that Moi was rigging elections and running a real risk that the country could devolve into a civil war. He was a racist who used the presence of a large Indian community as a whipping post. The Ambassador kept sending in reports which worried us on the human rights front but refused to confront Moi directly, despite repeated instructions to do so.

So I was sent out to Nairobi for a bit of "straight talking." I understood the Ambassador's reluctance. Hell, none of us like being the bearer of bad tidings, but frankly, I think the Ambassador was very weak. Anyway, I gave Moi the first of many lessons about the place of human rights in U.S. foreign policy … all to no avail. He became livid that we should question his internal affairs and threw me out of his office. But, each time I went to Nairobi, he received me and listened stone-faced to my lectures. And of course, he's still in power 15 years later with an even more abysmal human rights record.

Outsiders tend to exaggerate our ability to influence internal events. We had the leverage of foreign assistance in Kenya, but we had other foreign policy interests there as well. Kenya provided us a port for the U.S. Navy, supported us on a whole range of issues in the UN and offered us a key intelligence base in that part of Africa. So Moi knew that when push came to shove, we were not about to throw the baby out with the bath water.

In Uganda we did react and assisted (or at least promoted) in Obote's overthrow. He was replaced by another Ugandan in Tanzanian exile, Museveni. We had known him in Tanzania and believed he offered the best hope for the country. The Embassy strongly argued that we should offer him support, but after our experience with Obote, we were quite reluctant to do so. But Crocker came around, and we gave Museveni foreign aid, as well as moral support. He turned out to be Uganda's best leader in the past twenty years or so.

Q: Were you impressed with the officers who served in Africa?

We had some of the finest officers in the Foreign Service. People forget that many Ambassadors who went onto larger posts cut their teeth in Africa. Hume Horan in Sudan, Bill Harrop in Nairobi, Frank Wisner in Zambia, Brandon Grove in Zaire to name a few. And, lest I forget, Dick Viets in Tanzania. These were immensely talented people who were struggling with issues that few people in the U.S. government cared about, but their talent was recognized and most went onto senior positions elsewhere. Tom Pickering and Frank Carlucci, for example, Ray Seitz - all got their start in AF.

Q: As Director of East African Affairs with so many countries and so many desk officers who did you coordinate all of this and make this Directorate work?

FISCHER: Well I guess the secret was I was very good in choosing my Deputies. The office structure - we must have had maybe eight officers. I always had good Deputies. One of the things in the State Department that I believe very strongly is that you recruit good people to work for you if you have a reputation that you'll get them great jobs after they work for you a couple years. I had served on a promotion panel so I knew the game of how to write efficiency reports. One of the things I'm proudest of in terms of my foreign service career is that I got I think thirteen commendations, thirteen years in a row, I got commended for writing good efficiency reports. So that reputation preceded me. So if you're going to hire a Deputy, hire a DCM, it becomes a question of personality. You want to have someone you can work with, you want to have someone whose good, capable. One thing which I did, when I sat on promotion panels, I always kept a list, not people we necessarily promoted but I had a list of about a dozen people whom in the course of reading hundreds of efficiency reports, struck me as being truly outstanding officers. I always kept that list. It was on a little 3x5 card on my desk. So I would be able to know that a bright FSO 6 for example, would move up quickly and I would grab him some point during my assignment. So that's how I did it.

I also delegate much more than most Foreign Service Officers. I strongly believe that Officers should be responsible for what they write. I think in my entire career I edited a telegram or a report once a week maximum.

I'll tell you an anecdote. When I was Director of AF/E, I obviously went out twice or three times a year to Africa to cover my territory. I arrived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania,

where I had spent three years as DCM and Charge. I arrived on a Friday afternoon, and I spent my time there at the Ambassador's residence. Saturday morning the Ambassador said he was going to the office. This struck me as a little strange, and I asked whether anything was going on in Tanzania. When we arrived at the Embassy, virtually the entire Embassy staff was there on duty, even though it was a Saturday. I asked the Ambassador what was so important that he wanted to work on Saturday morning and thereby drag in everyone else. (You know the syndrome: when the boss is in, it's a good idea to join him to be seen.) He said the Economic Officer has written a cable I want to edit. I said, "Mr. Ambassador," I won't use his name, "do you realize that nobody, nobody in the U.S. government, other than the Desk Officer is going to read what you send out of this Embassy?" I don't read your telegrams; my Deputy rarely reads your telegrams except for the first paragraph. Why on earth would you bring everyone into this Embassy on a Saturday? They're here because you're here. Take advantage of Tanzania. It's a beautiful Post. You've got a beach house. Go to a local market. But, get the hell out of the office!" That was my approach.

Now I realize that's anathema to most FSOs. The Foreign Service lives by the word. They're ability to articulate ideas through written documents. But, frankly, the clearance process has gotten out of hand or at least it had in my time in the mid-1980s. The simplest cable from a desk officer required layer upon layer of approvals and clearances. In AF/E I told people they were free to write what they wanted with a minimum of clearances. Officers could send out anything from that using their discretion. They would be responsible for what they sent. They dealt directly with the Assistant Secretary of State. I got out of the loop.

Having run a large organization outside government I look back at how incredibly inefficient the Department was. We should have given officers much greater responsibility and held them accountable if they screwed up. The Department could do a lot more if it reduced the clearance process and given the state of communications, I assume that it has done so by now.

Q: But you did do this day to day management. Did you have a meeting every morning?

FISCHER: Nope, I had a meeting once a week. Very loosey-goosey kind of management style. Of the thirteen countries covered, frankly, eleven of them were not important. Nothing went on in a place like Djibouti, Madagascar or the Seychelles. Let me in this regard by the way that one of the problems was the disparity between what goes on in the field in the Embassy and what goes on in Washington is so enormous that even good Foreign Service Officers that spend a lot of time in Washington, and you understand how the system works, when they suddenly become Ambassador their memory disappears. They suddenly think that they're Ambassador to a place that's the center of the world. I had two Ambassadors, one in Djibouti and one in Madagascar, one career and one non-career who drove everybody crazy. They inundated Washington with telegrams and reports about countries that nobody cared about.

We had one Ambassador in Madagascar who'd been a former Admiral in the Navy. He believed that Madagascar was the world's largest floating aircraft carrier. His sole mission in serving there was to try and get the U.S. Navy to deploy large naval assets into Madagascar with airbases and all sorts of other things. Well, he forgot the fact that Madagascar is in the middle of nowhere. It's far too distant from any place where the Navy would possibly deploy. Yet, he wanted to enhance his role, etc.
I enjoyed being Country Director.

Q: Was not there in AFE some kind of overall annual reporting plan? I know in Latin America we had this reporting plan coming out our ears, and it didn't matter what countries there were or what the issues were the Embassies were expected to make certain reports.

FISCHER: Well there were but I've forgotten what those were. Certainly, the desk officer was responsible for coordinating requirements imposed on embassies from all over Washington. And if the Department of Agriculture wanted to know meat production in that country, I looked to the desk officer to head off the request if it were frivolous or trivial.

But, I enjoyed my time there. It gave me a chance to travel into areas, countries that I had not been to before. I think that one of the things that make these jobs enjoyable is that as a Country Director, you go out and meet the President of the country, you meet the Head of State. If you have good relationships with other government agencies, they trot you around to see all their key contacts. So I found that enjoyable. Again, as I said before, I think the only major policy issues were the civil wars raging in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia was a very tenuous situation. We were backing a dictator there that was frankly, crazy and everybody knew it. We were cutting back military assistance because we were terrified that he was going to use this assistance to wage a war against Ethiopia.

Famine - I must say, in retrospect, I wish I had spent more time on issues involving famine which were really horrendous. I remember going out in 1985, in the height of the Ethiopian famine. I had seen dead people before, but I got in an Embassy jeep on Sunday, it was the first of May, it was May Day so it was a holiday. Socialist country, the villages we would go through would have red banners. We went out about a hundred and fifty miles north of Addis Ababa on a Sunday into a refugee camp. I want to tell you, nothing had prepared me, to walk into a camp and to see probably a thousand dead bodies. The closest thing that was imaginable was going into Buchenwald or Auschwitz in 1945. I remember I was escorted around the camp by a very nice, very attractive Irish nurse. Every day she did medical triage. She simply went through and looked at the children who were going to die that day and put them up in a room. I found that one of the most horrific experience I ever had to do in the Foreign Service.

One of the major issues I had to deal with was the relationship between AID and the State Department. I had very good friends in AID. AID was the major kind of funding agency,

the major amount of money we had to work with. Speaking of famine and AID, one funny incident which should go down in history.

In 1987, I think, perhaps 1986, we began to get reporting out of our Embassies in North Africa starting with Sudan that Africa was facing another crisis. It wasn't locusts, we had that the year before; it wasn't drought, we'd had that the year before; no it was the fact that the gerbil population in North Africa was multiplying; I mean millions upon millions of animals. The descriptions we were getting of these gerbils going across North Africa, they ate everything in their path. They were pests. They were destroying every crop. So the issue became how could U.S. AID deal with this issue. We suggested that we take C-130s and C-147s and drop napalm - basically burn them out. These animals would go in columns that were perhaps 10 miles wide and three or four miles deep, literally eating their way across. So I think my only contribution to this, one of my contributions in the Foreign Service. I probably had a better sense then most Foreign Service Officers about public opinion and how it impacts on foreign policy. I woke up one night and thought my God, if the New York Times carried an article that the U.S. air force is napalming gerbils, we're in trouble. Every kid in America has got a gerbil in his bedroom in a cage and is going to get very upset that Muffy's cousin is being smoked. So I invented a term, it was called the North African Desert Rat. So we had a North African Desert Rat eradication program from AID. As far as I know we burned or poisoned those little critters, and that was that.

Q: Was there much interest from outside, Congress, African-Americans, Labor? And if there wasn't much, wasn't this kind of frustrating in that we must have had some policies to do some things but not many reverberations to what we were trying to do?

FISCHER: No. I think anybody working in African Affairs is somewhat frustrated by the fact that Americans by and large don't care about Africa, including African-Americans. African-Americans were in those days deeply involved in the issue of sanctions against South Africa. It was the U.S. government policy during the Reagan administration to be against sanctions. But other than that, it was a question of fits and starts. If there were a famine in Ethiopia which appeared on the CBS evening news than people became involved. If there was a desire on the part of the U.S. military to look at establishing naval bases in Kenya, than that became an important element but otherwise not. Congress was not interested. Occasionally we had a couple of key Congressman, Howard Wolpe for example from Pennsylvania. Wolpe had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia so he was deeply interested in that. Mikey Leland, who subsequently died in a plane crash in Ethiopia, but Mickey was deeply involved in Africa. He was African-American. He too had served as a Peace Corps volunteer. He had a deep understanding of issues in the Horn of Africa. But other than that, nobody cared. So we didn't have to write Congressional testimony which is one of the major parts. I think I went to Congress once to testify on some AID program or some military assistance program we were doing in Somalia.

As far as academics were concerned, there were one or two academics, very few, who recognized, who were doing current research, one in particular on Ethiopia. He'd been a

former CIA officer, had served in Ethiopia and then had joined university faculty. He was smart enough to realize that he could get current information and try to promote changes in U.S. policy and was very active in that regard. There were one or two others. But by and large this is not a field that is covered broadly by American political scientists and those political scientists that are teaching feel somewhat distant from policy matters and therefore don't take an active role.

Q: Was it the lack of continued interest by the African-American community, is this partially because most African-Americans are from West Africa?

FISCHER: No. There are a great many African-Americans whose heritage goes back not to West Africa but to East Africa. Particularly Somalia and Ethiopia. They were great areas for slave traders. It's interesting because Somalia and Ethiopians are characterized by an ethnic group with very distinct physical features.

Today, walking down any street in America, you can look at African-Americans, and you can spot out of a crowd immediately, people whose heritage is from Ethiopia or Somalia. In terms of this, in a previous incarnation, I had worked very closely with Randall Robinson who ran TransAfrica. In the late ‘70s when I was running outreach programs for the Department of State, I worked with Cy Vance. We made the point that as Secretary, you've got to meet the African-American community. These people have a valid voice in foreign policy. He resisted it tooth and nail. Finally, I got him to agree that twice a year he'd meet with fifty leaders of the African-American community in Washington. The first meeting went extraordinarily well. We had people there ranging from members of the Black Caucus in Congress, labor leaders, a very broad section of the African-American community. We met for an hour and a half. He did a foreign policy review, they asked questions about issues that interested them. I can remember this group was walking out; I stayed behind. He was ebullient. He was so happy. This is a great idea. What he didn't realize was that the group went directly for the seventh floor right down to the diplomatic lobby where Randall Robinson and Jesse Jackson had a press conference. They castigated the administration up and down that they weren't being listened to etc. Vance said that's it, never again. That was too bad.

But, as far as Africa is concerned, America's attention was focused entirely on Southern Africa, the issues in South Africa.

Q: How did your directorate deal with North Africa which included Egypt? You had a lot of issues that had overlapped with North Africa...

FISCHER: Egypt was not in the Bureau of African Affairs. The dividing line ran through Somalia, Sudan and Chad. Everything north of that fell to the Bureau of Near East and Asian Affairs.

The one thing I will say and I'm sure anyone whose ever did these oral interviews understands the importance of telling people currently in the Foreign Service the way one

succeeds. Not only succeeds professionally in terms of promotion, but the way one succeeds in implementing policy and to the limited degree that we make policy, it is the network of people one knows in Washington.

I had a chance to go the National War College which I was very sorry I didn't do because in those kinds of assignments, you get to know people in different agencies. I had friends in the Pentagon, I had friends in the CIA, I had friends in the NSC, people who I had worked with through my twenty-some odd year career so I could call upon those friendships to cut through bureaucratic red-tape. The most important thing you can have in the Foreign Service is a good Rolodex.

Q: So you were one year as Director?

FISCHER: No. I spent two years there. It was expected that I having had one Embassy and then having served as a Country Director, I would have another Embassy. I was offered a list of countries where they were opening up, and I was told that I could get any of these. I looked at them. I had gone to AF, the African bureau, with a very particular career goal in mind: to become an Ambassador before I was forty-five and I didn't want to stay in that bureau. Living in Africa is extraordinarily difficult. When I brought the list of possible assignments home to my wife, she said, "even if these countries have a first-class lounge in the airport, I don't want to spend three years of my life there!"
I also believed as I think I've said earlier on these tapes, I intended to retire as soon as was legally possible for me and to maintain a pension which was age fifty. In those days I think I was forty-six years old. So I was looking for an assignment that would ease my transition out of the Foreign Service.

One possibility was to be the Deputy Commandant of the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A friend of mine had that job and they were interested in my doing that. Another was to be a diplomat in residence at a university. Something along those lines. One day, I'll never forget this. This is how assignments are really made in the Foreign Service. I was standing at the urinal on the sixth floor of the building and next to me was a very good friend of mine who was the Deputy Assistant of State for Europe. He asked me what's your assignment. I said, "I don't know; I may go to the Army War College or something along those lines." He said, "Would you consider, could we entice you to go to Munich as Consul General?" I said, "What do you mean, entice me? " He said, “Well, you've been an Ambassador and Consul General may be seen as a step down." I said, "what does it take for me to get the job?" He said, “Do you really want it?” I said, “I want it.” This was a five thirty in the evening.

I have never played my chips after 25 years in the Foreign Service; I knew some people. I went back to my office and called George Vest who was the Director General; I called Mike Armacost who was the Political Officer for the Department; I called Ron Spiers who was the Director of Administration and I said to each of them, "Look, I know nobody owes anybody anything in this system, you take what you get, but I want to go to Munich." Each of them said if you went to go it's yours, no problem. So I was assigned to

Munich. The one person I had not talked to was Roz Ridgway. Roz Ridgway was then the Assistant Secretary of State for Europe. I knew Roz but not very well, I had never worked with her. One day I got a phone call, and she said can you come up to my office to see me? So I came in, and she said, "I understand that you've been assigned to Munich." I said, yes I have, I look forward to it, etc. She said, "I don't have anything against you, everything I hear about you, you're a good officer, but I'm sick and tired of having people brought in from other bureaus." I was seen as an Africanist. I had been in AF for six years, and she said, "you're pulling off one of the plum assignments I have in all the European bureaus. Consul General in Munich is better than most Ambassadorships. I'm going to fight you." I said, "Look I don't want to get in a situation where I'm going to fight the Assistant Secretary but I've talked to Spiers, etc. She said, "look the real reason I'm going to fight this assignment is that I've got a candidate who deserves to go to Munich. He's been very difficult. He's ideal for this Post." I asked who it was. She said his name was Felix Block. Well, years later when I was Consul General in Munich and one of my tasks was working with the CIA to investigate charges that Felix Block was a KGB agent, I met Roz and she said I thank my lucky stars that Felix Block never went to Munich and you got the job.

Q: How did you win the battle? Did she back down?
FISCHER: She had to basically. I had too much political clout.

Q: You think she was hoping that you would be somehow intimidated and somehow withdraw or negotiate for something else?

FISCHER: There is a funny side story to this. One of the bureaucratic ways in which she would...she really wanted Felix Block to have this job. Felix Block in those days was the Economic Counselor of Vienna. There was in Vienna a political Ambassador Ron Lauder of Estée Lauder cosmetics who frankly was a very difficult Ambassador. He had fired his DCM. So they were looking for a DCM. Ron Spiers who was then the Director for Administration and I guess Roz Ridgway called me to a meeting. They said look, you're assigned to Munich and you could go but we're in a bind. You studied in Vienna, you know Austria; you would be the ideal candidate to go to Vienna as DCM. We'll even cut you a deal, we can't make you any promises, but Lauder's only going to be there for two more years. If you go as DCM to Vienna we'll promote you for Ambassador in Eastern Europe, which was something I really was interested in. I thought about it, and I said this is not a deal. There's nothing worse than working for a political Ambassador that you don't respect. They said ok but as a minimum would you agree to an interview with Ron Lauder. He'll call you tomorrow. I went home, and I talked to my wife. Normally, we probably would have jumped at a chance to go to Vienna, but I was looking for a last post before retiring, and Munich had a great deal more to offer, not the least of which was I wouldn't have to work for Ron Lauder. So Ambassador Lauder called, he said, "Dave I've heard good things about you etc." I had been warned that if Lauder wanted me, he had the power to break my Munich assignment and with that in mind, I then proceeded to engage in the most arrogant conversation I could imagine. "Yes, Mr. Ambassador, I've got great ideas on how we should reshape the Embassy, clean out the deadwood, etc." I think the

call lasted about 7 minutes before Lauder hung up. I'm sure he called Personnel to say he'd take anyone but Fischer, so the Munich assignment held.

Q: Directly then to Munich from AF/E.

FISCHER: Yes.

Q: Tell us a little bit about what was Munich, why was it important, how big, etc.

FISCHER: Munich was a huge Consulate. I think the second or third largest in the world. Like many of the State Department offices in the eighties. Now it's a shell of what it was in those days. But, we had representatives of the Department of Justice, not the FBI. We had Department of Justice people litigating civil cases. We had immigration. We had the IRS, the FAA all sorts of government agencies. Why? Because Munich of course had been in essence the headquarters of the American military occupation in that part of Germany? Although the capital of Germany was in Bonn, nonetheless Bavaria was the headquarters of really the U.S. military administration and occupation of Germany up until 1955. And so a number of government agencies had set up offices in Munich during the occupation period. As people know in the Foreign Service, once an office is established, it is virtually impossible to get it closed. We had in Munich for example an office which was run by the Defense Department. When I arrived one of the first things, I did was to ask to meet with the heads of all the agencies there to get a sense of what their offices had been doing. This was an obscure office with four people in it, most of them in their sixties. It was run by the Defense Department, and it wasn't an intelligence operation, it was assigned to a very obscure military command and I couldn't really get a sense of what it was this office was doing. So since it had some intelligence functions, I called in the head of the CIA one day and asked what are those guys doing down at the end of the hall? He said, funny you asked that, I can't figure it out either. It turned out this was an office which had been established in 1945 whose purpose was to find ex-Nazi's. Through the years, that function changed and they began then to try to find Communists. They did this by reading newspapers, by clipping, it was the most strange, funny bunny, " intelligence" operation. It was an oxymoron. You had people sitting in the office, liaison with the German police force "looking for Communists." I tried to get that office closed.

Q: Military or civilians?

FISCHER: Civilians. They were civilians, but they were working for the Department of Defense. I tried to get that office closed, and I tried and tried to no avail.

Munich in those days was important partly because the political leader of Bavaria, who was a giant figure in the German political scene, was Franz Josef Strauss. He was very conservative. He was a man who had a worldwide impact. One of the reasons it was attractive that I be sent to Munich was because of my knowledge of Africa.
Strauss was a man who provided covert financial support to the white government in South Africa. They were providing covert financial support to Frelimo, a rebel group in

Mozambique. They were deeply involved in a number of very conservative causes around the world. Strauss had been the major supporter of Ian Smith who had been the white leader of Rhodesia. He had impacts well beyond Germany, well beyond Bavaria. Strauss was in those days in his seventies, an intellectual giant.

I arrived in Munich with a very strong dislike of Strauss. Strauss was far to the right of what I believed. I had heard all sorts of stories. This was a guy who'd been corrupt, who'd been involved in shady dealings when he'd been the German Defense Minister, he'd been under investigation for kickbacks, selling submarines to South Africa, all sorts of strange things. But, I got to know Strauss. One of the things, I think the only thing that made me successful as a Consul General in Munich was that my German was thought to be much better than it actually was. I have a gift of languages in my ability to speak fairly unaccented languages. Whatever language I learned, I had a good ear. I had an atrocious vocabulary. But I discovered that, frankly, when people converse and there's a dialogue, a conversation, they're much more interested if you can appear natural and appear almost a native. A certain empathy is created, and frankly, you don't need that kind of large vocabulary. I didn't speak academic German. I also used the mythology frankly that my grandfather had come from Bavaria. I didn't have the vaguest idea where my grandfather came from in Germany. But Strauss and others believed that I was one of them. I was a Bavarian.

One thing that I think is important, I learned in the Foreign Service from some Ambassador. The most important thing before you arrive at a Post is to make certain you understand what kind of person you want to be at that Post. One of the great benefits of the Foreign Service of course is that it's a tableau rasa. When we arrive at a new Post we are an unknown quantity. He said, "Think very carefully what kind of persona you want to show before you arrive at a new post." I decided Munich was a place that was fun-loving. Bavarians have a reputation for live and let live although they're very conservative politically, they're very liberal socially. I decided to basically play the role of one of them. As much as I could to make inroads. I must say I was very successful. Probably the most successful Consul General there for twenty or thirty years. I ended up invited to the inner circle of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the coalition partner of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU.) I remember once a month there was a meeting held in a basement of a very strong political backer of the CSU, Christian Social Union, which was Strauss' party. The was really the inner circle, a kind of a kitchen cabinet.

Strauss would come and like everywhere else in Bavaria, beer was flowing. It reached the point where I was accepted as a member of that inner circle. As a result, I got a much better understanding of the inner working of the Bavarian political system.

Q: CDU was in power?

FISCHER: CDU was in power. But in order for that coalition to work, Strauss had to be satisfied. Strauss had all sorts of irons in the fire. For example, we used Strauss as a vehicle to go P.W. Botha who was then the President of South Africa, basically to carry

the message that apartheid is over. You've got to change. The Americans are no longer going to fight sanctions. P.W. Botha would not accept that from hearing that from the Americans. Chet Crocker and others had been carrying that message, he trusted Strauss. So when Strauss carried that message on our behalf, it was much more effective.

Q: So you could go to Strauss and say we'd like you to carry this message. You trust us, this is what I, Fischer, believe, this is what we're going to do...

FISCHER: Yes. Obviously, I did this under instructions. I wasn't just winging it out in Munich.

Q: These instructions were coming from Washington not from Bonn. Who was the Ambassador in Bonn?

FISCHER: Well I had two Ambassadors in Bonn. I had Rick Burt who had been Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, and I can tell all sorts of anecdotes about Rick. I went to Munich with a very firm understanding that I would be reporting separately to Washington, that I would not send my telegrams to Bonn to be cleared.

Q: On all issues?

FISCHER: All issues. Burt didn't like that. But we worked out some accommodation that it was fine. I contributed I think there was a kind of round robin cable once a week that was sent from Bonn about local politics, we contributed to that cable. But on anything else we reported directly to Washington, whether it was economic cables or political cables or whatever. Munich was important enough place, the Consulate was big enough that it was accepted.

One example of how Strauss was helpful to us. We had intelligence that Frelimo, which was this rebel group fighting the government in Mozambique, was about to blow up the major hydroelectric dam which supplied power to northern South Africa to the mines. We were trying to get a message to Frelimo that this was unacceptable. This dam had in fact been built with German aid money. Big impact. So the way we finally got the message was to Strauss. I remember going to see Strauss at his private home, and I said we've got a crisis. We cannot allow this to go forward and so Strauss got on an airplane if I remember correctly. Strauss is a pilot he loves to fly. He had his own jet. I think he flew down to South Africa or Mozambique. He also liked to hunt. He went to Africa quite a bit.

Strauss, one of the most interesting things, this must have been the winter of 1988. Strauss wasn't a Nazi and he wasn't of the crazy right-wing fringe, but he was the leader of the legitimate conservatives of Europe. This was a man who had always been seen as a bastion of anti-communism. He was the equivalent, if you will, in American political terms of Barry Goldwater. In Christmas of 1988 I believe he was invited to go to Moscow to meet with Gorbachev. He flew his own plane. I can remember that he arrived back from Moscow on New Year's Eve and en route I got a telephone call from the aircraft

asking that I meet Strauss upon his arrival. It was snowing to beat the band. It was one of the blizzard conditions. Strauss flew this plane right through. This was a guy who weighed two hundred and eighty pounds. Brings the plane in, parks in his hangar, jumps down off the steps and says, "I've got to talk to you."

We didn't know what was going on. So we went off to Strauss' house. Beer flowing, that's the way Strauss did things. He unburdened himself if you will in a five-hour conversation basically saying," all my life I've fought Communism and I realize now that I might have been wrong. Communism is evil, but I've just met the head of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; Mikhail Gorbachev and this is a man that I can do business with." He proceeded to talk about what an incredible figure Gorbachev was, that there were enormous business opportunities. Strauss, by the way, had been instrumental very much under behind the scenes already covert business dealing between east and West Germany. He came back from Moscow absolutely convinced, Gorbachev had convinced him, Communism did not want to dominate the world. Gorbachev's problem was to reform Communism in the Soviet Union; it did not constitute a threat. Perhaps it was a function of Strauss' age. As people get older, they look back on their career. It wasn't that he was so convinced that what he had done in the forties, fifties, and sixties had been wrong because he was confronting people like Stalin and others. But, suddenly he thought Gorbachev was the greatest thing that ever happened. He began to be much more liberal in his outlook. I tell this story because he was also very helpful to us visa-vis other countries in the world where in the past he would have rejected our policy as being liberal, fuzzy minded, not tough enough. Suddenly, as a result of that Moscow visit, he became much amenable to do things that were very contrary to his image and what he had done for the past few years. Let me say this about Strauss.

Strauss without question was one of the smartest men I've ever met in my life. He had the ability to cut to the heart of the issue. He was a lot of fun to work with. I remember he was on the board of Airbus, and in Germany this is quite common where you have politicians who are on the boards of directors of major corporations. So you have this internecine kind of what we would now call crony-capitalism rampant in Germany. Strauss had been the father of the Airbus. He had promoted the Airbus; he developed the idea of a tri-lateral European consortium. One day we got word that he had, Airbus, not Strauss, had provided a leader in Africa a twenty-five million dollar bribe, to purchase Airbus over Boeing aircraft. So I went to see Strauss. I was sitting with him, we were having lunch. I said look this isn't on, we can't do business this way. I remember Strauss, who was this huge beefy man, hit me in the shoulder so hard he almost knocked me right off the chair. He said, "What do you mean twenty-five million dollars? Let me tell you about Boeing!" He proceeded then to tick off every sale of every Boeing aircraft for the last three years. I mean he knew it. Just off the top of his head. He was a smart man, a wonderful guy. He died, unfortunately, of a heart attack and that was that.

Q: Did he want to become Chancellor?

FISCHER: He certainly regretted he never made it. He'd run for Chancellor and lost the election. Now he became President of Bavaria as result of that defeat. He wouldn't give up that job for love of money. To be President of Bavaria in those days was the closest thing to being King of France. You ran a huge state, the largest state in Germany, the most prosperous state in Germany. He made an enormous amount of money. That's another story I can talk about. Strauss made a lot of money. He was treated as what the German's called a "landesvater" the father of the state. Of course, don't forget that Munich had been a monarchy up until 1918. It was important for Bavarians that they always have that kind of figure. Franz Josef Strauss who was the first man since Mad King Ludwig of Bavarian who captured and encapsulated everything that Bavarians wanted to believe about themselves. He was enormously successful.

Q: Wasn't Hitler a Bavarian?

FISCHER: As someone once said Austria's greatest success was convincing the world that Hitler was a German and Beethoven, an Austrian. No, Hitler was an Austrian, but he came to power in Bavaria. Although the Bavarians always say that Munich never voted for Hitler.

Q: Is Berchtesgaden in Bavaria?

FISCHER: Berchtesgaden is in Bavaria. That's another interesting anecdote. When the wall came down in 1990, I was still in Bavaria and we had in Berchtesgaden army hotels which were in fact, the old Hitler's headquarters buildings. For legal reasons, it isn't the government of Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany which was the successor state to the Hitler regime, in terms of property ownership, it was the government of Bavaria. Complicated occupation politics. So the issue became we wanted to get rid of these things. We no longer had a huge military presence there, and we wanted to downsize. I remember one day, Strauss's successor as President of Bavaria, Max Streibl, called me up and said is it true that you're going to give up these military facilities, these hotels. I said, yes we are if you know a buyer let me know. He said well we would be interested in taking those over. I said you mean the government of Bavaria? No, the CSU political party. I said has it ever occurred to you that it wouldn't be a good image for the CSU to be taking over as it's party headquarters the former headquarters of the Nazi party? He said, oh I never thought of that. To make a long story short, I think we finally dynamited most of those places. I have a great interest in German history. One of the interesting things, in Berchtesgaden below Hitler's what's called a "berghof" where Hitler had his eagle's nest. But in the town of Berchtesgaden the Nazis had established an office complex to allow Hitler to rule from there as easily as he could from Berlin. I was prowling around one day in an old Nazi building we had taken over in 1945 and which was being used as a U.S. army switchboard. And there on the switchboard panels were the names of the entire Nazi hierarchy, from Hitler all the way down to Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress.

I went into this building one day, and I met someone, it was a U.S. Army headquarters, and I said this is fascinating. They said would you like to meet Hitler's secretary? I said

what do you mean? She's still alive, and she lives in Berchtesgaden. I spent three hours with her. I've forgotten what her name was. She was ninety-two-year old woman. Very talkative, very open. She was not a great critic of the Hitler regime. She was clearly like many secretaries, in that she admired her boss, worked for him for many years. She was an interesting person.

I got to know a number of children of senior Nazis. Herman Goering's daughter for example lived in Munich. She had taken a different name. She worked as a nurse in a cancer ward. She was really an extraordinary woman. She was doing this if you will to expiate the sins of her father. But, there were still a number of those people still around.

Q: Is the Munich consular district more than Bavaria? And if so, did it border on East Germany and if so did you have any role in the strategic planning or anything else as Consul General?

FISCHER: The Consular district is Bavaria only. It was, however, the major basing area for military forces in Germany. I guess when I went to Munich in 1987, we probably had, I think, three hundred and fifty thousand Americans in Bavaria. They were under the unified military command NATO in the first instance and then Strategic Command Europe. But, the major U.S. military training facilities and other shooting ranges were in Bavaria. I think we had stationed, as far as U.S. troops, about a hundred and sixty-five thousand uniformed military. We serviced those people in the Consulate. We had a huge Consular Section. I think we had eight or nine visa officers and birth registration officers and floor people working in social security and all the usual things that Consulates provide.

Q: But you had a responsibility for other issues, like intelligence, as the State Department representative?

FISCHER: Munich was the area where we had liaison with the German Intelligence Service. Germany is a federal republic and unlike the United States when the federal republic was created, they dispersed government offices throughout the states in Germany. So the Supreme Court for example is not in Bonn, the capital city, it's another place. The German Intelligence Service was located in Munich. So we had a very, very large CIA presence. It was also a worldwide headquarters for certain operations that were undertaken in Munich. So it was very large. Although that is where frankly, I, as a Consul General, had a role to play in terms of intelligence operations that were being run. I had always had good relations with the Agency people who worked with me in various postings, and Munich was no exception.

In terms of policy, in 1988, Vernon Walters, Dick Walters, became Ambassador in Germany. Dick, and it is true I was present in the meeting, in his first staff meeting of the senior staff, he invited the Consuls General, looked around and said what are we going to do when the wall comes down. You could have heard a pin drop in that room. Dick Walters you have to understand was a man who had been educated in Switzerland right

after World War I. His German was excellent. One of the reasons I got along so well with Dick Walters was that he was convinced that my German was better than his. This was a person who claimed to speak seven languages, and he had the utmost respect for anyone who spoke German very well.

But, Dick knew Germany and he knew the German psyche. The gist of his remarks in that staff meeting were "I understand, of course, that it is policy not to promote reunification of Germany in any rapid way. But don't you ever forget that when a German goes to sleep at night, the last thing he thinks about before he falls asleep is a unified Germany."

I was the only person I think on the entire senior staff in Germany who agreed with him. I felt too that as we could begin to see that the system in Eastern Europe was beginning to erode, Gorbachev, Perestroika and Glasnost, nobody understood what the consequences were going to be. We did begin to see, of course, in the summer of 1989 this enormous exodus of people from Eastern Germany who were going to the German Embassies in Prague and in Hungary. It was beginning to collapse.

I think it would have been October 21 or 22, 1989, there was a Chief of Missions conference in Berlin. Dick Walters invited me to dinner with Eberhardt Diepgen who was then the Mayor of Berlin, the Lord Mayor of Berlin and Mr. Mompa who had been the Socialist opposition in Berlin. Harry Gilmore who ran the U.S. Mission in Berlin was the fifth guest. This was a dinner on a Friday night. We knew there were to be demonstrations the next day in East Berlin. Gorbachev had been in Berlin the week before. Crowds had gone through the streets shouting "Gorby, Gorby, Gorby!" It began to appear as though the East German regime was beginning to lose control, and it was also apparent through CIA reports that the Russians had given orders that their troops were going to stay in the barracks. No matter what happened, the Russians were not going to save this State. I remember the four or five of us sitting around this table saying the demonstrations in East Berlin tomorrow, there may be as many as two hundred and fifty thousand people in the streets. What are we going to do? Are we prepared? Is the U.S. military prepared to defend if people begin to start attacking the wall or whatever? Well, I tell this anecdote because even those of us that thought we knew the situation, grossly underestimated what happened. Instead of two hundred fifty thousand, there were two million people in Berlin on the streets that Saturday. Dick Walters and I the next day, it was Sunday, after the demonstration, we took a little boat. The Ambassador had a yacht in Berlin which we could drive on the lakes in West Berlin - another hangover from the days of complete military occupation. I remember I said Dick how long do you think the system is going to last? He said, I can almost guarantee I think the wall will come down within a year. The wall came down 10 days later. So I tell this story because although he was essentially correct, he was correct in terms of what would happen, all of us underestimated the rapidity with which these events took place.

Q: Going back to Bavaria where you were the Consul General and this great world event had an impact, what was the impact on your job in your area of this historical event, the wall coming down? What did it do to your role as Consul General?

FISCHER: Frankly, not a lot in terms of day to day operations. Bavaria was the receiving point for refugees from East Germany. Initially, in the summer of 1989 as thousands upon thousands of East Germans fled though Czechoslovakia and Austria they ended up in Bavaria. A very wise decision on the part of the German government was that these refugees would be dispersed equally among all the German States. Otherwise, Bavaria was going to be burdened with thousands upon thousands of refugees. So in that regard we had very little impact.

Very few people in East Germany had relatives in the United States so they were not prospective immigrants. They were in the first instance fleeing only from one part of Germany to another they were not seeking to go to the United States.

Q: Very few as opposed to West Germans who all had relatives in the United States?

FISCHER: Right. But to the extent that East Germans had relatives in the United States, they'd been cut off from contact with them for years and years. It increased our political reporting. We certainly did a lot on this. But, as for day to day operations it had little impact.

Now, when the wall came down, I argued and Dick Walters again, I think we were the only two who agreed on this; we believed that there would be a very rapid movement towards a unified Germany. Most people believed that East Germany would continue to develop as some sort of an independent state, and ultimately unification would happen but the Germans were not prepared to absorb this area. And it would take two, three, four or five years. I disagreed, and Dick disagreed.

Dick got into some trouble because he was promoting that idea in Washington that we'd better get our act together because all of a sudden we were going to be confronted with the issues involving a unified Germany. He wrote a number of telegrams, and I did as well. Jim Baker was Secretary and did not take kindly to what he felt was Walter's "rushing the process." Baker very much wanted to control events and from that point on, the Embassy was totally cut out of the process.

This isn't unusual in a situation as fast-breaking and critical as was the unification of Germany. U.S. policy had less to do with Germany than the Soviet Union. Baker and Thatcher were concerned that Gorbachev would be overthrown in a coup and that we would lose an historic opportunity. Those were real fears at the time, although in retrospect I think we underestimated Gorbachev's determination to get out of Germany.

That was frankly, the issue from 1989 when the wall came down until the unification of Germany in 1990 which dominated I suppose what I did in Munich. As you know, the United States, when it appeared that Germany would in fact unify and it would unify very quickly; the United States was the only one of the four powers that believed in German unity. The French were for obvious reasons reluctant. The British certainly did not look

forward to having a large strong united Germany. The Russians were opposed. I must say the probably central foreign policy success of the Bush administration was the way in which the United States managed the unification of Germany. And its thanks largely to Bob Blackwell, a guy that a lot of people don't like. But, Bob understood Germany very well. They worked very closely. They made it a small working group. They cut out a lot of the American bureaucracy. Again, I think that proves that when you really want to accomplish something important and you want to accomplish it rapidly, centralize the process take the bureaucrats out of it and drive home the bargain. One day the history of this will be written. I think the United States was central in achieving a goal that early on most people thought could not be achieved which was a unified Germany within NATO. Chancellor Kohl also deserves a great deal of credit. Kohl was always underestimated as a politician. But, he had an enormous sense of what the German body politic could bear. He was certainly aware of British and French concerns about a unified Germany, so he did two things. First, he preempted the process by issuing a set of 10 principles which formed the basis for subsequent negotiations. Secondly, he agreed that a future German state would be tied to western institutions. Not only NATO. The price the French wanted for their support was German agreement to a European central bank and currency. Kohl agreed to the creation of the EURO as one of the prices he was willing to pay.
The other major issue that happened on my watch was the Gulf War. As I was leaving the Foreign Service, in the summer of 1990, it was clear that I was going to leave the Foreign Service for personal reasons. One of my children had a medical condition that I frankly couldn't deal with overseas so I was looking to get out. So I remember on a Sunday - rarely did I ever go to the Consulate on a Sunday, but I did for some reason. I guess I was called in by the Duty Officer. I received a telegram/flash whatever that we needed immediate liaison with German authorities because Iraq had invaded Kuwait.

As a result of the preparations for Desert Storm, the overwhelming number of troops, the majority of troops, ninety percent of them that took part in the invasion of Iraq came out of Germany. This was a God-send to us. In the summer of 1990 it was pretty clear that we would begin to draw down the enormous numbers of U.S. troops in Europe, the vast majority of which were stationed in Germany. The Gulf War presented us an opportunity to do so at minimum cost. The Germans paid the transport costs and we were able to move out rapidly large numbers of soldiers. Their families were repatriated, in most cases to the United States. It served two purposes. One, it provides the military forces that ultimately were successful in Iraq. Two, it allowed us draw down in a rapid process something that would have taken us years to accomplish. One of the issues again as Germany became, even before it's unification, the Germans were becoming much more self-confident and were no longer willing to accept some of the costs, large scale military operations and occupation, we were not longer the occupying power. But, every German city had a large American military base. We had forward based large armored divisions which had tanks which rumbled down German villages at three o'clock in the morning. The major issue was also low-level fighter aircraft because we had to defend the Czech and the East German borders. That required training of helicopters and fighter aircraft flying fifty feet above the ground. That became a major problem. More and more mayor

s of cities in Bavaria were asking that the American troops withdraw. But it was interesting, because when withdrawal finally took place, every mayor would then come in to see me and ask how can we keep the American military base. They suddenly realized that these were enormous economic benefits, as well as liabilities. The other thing of course, although it's easy to exaggerate this. The American military presence in Germany, most GI's stayed within their barracks, very few GI's spoke German, very few GI's I suppose participated in civilian civic life in Germany as much as they had. But, they were always welcome there. There were friendship societies. The Germans being very efficient and organized beginning in the late 1940s felt that they owed a debt to the United States. This, as we speak today, I think this week is the fiftieth anniversary of the Berlin airlift. But, the American military presence in Bavaria allowed a certain level of friendship, trust, and confidence which was I think unique in military operations overseas. So that was an interesting time.

Q: Looks to me like almost everything you said and the things you talked about, are sort of unique for a Consul General. It was a unique place, a unique job, at a unique time. I want to look at a couple of aspects of that. One, it sounds as though you were very close advisor of Ambassador Walters in the sense that I must say serving in Mexico with its twelve Consulates, in most cases the Ambassador never wanted to see a Consul General. Just go do the visas and leave me alone. That seems to have been different. Was that the case with other Consul General in Germany. Was it you or was it the size or was it the way Walters ran the place?

FISCHER: Well, a combination of it. Every American Ambassador that I ever knew to Germany envied whoever was the Consul General. It was a nice city to live in. Don't forget the American Embassy was located in Bad Godesberg, a little tiny village on the Rhine. Dull as dishwater. Munich is a thriving, vibrant city with great culture all the interesting things that happened in Germany, tended to happen in Munich. So that was part of it.

Every Ambassador came to Munich at a minimum of once every two weeks. Partly to meet with business contacts and partly just to have fun. If you wanted to have a good meal, you couldn't get one in Bonn. I shouldn't say every two weeks, once a month. They would also go to Berlin. West Berlin: the Ambassador always had a residence in West Berlin. He would go back and forth to underscore American commitment to Berlin. So that was part of it.

It was a huge Consulate. We had fifty or sixty Americans, other people through intelligence agencies for whom I was not directly responsible but of whom I was cognizant. We provided them housing, cover, things such as that. So that was part of it.

Dick Walters and I just hit it off. Dick and I share a great interest in German history. I think Dick respected the Germanist I was not a Germanist, but I knew the language, I knew the history, and above all, I had great contacts. There had been a whole generation particularly in the sixties who had been steeped in German history and culture and had

served in Germany very often. When I arrived in Germany in 1987, that generation had died off. There were not that many people left who had specialized in Germany in their career. I had not, but Dick trusted me. He also developed relations with other people. Harry Gilmore for example who was head of the Berlin mission. Dick had a lot of respect for Harry and certainly would not hesitate to talk to him. Dick would not hesitate to call me on the phone or whatever.

Finally, Bavaria was politically and economically important. It was the Silicone Valley of Germany. It was the headquarters of the Siemens Corporation, BMW, Messerschmidt-Boelkow-Blohm. All the major Germany companies had major offices there so that in many ways it was seen as the center of high-tech, modern industry.

One anecdote I will tell in terms of Desert Storm because I think that this is sometimes misinterpreted. In the fall of 1990, it was clear that one of the issues we were going to have to do was to get a hold of the targeting information for military targets in Iraq. The Germans had a long business relationship with Saddam Hussein, and various German companies had built legitimate, in most cases, buildings. Siemens, for example, with putting in the electrical systems in what were clearly military installations and bunkers. Other German business had provided equipment which was used for the production of germ warfare, biological agents. So one of the tasks that I had in Munich, and indeed the CIA's major task in the fall of 1990, was to get as much information as we could about what was going on in Iraq based on what the Germans had done. I can remember a meeting I had with the Chairman of the Board of Siemens Corporation who was a friend of mine. German businesses (and I have to say for understandable reasons) were reluctant to provide this, because these were things that they had developed legitimately and on a commercial basis and they were reluctant to provide us information, including blueprints. I can remember a very difficult, one and half hour conversation with the Chairman of the Board of Siemens in which I made threats, he made threats but the upshot of it was I ended up carrying out a box of blueprints of Baghdad military headquarters. So it was fun a Post in that regard. It was not an isolated visa mill. Obviously, what went on in the Consular Section...

Q: How much of your time was taken up in the Consular Section?

FISCHER: I did virtually no consular work. Although I tried to spend a day a month in the Consular Section, it was to boost morale, not to interfere in the day-today operations of the consular section. I've always managed by wandering. I went into the Consular Section everyday without questions. I knew everybody. But again, one of the unique qualities of Consulates in Germany (and we had a big Consulate in Frankfurt, as well) a big Consulate in Munich we had smaller Consulates in Hamburg and Stuttgart. For forty years we had German local employees who had worked for the U.S. government who frankly could have served as Secretary of State. They were extraordinarily dedicated people who, for example, knew the Consular Foreign Affairs Manual backwards and forwards. I had worked in my first job in the Foreign Service in Frankfurt as a Visa Officer, and I immediately recognized that every German employee working in the visa

section knew that visa law far better than any American possibly could. Why? Because Americans were cycled in and out of these jobs. The maximum time you were there was a year or two. These people had been there for forty years. One of the problems that happened in Germany in the late eighties and early nineties was that this generation of employees was pensioned off, and they were retiring. So that by the time I arrived in Munich, we probably had in each key section, the Administration, Budget and Financial, Visa and Citizenship you probably only had one employee left of that generation who had dedicated their lives to serving the United States. In the old days you would have had ten, but we only had one. But that local employee in a very gracious way tolerated the presence the of an American officer, usually a junior officer and trained that officer in how to do things. And they ran those places like a Swiss clock.

When I lived in Germany, when I worked in Germany you didn't have to be concerned with fraud. These people were extraordinarily ethical. I don't know of a case, frankly, of fraud that existed in any of the German Consulates. So that was not a concern. I think the biggest management problem that I had - and I know my colleagues in Frankfurt and Hamburg had it as well - was usually that some head of a Visa Section, middle grade officer who decided to come in and they were going to teach these people a thing or two. So you had to reign that in.

Q: What about, you didn't have problems of sheer volume?

FISCHER: No.

Q: You didn't have to give non-immigrant visas?

FISCHER: Initially we did. The first years that I was there we were issuing about a hundred and fifty thousand visas a year, but it was done by mail. Travel agents would simply mail in bag loads of passports, and it was a mechanical operation. Then of course, we had the visa waiver program which was put in 1988 or 1989 I think, so that Germans no longer needed non-immigrant visas. Immigrant visas were centralized when I was there. We initially did them in Munich, and then we centralized them in Frankfurt. We had a very, very good Consul General by the name of Jones whom I think was the person who introduced the idea of centralization of functions. Then we had social security - thousands of checks but again it was a mechanical operation.

Q: What about you relations with some of the other agencies? We talked about the military and intelligence, what about someone like Commerce? I suspect Commerce had a huge operation there. Did that run well? Did they have a trade center there?

FISCHER: Yes, Commerce had a huge operation. We did not have a trade center there, but again the Commerce Section had one local employee, one woman, and my central task as far as the Department of Commerce was to make sure that this woman who had worked for the U.S. government for 30 years did not accept another job. She was offered them on a weekly basis at two and three times the salary we could pay her. This was a

woman who frankly knew the German commercial scene, U.S.-German relations better than anyone else. The Department of Commerce was smart I think in Germany because it divided up its operations in Germany based on industry. So that in Frankfurt, the Department of Commerce the people there were specialists in publishing, in food stuffs and financial services. In Munich we had responsibility for electronics, computers and for those industries were specialized and headquartered in Munich.

My major headache was an operation over which we did not have direct line of control. It was perhaps the largest civilian operation in Bavaria; Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty had been a CIA operation up until the 1970s when it was ostensibly privatized. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty employed at one time about fifteen hundred people in Munich. By the time I got there, it was down to about eight hundred. These were Czech, Romanians, and East Europeans and former Soviet citizens who were broadcasters and technicians. It was run by a Board of Directors that were very politicized. William F. Buckley's brother at one time had been the Chairman of the Board and run Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The line of authority between the U.S. government and what was in fact, a private corporation, funded; however, ninety percent from U.S. government funds, was very murky. When I went to Munich, I had long briefings, and I met with people on the board on International Broadcasting.

Our responsibility in Munich was to see to it that what the radio stations were doing was consistent with U.S. policy. We didn't have a day-to-day oversight. We didn't have oversight for the financial operations, their personnel, or anything else. But, we were supposed to make sure that what was being broadcast was in line with U.S. foreign policy. But, it soon became apparent to me that we had no way to control the content of the broadcasts to ensure they didn't violate U.S. policy. They were broadcasting twenty-four hours a day, in languages, some of us understood and knew, Polish and Hungarian these were languages that were common. But in Radio Liberty's case they were broadcasting in Tadjik or Uzbek, languages of Central Asia. There were very few people in the U.S. government, and certainly no American in a policy position who could read and understand the scripts that were being broadcast.

The way Radio Liberty and particularly Radio Free Europe had a check on this, they were broadcasting live but they at random, the American management, would take tapes of a particular broadcast and give them to someone to be translated into English. Then they were given to the Consulate for review. It became apparent early on that the people who were translating the documents were precisely the same people doing the broadcast. One of the things that developed and never really explored, this is a good Ph.D. thesis for somebody. Radio Europe had performed a very valuable function although I think the radio had always exaggerated the number of people in Eastern Europe that was listening to their broadcast. In fact, I, having lived in Eastern Europe, knew how difficult it was. By the late 1980s although these countries were still Communist, these people had access to Western media. People were no longer sitting in Warsaw twiddling their short wave

radios. They were watching television. There were American tv programs which the Poles had purchased. But that's another issue.

But Radio Liberty had always operated with scripts. So you had people reading the news broadcast. But, as Glasnost and Perestroika opened up, Radio Liberty soon discovered that you could make a phone call from Munich to Bishkek or Leningrad to a dissidents home and talk to him directly on the radio. Dissidents were in those days because of Glasnost willing to go onto radio stations, and we had no control over what these people were broadcasting; these were live call-in shows. Although I can't prove it, but it wasn't anything that we really investigated, a lot of the émigrés particularly working at Radio Liberty were people who came from very conservative backgrounds who were from obscure political parties, there were Czarists, monarchists, people who believed in greater Turkic or Islamic empires, and these people were broadcasting whatever political point of view that suited them. So what they had to say and what went on in the radio stations I frankly don't know.

Q: What role in the two radios did USIA have?

FISCHER: None.

Q: But you did have a USIA mission?

FISCHER: We had a big USIA mission, again a hangover from the occupation days. One of the great things that Americans did, if anybody ever wants to study a successful military occupation, just look at the United States occupation of Germany. We created initially in virtually in every city in Germany over a hundred thousand population in the 1940s, reading rooms and libraries. They were called Amerika Hauser. By the time of the 1980s all these little reading rooms had been closed down with the exception of major American facilities where there were Consulates. The Amerika Haus was a very important cultural center. It had a theater, a great library, it operated an exchange program for the thousands upon thousands of students Americans studying in German universities and Germans studying in American universities, high school exchanges. Again, it was an example where we had some key German local employees who had worked for that operation for thirty years. We had a man in charge of the press section, Hans Peters who was on a first name basis with every editor in Bavaria, every major journalist. Wonderful operation. Unfortunately with the reduction in resources those places are being closed down. So it was a big operation.

Q: This is sort out of the blue, having these huge agencies there, headed by very high ranking people some of them, how many of those people should have become or people of their stripes should become American Ambassadors, even though they 're from Commerce or USIA? Were they qualified? In the jobs they are doing, were they broad enough to be U.S. Ambassador?

FISCHER: I can only talk to this issue as far as USIA is concerned. I served with some very good USIA officers. I worked for USIA and was seconded to them in Poland in my early career. I saw two kinds of officers in USIA. Those people who had the broad political skills who were interested in economic issues, interested in American business, who had the kinds of skills required to be an Ambassador. They were a minority in USIA. Then we had people who were very good at what they did. They could run libraries, film festivals but they took they attitude that politics was outside their jurisdiction.

In Commerce, I met the people who also had the kind of broad political skills and ability to get along in international affairs, but they were a small minority. But, State also had very few people in the Foreign Service with the requisite skills for dealing with the private sector. I watched a lot of people in the Foreign Service at senior levels; American businessman would come through town and want to talk about foreign investment, and the mistake that was made by virtually every Ambassador was "oh, this is a great place to invest," promoting whatever backwater they were assigned to, when in fact, if you were a stockholder in this man's company, the last thing that you would want to invest is in this hell hole.

Foreign Service officers are not good at speaking the language of private American business, and they're not good at understanding the issues that the business community is concerned about. So I think it's a trade off.

Q: Anymore comments?

FISCHER: No, that's about it. I'll wind up my career. I retired from the Foreign Service in January of 1991. I landed the plum job as President of World Affairs Council in San Francisco which was a large foreign policy operation. Peter Tarnoff had been my predecessor once removed.

I guess I'll conclude by saying that it's a career I certainly don't regret having done. It was an exciting time. I joined the Foreign Service to satisfy a number of psychic needs. I'm essentially driven by altruism, the desire to do good, to change foreign policy. I think the Foreign Service provided sufficient satisfaction of those goals. If I look back at my career, my work in arms control was probably the only thing I did that was important in terms of foreign policy, but it was an important contribution.

I also am a person who is driven by power and prestige. I tell younger people when they ask me about the Foreign Service, I counsel them, look no matter how dull the job may be, you can be on the visa line working in an obscure Consulate somewhere, the fact that you are a diplomat representing the United States of America gives you access to the best in any society. I look back on my time in Poland. My wife and I are interested in art, film, theater. I knew every film director. I knew artists. I happened to be interested in dog breeding. I had access to people who breed dogs. You can enrich your life enormously if you take advantage of what is available to you as an American diplomat overseas.

And finally, in terms of prestige and comfortable life, I went to Harvard Law School. I recognize that if I had stayed in the law, I would be earning $500 thousand dollars a year as a partner. But that wasn't a route I wanted to take. But, I also didn't want to be impoverished. I wanted to send my kids to private school. I wanted to lead the kind of life I thought I would like to have. The Foreign Service provides that, too. Even on meager federal salaries, the fact of the matter is we live a very pleasant life overseas. We have very nice houses, cars and servants, and that kind of lifestyle allows us to save money which we then of course spend when we're assigned to Washington trying to pay off mortgages. But in reality in terms of federal salaries it's not a bad lifestyle.

Q: How did you face the problem which at least in my family's case, privacy, which was their biggest bon of contention. You're really never a private citizen. You're always on stage. I don't care if you're a junior officer. You didn't have that problem at all?

FISCHER: Oh, sure. It bothered my wife more than it did me. The one thing which my wife objected to most was the lack of privacy. I rather enjoyed it. There are times yes when you have to be very careful. But, I have an ego and I think that ego is satisfied very often when you're in the limelight. For example, in Munich I was a big fish in a small pond. I was an even bigger fish in an even smaller pond in Africa. But it is difficult.

The other issue which in the late ‘80s became a real situation for me was the security issue. When I lived in Munich we were very much aware of the terrorist threat. I had a twenty-four guard at the residence, although I refused a police escort. It drove my fifteen-year old daughter crazy because she couldn't sneak out of the house or couldn't sneak in at two o'clock in the morning because her movements were being watched by the guards. I approached that issue, with a - disdain is not the word. But, I said I'm going to lead the lifestyle I want to lead. If I want to ride a bicycle to work, I'm going to do it, over the objections of my security officer. I basically had the attitude that if somebody wants to kill me, they're going to do it. But it's uncomfortable for the family. It imposes burdens on your children and wife. They're not getting paid to join this profession. This is not necessarily the lifestyle they would choose.

Yet, I think all my children look back with enormous amount of fondness of their time in the Foreign Service and they're grateful that they had it. There were difficult times, too. The transition to go from an American high school to a different atmosphere and you're fourteen or fifteen years old, it's not easy.

Finally on privacy, let me close with one final anecdote. Bavaria as I explained was ruled by the CSU, the conservative party, but the city of Munich, the mayor of Munich had traditionally been a Social Democrat. The mayor of Munich is my time was a very nice man, a good friend, and I think he respected me. He invited my wife and me for a private dinner in a castle in a tower of the city hall, very small, very intimate. I thought it was off the record. In the course of the discussion, we were talking about Franz Josef Strauss who had died. There was a journalist there, and my understanding was that it was all off the record. I said one of the problems with German journalism is that you folks don't have the

tradition of investigative journalism. "Why isn't anyone looking into the fact that Strauss who began life as a butcher's son, when he died owned half the city of Munich?" That was the end of that. Nothing happened.

A year later, I left the Foreign Service, came to San Francisco. In the summer of 1991 I came to my modest, nonprofit office in San Francisco at 8:30 in the morning and as I opened up, there were two television crews there. I mean crews, cameramen, soundman, correspondents from the two major German television networks. What's going on? Don't you know, you've been named in Die Welt, one of the major newspapers in Germany, as the secret head of the CIA and you are said to have knowledge that Strauss had been taking money from the East Germans. As a result of this wacky story I became the cover subject of the equivalent the German Time Magazine, Spiegel. It was an extraordinary story all of which could be traced back to this conversation I had had two years previously in which I had said to the German journalist that somebody ought to investigate the Strauss' finances.

I was sued by the Strauss family for defamation of character. I threatened a counter-suit in a German court. It became an enormous brouhaha. All of it disappeared; it blew over. But, it goes to the issue of privacy. Suddenly, as an American diplomat, even a small Consul General in Munich, you are a public figure. What you say is taken with an enormous amount of seriousness. As we're talking, however, it's ironic that Germany is finally coming to grips with serious political corruption. The Strauss family is under siege by the press for having committed the very things I supposedly had accused them of. So, what goes around, comes around, I guess.

End of interview