

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

DR. LOWELL FLEISCHER

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today I will be talking to Lowell Fleischer on behalf of the Foreign Service Oral history program. Lowell has more than 25 years as a Foreign Service Officer and has developed a specialty in Latin American affairs. In fact he and I were on the staff of the US mission to the Organization of American States some years ago.

Lowell, what made you decide on a foreign service career?

FLEISCHER: I don't know that that is such an easy question to answer. I am from a small little town in Ohio and until I went to college I don't know that I'd been outside of Ohio and Pennsylvania. But once I did go to college, Ohio Western University, that's where I first became interested in foreign affairs. I was a journalism and political science major and from both of my principal professors in those two fields I guess I came to have a fascination with foreign affairs. In fact, during my senior year at Ohio Western I signed up to take the foreign service exam but they didn't give it that year. I don't know whether they still do this or not, but they had a very long waiting list of people already certified or whatever, so they just canceled the test that year. So I went on to graduate school and didn't think much more about it until I was teaching a class one day. It happened to be in diplomatic history. I remember two of my students came up to me after the class and said: "Mr. Fleischer, what is this foreign service business all about?" So we started talking and I sent away for the information for them and decided to take the foreign service exam myself. I guess I lived in constant fear until the results came back that they would get in and I wouldn't and I'd lose control of the class.

Q: That is a rather unique circumstance, being led in by your own students, but I think it worked out well. Now you passed the foreign service examinations and came to

Washington, had your training and were assigned I see to Medellin in Colombia for your first post. That was in 1963. What did you do in Medellin?

FLEISCHER: Medellin was a very small foreign service post. Just as an aside we'll get back to this comment in a minute, but all of those little posts have been closed by now. In a way I think it's too bad because it was a really good training ground. Colombia geographically is four distinct regions really, with the capital around Bogota, then you got the west of the Andes where we had a consulate in Cali, then you had the north coast where we had a consulate in Barranquilla and then Medellin which was the big coffee producing and textile area of Colombia. So we had a two-man post there. There was the principal officer and one vice consul and maybe half a dozen locals: somebody doing USIS work under the direction of the PAO in Bogota and a couple of consular clerks, and I had a commercial clerk who followed the commercial developments. The interesting thing about those kinds of posts ... Obviously I spent most of my time doing consular work--we issued a heck of a lot of visas in those days--but I also did other things. I worked with a local in developing commercial opportunities for US companies and stayed in touch with the commercial attaché in Bogota. It was an important area of the country so we also did some political reporting. Although back in those days communications were obviously not what they are today. We had no direct communication with Washington from that little post at all. We would send a telex to the Embassy in Bogota and then Bogota would send it on. Or if the Department ever really want to get hold of us, they'd send a commercial telegram either in the clear, or if it was classified, I'd have to use a one-time pad to decipher the thing. The one bad experience I remember about the one-time pad very clearly happened when my boss was away. He was a former desk officer for the Dominican Republic and as things started heating up there in 1964-5, Phil Torrey was called back to Washington and eventually to the DR, so I was left running the post myself. During this time we had some textile negotiations with Colombia. We had a textile agreement with Colombia on the amount of certain kinds of textiles that they could send to the United States and the various duties, etc. So the negotiations were going on in Bogota and the textile delegation from Washington came down to Colombia and they were greeted by the Embassy and then they came down to Medellin to do the actual negotiations. Until I managed to get some other system in place the Department was sending instructions for these textile negotiators by commercial cable all of which had to be deciphered by hand using the one-time pad. There were reams of this stuff coming in. Finally I called the Ambassador, Tony Freeman--he was later our Ambassador to Mexico--and I said: "This is just overwhelming us all. We're only an hour's flight away. Can't we get these cables sent to you? They can be deciphered there and sent down here by courier." It was taking me hours to decode these things. So that's what we finally did. Washington finally listened to reason and they sent these instructions for the textile negotiators to Bogota where they were decoded in Bogota and flown down from Bogota to Medellin. So these small posts provided an invaluable learning mechanism for somebody coming into the Foreign Service. I wouldn't have traded places with anybody in Bogota for any amount of money.

Q: As many new officers, you were rotated, but of course that problem never arose in Medellin since there was no one to be rotated with.

FLEISCHER: That's right. We did everything anyway.

Q: But I think you're absolutely right. You got a chance to try your hand at almost everything including running the post which most junior officers never do.

FLEISCHER: Yes, in fact when Phil was away for a good length of time during the Dominican crisis, maybe three or four months, and I was running the post, I got Charge pay. The difference between my FSO-8 or -7 salary, whatever it was, and his-- he was maybe an FSO-3 or 4 at the time--during that period of time amounted to maybe a couple of thousand dollars. When you're only making six or seven thousand dollars a year, that is a lot of money. I wasn't married in those days and I took that money when Phil came back to post and blew it on my first trip around Latin America. So that's the first time I had an opportunity then to visit other countries in the region.

Q: Well you probably deserved the extra money for the time you were putting in deciphering messages from Washington. What was the situation as regards violence in those years in Colombia.?

FLEISCHER: Colombia, traditionally, we would have to admit has been a very violent country. I say that as a very good friend of Colombia and somebody who has followed Colombia pretty closely ever since my first exposure to the country some thirty some years ago. There were always pockets of violence, even when I was there traveling around Antioquia. I made a point on a lot of weekends to take the USIS truck and some U.S. movies and go out to villages and show them, usually outdoors on a home-made screen or a white-washed wall. I'd get a chance to meet not only the mayor but lots of other people in those villages. I remember going to one village and being fascinated to find out that everybody there was a member of the liberal party. Colombia, of course, being basically a two-party state divided between liberal and conservative voters. There were no conservative voters in that town at all. This was really an outgrowth of "la violencia," a period in Colombian life which was almost civil war where the political parties were actually fighting each other. From then on some villages in Andes were of all one political persuasion or another. That way, I guess, they decided they really could trust someone. So there was still that kind of violence. Now, in the cities there certainly was nothing akin to the kind of drug violence which Colombia has unfortunately been subjected to in recent years. Things were relatively calm that way. Another little incident I can think of might illustrate the difference in time. There was a departmental police chief, that is for the department of Antioquia. Colombia is divided into departments equivalent to our states. He called one morning and said he'd had reports that an American plane had crashed. He was sending a crew out to investigate and he wondered if I'd be interested in going with them. I jumped at the chance to do that. It was an arduous trip up into the Andes. We flew, we took a helicopter, we rode horses, mules and finally we walked. We found this plane. It was an old C-47, gooney bird, that had crashed. The call letters had

been painted out so it was obviously engaged in smuggling. Inside the plane we found some manifests indicating that the plane was bringing American cigarettes into Colombia. We found other manifests saying they were taking coffee out of Colombia. So they were smuggling US cigarettes, which sold very well in Colombia in those days, into the country and smuggling coffee out. That's how innocent the whole thing was in those days. I can imagine that those same smuggling routes were used in later years when the product was cocaine.

Q: Did you feel personally threatened while you were there? Was there antagonism toward you as an American official?

FLEISCHER: Not really. I felt very safe in Medellin. I was a young single person. I had a lot of Colombian friends and I never felt that I was in any danger at all. We did go through one episode brought on by the US intervention in the Dominican Republic. As a lot of people who were there at the time will realize, this energized especially student groups, leftist groups, all over the continent, to protest against the United States. We did have protests in front of the consulate. We were on a main street there in Medellin. Junin was the name of the street, as I recall. We had a lot of protests there because of that and one day, some people from DAS, the Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, which is the Colombian equivalent of our FBI, came by the office to tell me that they'd had a specific threat on my life. I didn't really believe that, but I guess I had to. So they assigned a couple of guards who went around with me for a while. That was all heady stuff for a Vice Consul. I really couldn't believe what was going on anyway. I guess they probably did that for a week or so. I think it's because they got free beer at my house and they were fed fairly well. Eventually I was walking down the street one day and these two guys were behind me and somebody in the American community saw it and raised the question whether they were safe if this was happening to me. That kind of led me to think that maybe that wasn't the best thing and it really wasn't needed. And I talked to the DAS people and the whole thing was called off and nothing ever happened. So I don't know whether that was a false report or whether it was a real report ... But that's the only time when things were really unsettled, the time when those students were up in arms over the US decision in the Dominican Republic. But even they were not violent. There would be some rock throwing, they would sing and chant in front of the consulate and sit down. The place wasn't attacked or anything like that. Looking back, it was pretty calm; there was certainly nothing akin to what we went through in Iran, for example,

Q: These were exciting years in our Latin-American policy of course. We had the Alliance for Progress, we had the Peace Corps. Did they impinge on any of your duties in Medellin?

FLEISCHER: Yes, both of them very much as a matter of fact. We had quite a few Peace Corps volunteers in Antioquia. The westernmost part of our consular district was in a really remote area of the country. That particular state or department was called the Choco; the capital was Quibdo. I went down there to visit Peace Corps volunteers who were living there and it took me a couple of days to get down to where they were. So we

had a lot of rural Peace Corps volunteers. We also had some Peace Corps volunteers in the city. It was a brand new experience. Some of them, most of them, did very well working in specialties such as public health and a few things like that. Some were supposed to be working in city planning, I remember the mayor called me one day just ranting and raving about how these young kids who didn't know beans about running a city, whether it was an American city or a Latin American city, were telling him how the run things. What were they doing there, what was he supposed to do with them? Well, it took us a little while to get that straightened out. But most of them who were health-care specialists or education graduates for the most part probably did a fairly decent job. The Alliance for Progress was a huge program. Colombia was showcase for the Alliance and an awful lot of money went into that country in those days. For a while both my boss and I were spending almost every weekend participating in the inauguration of some new Alliance project. After President John Kennedy was shot, everything was named Kennedy. I must have personally participated in the inauguration of at least a dozen John Kennedy schools in that part of Colombia, built with the help of the Alliance for Progress. So it was a very large program in Colombia in those days. I remember being totally shocked on a visit to the Embassy to find out the incredible number of AID personnel involved in this Alliance project.

Q: Were AID people in Medellin?

FLEISCHER: We had no AID people in Medellin. All of it was all done out of Bogota. Bogota was only an hour's flight away, so it wasn't a huge undertaking to fly back and forth. So we had no AID people there, but a lot of projects being funded by AID in those days.

Q: Now, as I recall it, there were two ambassadors at the time you served. Tony Freeman and Covey Oliver. Did they come and visit you in Medellin?

FLEISCHER: Yes, both of them came regularly, as did the DCM. Henry Dearborn was the DCM. He, of course, had been in Santo Domingo when Trujillo was shot. As a matter of fact, he was our Charge there. I guess we didn't have diplomatic relations. Was he the Charge or the Consul General? Anyway he was the number one there, but he was the DCM in Bogota. Yes, they both came down. It was my first experience, my first opportunity to contrast a career diplomat ambassador, in the case of Freeman, and a non-career ambassador in the case of Covey Oliver. Oliver was not just some political appointee, however. He was a very talented, a very well educated expert on Latin America. I remember as a young Vice Consul thinking there was not that great a difference. That is, they were both very effective and the fact that one was a career officer and the other one a political appointee, at least in my experience, made absolutely no difference. They were both very talented and effective representatives of the United States.

Q: Well now, in 1966 your tour was up in Medellin and you came back to Washington and served for a year in INR?

FLEISCHER: I was in INR a couple of years, beginning in 1966. I was the analyst for the United Kingdom which was an interesting sort of assignment too. Had I been the analyst for Colombia or Uruguay or some African country, I think it would have been a different experience. As it was, when you are the analyst for the United Kingdom, everybody from the Secretary on down thinks they understand the United Kingdom. There is very little, it seems to me, that you can contribute to that kind of a dialogue, except watching what is going on and so on and so forth. That assignment was, in terms of career development, interesting mainly because it was my first experience working with CIA analysts, or learning anything about the CIA. We didn't have any CIA officers in Medellin and I didn't get to know the ones in Bogota very well. INR was also my first experience in the Washington bureaucracy. You write a little paper with a heads up on British election, for example, and just clearing it with the desk and then with the CIA analyst and so on and so forth. So it was interesting in that respect Also I had a great deal of respect for Tom Hughes who at the time was the director of INR. So we got to know him very well.

Q: Tom Hughes later went to London, I believe.

FLEISCHER: Tom Hughes later went to London. That is correct, as the minister, not the ambassador if you'll remember. It was also during that time that the INR operation in the State Department Operation Center started. The State Department Operation Center was even relatively new. We're talking about 1966, 1967. It was a small little operation and INR began to do an intelligence set up in the operation center so that that could be part of the briefing of the Secretary the next day, You wouldn't find this happening today because I suppose people would sue because of some kind of discrimination or another, but in those days they looked specifically for a couple of bachelors, on the assumption that working nights would not disrupt their family lives and so we were assigned to this new INR duty up in the operation center.

Q: Well, at the completion of your INR tour, you went back to Latin America, to Santo Domingo. What were you doing there at the Embassy?

FLEISCHER: I was a political officer at the Embassy in Santo Domingo. That also was a very interesting tour for lots of reasons. One, I just been married. I got married while I was here in Washington. That was almost our honeymoon cruise down to Santo Domingo. In fact we did take a Grace Line ship which you could still do. I think we couldn't go to Santo Domingo by ship, but we sailed to Jamaica, then flew over from Jamaica. I remember arriving in the Dominican Republic without our luggage which had gone astray somewhere. I was a junior political officer there. This was about mid-year of 1968. The US intervention in the Dominican Republic was over by that time, but everyone was still dealing with the aftermath. The Dominican Republic is a very small country, and the US Embassy was huge. We had five State Department political officers in this little island nation. I mean, it's unbelievable, to say nothing of the number of CIA personnel. There must have been twenty. Twenty-five maybe even. I remember when my wife, who was very new to the Foreign Service .returned from a wives meeting and asked

me who all those political officers were They were all CIA people. We had an absolutely huge staff in the Embassy. The political reason behind it was that President Johnson's reputation was at stake. He'd sent all of these troops into the Dominican Republic and certainly nobody in the State Department or anywhere else wanted to have some kind of a failure to hang around his neck. So the Embassy was really oversize. You can imagine what work there was for five, FIVE political officers to do in this little island. We knew everybody and we were falling all over each other reporting on the most insignificant youth groups and meetings with people. Some of the stuff that would be in the archives back here that we reported on in those days would, I think, shock people today.

Q: Was there much anti-American sentiment then lingering from our deeds in 1965?

FLEISCHER: I guess there was, Tom, but in some ways I'm surprised that there wasn't more. Again, there were problems with some leftist groups. We'd read things in the newspapers, and there were times for example when we couldn't go across the bridge to go out to the beach because there were anti-American demonstrations going on. But, again it was nothing really very violent. I don't think any of us ever didn't go to a restaurant or go out about town, normal sort of things. We all had very good Dominican friends. But there were lingering resentments. One of the things that I did for a while was follow the activities of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano, which was Juan Bosch's party in those days. I knew some of the people fairly well. I remember one Senator Pablo Casimiro Castro. He only had one arm because he had been involved in some kind of skirmish and had lost part of his arm during the US intervention. But he was always willing to talk to me. Now, he didn't want to be seen with me necessarily in a public restaurant, so we would always have these clandestine meetings. I'd drive outside of town and meet him at a restaurant, or he would drive over to my house and we'd meet at the house, or something like that. The PRD in those days certainly could be classified as an anti-American party in some sense. They had opposed the US intervention, they were opposing all of the US influence in the Dominican Republic -- and there was a lot of US influence. I mentioned previously the large number of USAID people in Colombia when I was there, well it was dwarfed by the number of people we had in the tiny Dominican Republic after the US intervention. We had a whole education section for example that was housed physically in the Dominican Education Ministry. That's how intimately involved we were in running things in the Dominican Republic.

Q: What were our relations with the Balaguer government?

FLEISCHER: Our relations with the Balaguer government were very good. I thought Balaguer was an old man in those days and here he is still sitting in the same presidential office where I used to see him practically thirty years ago. We used to marvel at reports that he signed personally every check over ten thousand dollars paid by the Dominican government. I think he kept track of the entire country's budget on the back of an envelop in his pocket. I guess he wouldn't do that anymore. He really controlled every aspect of government personally. After all, he came to political maturity in the Trujillo regime and he was pretty used to having it his way. Our relations with the government were really quite good, however. The depth in ministries was pretty shallow and if you really wanted

something done or find out something you had to talk to the Minister or maybe you talked to the Vice-Minister, but certainly nobody below that. No one else had any real authority. John Crimmins, who was our Ambassador when I got there, maintained excellent relationships with the whole government. I think he would be a good example of an activist US Ambassador during this period of time. I don't think anything went on in the Dominican Republic that he didn't know about. For all practical purposes, he was his own political counselor, his own AID director, etc. He knew absolutely everything that was going on and he wanted to have his hand in everything that was going on. In those days, we used to write so-called "Weekas" which were weekly summaries of events, and send them to Washington. It was not always the highest priority on everybody's list to get that thing done and it usually fell to the lowest guy on the staff, which was me, so I'd end up writing the thing. I remember spending some Saturday morning sitting with John in his office because John didn't like the way the "weeka" was written. If the report, no matter how insignificant, was going out under his name, he wanted it to reflect his opinions and his take on things.

Q: Yes, most ambassadors I know had never heard of the "weeka." It just goes on without them.

FLEISCHER: That was not the case with Ambassador Crimmins.

Q: But we also had relations with the opposition I take it from what you are telling me about your relations with the PRD?

FLEISCHER: Yes, we did, and as time went on while we were there, those relations got a little bit better. I can remember having affairs at my home when opposition politicians would actually come. I think during that time our relations with the opposition did count. We were always very prompt to follow up coup rumors and that sort of thing. I can remember many a night going out trying to find somebody in the PRD, or somebody in the Social Christian Party which was another opposition party in those days. It has since merged with the official party and it's all one now, but there was a separate Social Christian Party then. And putting out the word, you know, that the United States was unalterably opposed to any undemocratic change of government had its effect. The Military Attachés as well as those in the Milgroup were quite busy trying to build up relations with the general staff as well other officers as low as second lieutenant. The military was still a pretty strong and influential outfit. But we certainly had the staff in the Embassy to try to find out what was going on.

Q: You were there during that rather bitter election campaign they had in 1970?

FLEISCHER: I was indeed. And it was a bitter election campaign. All of us spent a lot of time out in those days just trying to figure out what was going on and who was going to do what to whom during that campaign. We set up a headquarters back in the Ambassador's office and we followed things very closely. It was a very bitter campaign and the United States became part of that obviously. It would have been hard not to have

been a part of it. But I think the Embassy came out of that fairly well. John Crimmins by that time was back in Washington as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs. He had been replaced by Frank Malloy. It was Frank's first ambassadorial appointment. He had been the DCM in Rome just before being named ambassador to the Dominican Republic. He was a consummate professional. He was determined that the staff should go out to gather information about what was happening, but that we should not become part of the campaign. Eventually Jack Crowley, who eventually replaced you at USOAS, arrived as DCM. Frank Devine had been John Crimmins's DCM. So again two highly rated professionals who later on went to become ambassadors in their own right. So I think for the most part we were able to keep the Embassy as big, as influential, and as meddling if I may be so blunt as to use that phrase as the Embassy was during that election campaign. We at least were able to keep ourselves from becoming an issue.

Q: Let me ask one final question with regard to the Dominican Republic. Looking back on it, when you were there, was there a feeling that intervention in '65 was necessary, worthwhile or did it do more harm than good?

FLEISCHER: I'm sure Tom you will find people who will say it did more harm than good, but the judgment of people I knew then, and the Dominicans with whom I have kept in contact over the years since then, is more positive than that. I know an awful lot of Dominicans who are convinced that because of the US intervention, the Dominican Republic is a more viable political entity today than it would have been had an all out civil war developed without US intervention. Now there are some died-hard partisans -- Juan Bosch for example would never obviously agree to that; neither would Pena Gomez who was the PRD candidate in this last election and who some analysts think actually beat Balaguer but was cheated out of his rightful election victory. There are people like that, activists who are convinced that the US intervention should not have taken place and did more harm than good. I don't know that given the climate today that we end up doing the same thing in such a small island again. I cannot imagine the American people tolerating the same kind of intervention in Haiti today, no matter what the problem there.

Q: Well, following your tour there you were sent to the University of Massachusetts as the John Quincy Adams lecturer. That was quite a prestigious assignment.

FLEISCHER: Again, I guess those things don't happen anymore because those kinds of assignments count as training years on Department records, so I think that quite frankly those have gone by the way side. But that was a very interesting year. John Blacken who later went on to become an ambassador to one of the smaller African countries, I can't remember which one now, was my predecessor in that post at the University of Massachusetts. The Department of State continued to pay my salary and I was a faculty member at the University of Massachusetts. The University provided some office space and a secretary and that was their part of the bargain, and I taught some classes. It was interesting for me to do that. I had an academic background as it was and just barely finished my Ph.D. before I came in the Foreign Service. But I can remember for example

teaching one seminar on the Dominican Republic. Howard Wiarda, who is a well-known Latin American analyst and author of many books on the region -- he's been teaching for the last two years at the National Defense University here in Washington--is still on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts in the political science department. I had met Howard in the Dominican Republic while he was doing some research while I was living there and when he found out that I was coming to the University of Massachusetts as a John Quincy Adams scholar, we planned a seminar together and we taught a seminar on the Dominican Republic which I think for the graduate students was really extraordinary in a way. I had just come back from a couple of years of living there, active policy-level experience there, and Howard was just back and with his academic experience, and putting the two together I think it was a very good idea. What the Department eventually got out of this year that I spent there, I don't know. It was a reverse sabbatical and I enjoyed it, and certainly enjoyed living in Amherst. I think we also provided a service for the Department. I did a lot of speaking on behalf of the Department of State and on behalf of the Foreign Service to some unfriendly college audiences.

Q: I was going to ask. This was the period of course at the end of the Vietnam war when things were not very favorable for us on college campuses. And also I think there was some criticism of our intervention in the Dominican Republic. Did you sense a lot of this hostility?

FLEISCHER: Oh yes. Definitely. Some of it cuts both ways, of course. I can remember one class I was teaching and at the beginning of the class the students didn't know that I was a Foreign Service Officer and was just there for a year. I was just Professor Fleischer as far as they knew until later in the semester we talked about it. I remember one thing to make my ... "God, I didn't now that somebody who was a representative of what was described as the fascist US government could be so reasonable." That's one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is, I was asked to speak once at Hampshire college. In the Amherst you have not only the University of Massachusetts but you have Amherst college, Holyoke is very near, Smith is very near, and there's Hampshire college and they have a very active five college conference. Students enrolled in one school can take classes in another, and that sort of thing. Well Hampshire is a very non-traditional four year liberal arts school. Very few requirements, test, and that sort of thing, and I think some students thrive on that. As a matter of fact, the daughter of a former boss of mine, Bart Moon, went there and she's quite a delightful young lady. I don't mean to suggest that certain kinds of students can't get a good education there, I think they can. But in those days, it was sort of a hotbed of anti-US government, anti-war fervor; in any case I was actually booed and hooted off of a platform when I was speaking there one day. So sentiment was really quite strong and became even more so when President Nixon increased the bombing and sent troops into Cambodia.

Q: Yes, we did in 1970.

FLEISCHER: The whole Southeast Asia scenario, especially every escalation there would rile some students considerably. So when you are in that kind of a situation, all you can

do is try to sit down with them and remind them that they are in an atmosphere where inquiry and learning and testing of ideas, of trying to understand the other guy's point of view, that that's why they're there. That is certainly what I was trying to do in those kinds of instances. I was still on the Department payroll, so I felt some obligation to defend US policy even to the extent in some cases that I wasn't sure that I personally felt that that policy was correct. But you know you do your best in those kinds of circumstances.

Q: Did you have anyone follow you into the Foreign Service. Did you encourage any of the students, or did any of them show any interest in it?

FLEISCHER: Oh yes. The students did show interest, and I know of a couple of grad students whose committees I served on at the time I was there who later did come into the Foreign Service. I would be the last one in the world to say that I was responsible for that, but simply being in a position where they could talk to a real-live Foreign Service Officer in a very informal kind of setting, I think that was helpful to them.

Q: Well then let me say that I think you were probably an excellent example to them. After that interesting years, you came back to Washington and went to the Foreign Service Institute for several years where you were in charge of training for Latin American.

FLEISCHER: Yes, that's right. I guess that was another assignment that I thoroughly enjoyed. It was also in retrospect as one looks back an assignment that I probably shouldn't have taken because it was a time when I was looking to be promoted and it was not a kind of assignment, despite what Personnel in the Department tells us. Had I been more astute, I should immediately have tried to get to a desk and to an active position in a bureau or whatever. Instead I sort of did what I wanted to do and what was going to be interesting to me and I certainly enjoyed it, but in the long run I don't think it was a good career move. But I think training at the Foreign Service Institute is very important for officers going out. I have not had the opportunity yet to visit the new FSI, and I certainly would want to do that because I think we've come a long way since I studied Spanish in the basement of some apartment house over in Rosslyn as I remember. And I can remember a lot of FSOs coming through who were going to Latin America for the first time and try to provide them with some kind of background I think just makes all the kind of sense in the world. I think FSI now is doing a much better job of it that we even did in those days because it's become integrated with language studies and the whole thing works on a more kind of rational basis. So from that standpoint I certainly don't regret that assignment. I met a lot of people and thoroughly enjoyed it. I just think that as a career move, it was not the best thing in the world.

Q: Did you lecture yourself or did you arrange to bring others in, experts in their field?

FLEISCHER: Well, I did lecture myself because I thought I knew, had not only experience but an academic training which permitted to do that. But the big part of that job is just getting the right kind of people to bring in and get them together with people in the field. I also knew a lot of people active in Latin America all around, so we did that a

lot. Area studies was not always popular. That is to say, we all think, Foreign Service officers especially it seems to me think that (end of tape)

We can be plunked down in the middle of another situation, in another country, and somehow by osmosis will pick it up. But I think if training is done right and now with their integrating area training with the language training, I think that probably today, a Foreign Service officer going off to almost any country in the world is probably going to be much better prepared for that experience than either you and I were for a lot of assignments that we had.

Q: Absolutely right. I used to know a Foreign Service Officer now unfortunately departed who said he could land anywhere in the world and get operating within twelve hours as long as he had a case of scotch with him. What was the emphasis during your years as chairman of Latin American Studies? Was it on Chile, because that was the time we were having trouble there. On Cuba, on Brazil, on the Andean countries?

FLEISCHER: Well again, today things are much better organized at FSI and they've got a little bit more money so they can break areas down. For example the Latin American program now if you're going to Colombia, you would be part of an Andean group. If you're going to Argentina you can be part of a southern cone group. We didn't have the resources in those days to do that. So that we tried to do a lot of more general kind of work. I mean, the role of the church in Latin America just to give you one example. And then we would, depending on the number of students enrolled who were going to certain places, then we'd try to tailor the people that we'd ask to come in to talk to those particular countries. So I wouldn't say that we had a particular emphasis on anyone country in those days. The thing I think we did not, again in retrospect, have enough emphasis on, was the whole economic and commercial side of things. I don't know that the Foreign Service as a whole in the 1970s which is the period we are talking about placed enough emphasis on the economic/commercial role of the Foreign Service. Those of us who were political officers thought that was the be all and end all of an embassy, and if you were the political councilor, you sort of deserved to be next to the ambassador and the DCM because that was the political section. I'm afraid that when I ran the Latin American course at FSI, I placed much too much emphasis on political factors and the political side of the equation and not nearly enough on the economic/commercial side of things. Again that's now in hindsight, going back. Look at Mexico which is in the news regularly now, or look at Chile, or Argentina or Brazil. The questions that come to the forefront today when we talk about all of those countries are really economic questions. They're not political questions. They're economic questions. And even those political questions which do come up and they do obviously from time to time have some kind of economic background, some economic connotation to them. So I think we shortchange people, again looking back now with twenty years of experience in the area, on the whole economic side of the house.

Q: What were your experiences with the ARA bureau, the Latin American bureau during the ... Did they show any interest and cooperation?

FLEISCHER: No, they did and I must say, I have very good memories of my experiences with ARA, whether it was to get a Deputy Assistant Secretary to come over to open a class, or whether it was to get an officer, director or a desk officer over to meet the people of particular countries, I never had any difficulties in that regard at all. I think for the most part that was true of other areas of Area Studies at FSI. The bureau was unfailingly cooperative in providing personnel and providing time, of making time, to meet with new officers going out. The only time bureau was really stingy was in not wanting officers to be at FSI at all. They needed them at post last month rather than two months in the future. So the problems you really had were with the executive office of the bureau rather than with the policy or substantive side of the house.

Q: Now when your tour in FSI was ended you had a complete change. You were sent to Yugoslavia?

FLEISCHER: Yes, that was a deliberate decision on my part. I felt that I had been in the Foreign Service by that time a good ten years, almost all of it connected with Latin America, except for a stint in INR and I really thought I wanted to get some experience in another area of the world. I found out that there was a political slot open in Belgrade and so I applied for language training with the idea of going into that slot. As it turned out I never did go to that slot because for personal reasons the person who was in it was kept on for a year and by that time I was already five months into nine or ten months of language and area training and decided I would still like to go to Belgrade. So I consented to become counselor of consular affairs and off to Belgrade we went.

Q: But you went there with Serbo-Croatian language training?

FLEISCHER: It was Serbo-Croatian language training. Ten months we had, nine or ten months of Serbo-Croatian language training, yes.

Q: Was it a happy embassy when you arrived?

FLEISCHER: Yes it was. You know, Belgrade was an interesting place in those days. Marshal Tito was still very much a leader of the non-aligned movement. He was an important figure when it came to world affairs. Tito was always consulted on issues by both east and west. So things were interesting politically. It was also interesting because I arrived at the same time as a new Ambassador, a non-career ambassador who had been the Deputy Secretary of Labor. This was Laurence Silberman who is now a member of the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. A very militant republican who had been an acting member of the cabinet practically when he was Deputy Secretary of Labor. Anyway I met him in Washington before we went out there and was quite frankly very impressed with him. The DCM was a career foreign service officer, Dudley Miller The Ambassador brought with him a staff aide whose name now has slipped my mind, but somebody from outside the foreign service. Eventually the staff aide and the DCM were clashing and stepping on each others' toes and one day we went to the staff meeting and

found out that the DCM was no longer going to be the DCM but was going back to Washington. He was in essence fired by the Ambassador. That disrupted things at post on the personnel level for quite a while. No DCM was ever sent out again and in effect Ambassador Silberman's staff aide became the DCM, never in name, but in many functions. Those of us who were section chiefs went right to the Ambassador with many issues that ordinarily would have gone to the DCM. We really did not miss another layer. So it worked out for some of us anyway. This may be an appropriate time again to comment on the issue of non-career ambassadors Larry Silberman had his supporters and his detractors within the Embassy. I consider myself one of his supporters. I think Larry was able in some ways to be a more effective ambassador at that particular time in Yugoslavia than perhaps a career ambassador would have been. He was willing to step on some Department toes. He also knew personally a lot of the members of President Jerry Ford's cabinet and was able to get them to come to Yugoslavia. I'm not sure under other circumstances that they necessarily would have wanted to do that. I remember Bill Simon for example, the Secretary of the Treasury, coming through and I think this was important for a lot of reasons. I don't know that the Embassy would necessarily have disagreed with any policy line that EUR was trying to push. It wasn't that so much as Silberman just deciding that he was the guy in the spot. He was willing to take a few more chances, let's say, than I think maybe a career ambassador would have been able to take under the same circumstances. I would like to mention one case in particular that I had worked on for over a year as the Counselor for Consular Affairs. We had a US citizen by the name of Lazlo Toth who had been arrested by Tito's police for alleged industrial espionage. This guy was a chemical engineer employed in the sugar manufacturing business in the U.S. He was born in Serbia, educated in the U.S., and became a U.S. citizen. He was back visiting his family. There was a sugar plantation nearby where he had worked as a young man and he was visiting that sugar plantation and took some photographs. Well, he was arrested for taking photographs and they charged him with industrial espionage of all things -- as if the sugar plant technology in Yugoslavia was on a higher plane than it was in Colorado. Well it took us over a year to get him released and I am convinced that the only way we were able to get him released was to have people like Bill Simon put that issue at the top of his agenda when he went to call on officials in the Yugoslav government. And we did the same thing with absolutely every U.S. officials who came to Belgrade. Larry Silberman thought it was an absolute outrage that Lazlo Toth had been arrested on obviously trumped up charges and my instructions from him were to do everything I could to get the guy out. Ambassador Silberman told me that he was willing to do anything I asked him to do. I don't want to be too harsh on the foreign service at all, but we could have had a career ambassador in that situation who would have been reluctant to smash as many Yugoslav toes as we smashed trying to get this guy out. Larry Silberman didn't care if he was criticized for devoting so much time to one American in jail. He thought it was an absolute outrage and we were going to get the guy out. I just know a lot of foreign service officers who would have been reluctant to do that. So I think Silberman did a good job. He would have been more effective had he spoken Serbo-Croatian as his successor Larry Eagleburger did. I also think that Silberman was more willing to ruffle Tito's feathers than some career ambassadors would have been. It was probably a time in the twilight of Tito's presidency where he needed somebody to ruffle a

few feathers. So I think Silberman was very, very good at doing that. At the same time he was able to keep confidences and being effective in operating the people below Tito's level. But in Yugoslavia in those times it was Tito and nobody else. I mean we all tried to get to know other level people. We all tried to put our best thinking caps on and come up with scenarios about what would happen to Yugoslavia when Tito was no longer there. I'm sorry to say that I don't think any of us could have predicted the eventual fate that befell the country. Although we did have a pretty good indication that it was only Tito, the glue that was holding the thing together. I can remember for example another little anecdote. "Borba", the official communist party newspaper, was published in Belgrade in Cyrillic and in Zagreb in the Latin alphabet. Well, if I did not feel like struggling with Cyrillic on some days I might pick up a Latin edition because it was a little bit easier for me to read even though in those days my Serbo-Croatian was fairly decent. One day I was in my office reading it when the chief local consular assistant, a lawyer who had studied abroad, and an intellectual Serb on whom I relied on him for a lot of things, came into my office and he saw me reading Borba with the Latin lettering in it and he had a fit. How could I think that I was understanding the true meaning of what I was reading, that I was getting as much as I could out of that article if I was reading it in Latin as opposed to reading it in Cyrillic. That's just one tiny little anecdote that illustrates I think the strong antagonistic feelings which the various nationalities which had been jammed together in this artificial country. Let's face it, that's what Yugoslavia was. That's just one little anecdote I think that served to illustrate how strong the feelings were among the various parts of Tito's empire in those days.

Q: Were you able to get out of Belgrade, to travel around the country at all?

FLEISCHER: I traveled quite a bit as a matter of fact. Belgrade was not a closed, completely closed society in those days. We were watched and we used to play little games with the police who we knew were writing down the diplomatic tag numbers of our cars, for example. But as a consular officer it was a little bit easier for me to travel sometimes than as a political officer because I could go to an area on the pretext of visiting U.S. citizens, investigating social security checks, visiting U.S. citizens in jail, etc. I mean I was going to an area to visit an American in jail or whatever, and use that time that I was there to do other things as well. So it was fairly easy to travel around, and interesting to travel around in Yugoslavia. Serbia was fairly well off. Yugoslavia is like a lot of other European countries in the sense that the northern part of the country was the rich part and the southern part was the poor part. That seemed to hold true for Yugoslavia as well. You would get down near the Albanian border for example or on your way down towards Greece and those were the poor areas. One of the things that struck me traveling around during that period of time were the number of half-finished houses we would see. You would be traveling around in Serbia and there would be a farm field and all of a sudden you would see a half-finished house, fairly good size and wonder what was going on. Well, what most of this was, there were a lot of gastarbeiters in Germany ... Serbs who went to Germany to work as "guest workers." They would come back with their earnings, and use them to start building a house, buying a little business or whatever. They would return to Germany and work again and plow their earning back into their

houses in Serbia. This was happening all over. There were a lot of Serbians working in Germany. I remember another little incident to illustrate that. I had a Volkswagen sedan, a bigger Volkswagen with a rear-engine and a fuel injection system. I had trouble with the fuel injection system and I had trouble getting somebody in Belgrade to fix it and decided I would take it to Austria. When I took it to the shop, the mechanic was a Serb. So there were a lot of them in Germany and Austria and other parts of western Europe who had gone up there to work. It was a society which was functioning, but it was also a society where you knew that in Croatia, for example, or in Slovenia which were the two northernmost sections of the country, the two richest, the two closest to western Europe where they were obviously pushing the communist envelope. You would talk to people up there who owned small factories for example. The Yugoslavs were always sort of flexible. You could have a private restaurant or a private business as long as you only employed a handful of people - I don't remember the exact number -- outside of your own family. In Croatia and Slovenia, they were always expanding that trying to add more, pushing the envelope as it were. But Yugoslavia was certainly better off in those days than a lot of the other eastern European countries. Among other things, I was president of the school board in Belgrade for a year or two and I remember getting a call from my counterpart who was also an embassy officer in Sophia. I got a call one day asking me whether it was possible to buy a water heater or nails on the market in Yugoslavia. I said: "My God, yes, you can buy a water heater any place; there are a lot of hardware stores." So he came over personally in an embassy vehicle to get a new water heater for the school in Sophia because they were not available in Bulgaria.

Q: From one communist country to another?

FLEISCHER: From one communist country to another. So in that sense, certainly economically in those days Yugoslavia was much better off than Romania or Bulgaria for example.

Q: Were there evidences then of the strong Moslem nationalism that we're seeing now?

FLEISCHER: Yes, there were. Obviously, you went down to Moslem territory, to Sarajevo, the scene of so much bitterness today. I can remember on several trips to Sarajevo and I can't imagine that that place has almost been obliterated from what we see on television today, but the Moslem influence was extremely strong. You would talk to a mayor or a city councilman or a Moslem leader in that area and it was very evident that there was a resentment toward Belgrade that was a little more than the resentment that you find in many other places toward the capital city. I mean, you and I have both served in countries where if you're not in the capital city there was always a resentment there. I found that in Colombia, I found that in lots of other places where I served, but this was more than that. You knew that religion was at work. The other thing that I've thought about a lot since then with the recent break up of the country, the Serb against Moslem, the husband against wife in some cases which we've all read about, when you look at it historically and you try to reason it out and you think that it's really just almost an accident of history. The line between where Roman Catholicism and the Latin alphabet

was the norm, and on the other side where eastern orthodox religion and the Cyrillic alphabet are used is where the advance of the Ottoman Empire was stopped. A lot of the Moslems are ethnically and racially the same stock as the Serbs. So, you know, if the line had been fifty miles away, we'd be dealing with an entirely different situation.

Q: There were some prominent visits I gather during your time in Yugoslavia?

FLEISCHER: Yes, there were. President Ford came through for example, to Belgrade.

Q: Was this when Tito was still alive?

FLEISCHER: Yes, that was when Tito was still alive. President Ford had a very successful visit to Belgrade. Tito went personally to the airport to greet him. Tito didn't always do that for a foreign visitor, and he went personally to greet President Ford and met him at the airport. That was an extremely busy time for us and I think that that visit really went very well and served I think a lot of good purposes during that particular time. I don't think presidential visits always do that. But this was a novelty there in Yugoslavia and I think it worked quite well. We had other high level visitors during that time. I remember a visit by Carl Albert who was the Speaker of the House of Representatives at the time. That was a disastrous visit, I think you can say. Albert is still alive so maybe I should be more careful in what I say, but Albert was known in those days as a pretty heavy drinker and he continued to do so while he was on that trip. I mean in the control room, we eventually had to lock liquor up and he got pretty annoyed with us I must say.

Q: I've been in several experiences like that with our congressional representatives.

FLEISCHER: But this was the Speaker of the House of Representatives for heaven's sakes. Tito honored him with an official dinner. Tito was always not present at such events. Albert could not even remember the name of the country he was in and when he got up to respond to a toast he thought he was in Czechoslovakia. I mean he got countries mixed up. I mean that was a kind of disastrous visit. So there was both the good and the bad. Traveling in Yugoslavia was very easy. Geographically it's a very good place to be stationed. We drove to Greece and it was an easy drive to Vienna or to Budapest and roads were pretty decent. The north-south route was fairly dangerous. You get Greek and Turkish truck drivers on the way to Western Europe and in those days it was really only a two-lane highway and they weren't exactly too careful about pulling over and sleeping when they should. But you could put your car in a car-train in Belgrade and go from Belgrade to Ljubljana and in no time at all you'd be in northern Italy or drive over the pass and be in Austria. So it was a very good geographical location. It was a very pleasant place to be assigned.

Q: Well, after that tour in Belgrade you returned to Washington, to the Operation Center where you spent several interesting and probably exciting years.

FLEISCHER: The Operation Center in those years was very exciting and we had really a lot going on. Personally and professionally that was very interesting because it gave me an opportunity to work fairly closely with the Secretary and the top people in the Department of State and it seemed we had some crisis or other going on. The Iran crisis developed at the time I was Deputy Director of the Center. I remember the night quite well when we opened a telephone line to the Embassy and kept it open for days at a time. Afterward I remember one of the bean counters in the bowels of the building calling me and questioning a \$26,000 phone bill!. And that was from an opened line that we had kept open. We expanded our facilities then because we had almost a permanent Iranian working group going on and we had to have space for them up in the Operation Center. The other thing that tour did for me was to make me even more leery of the Washington bureaucracy. Dealing with the bureaucracy not only in your own building, but in every other building in town at that time, why that was a very humbling experience. We were also at that time just on the edge of the communications revolution. It's amazing what has happened since then. I can remember for example, now it's routine, the embassies have word processors and all that stuff. But I can remember working with Xerox to develop what we called in those days LDX which permitted us to send via a scanning device, paper from the White House to the State Department and have it classified. Today faxes are a fact of life. In those days it certainly didn't work as easily. Just the size of this machinery that we had developed at Xerox to allow us to encrypt a piece of paper and have it come out at the other end was amazing.

Q: How were your relations with people in the White House, DOD, CIA? Because I know that the Operation Center has a line to each one of those.

FLEISCHER: Yes, we have a direct phone line to each one of those buildings and we found ourselves working extremely closely with each one of them during a lot of these crises, for example the Iranian crisis. On the working level, the relationship was always extremely good, whether we were talking to watch officers in the middle of the night and another agency, sharing information, there was never any problem at all. It was always the next day when turf battles began to come out and those turf battles were always fought up the line from the working level guys who seemed to be getting along fairly well in my view. But there were always fires to put out the next day because of turf battles developing. Operations Center directors from all agencies used to meet and get together and work out problems and for the most part I think the flow of information and the sharing of information was pretty good. There was always those turf battles, however, some of them caused by ambassadors in the field. You know the notion gets around that if you want the Secretary or even the Assistant Secretary to read a cable it has at the very least be EXDIS. better if it's NODIS. And then if you make the decision that that information is vital to other agencies as well and you distribute them, feathers get ruffled. Every day I had to call one of our embassies to inform an ambassador or DCM that I had down graded or reclassified their exclusive distribution cable for such and such a reason. I got phone calls from ambassadors overseas telling me that I had absolutely no business doing that, that that was in their prerogative, etc. So you just have to be your own diplomatic self and say: "I'm sorry Mr. Ambassador, but I did that for various reasons and

if you care to call someone else, why you can do that." I don't know how it is today; communications have changed so rapidly since I left the Service.

Q: Human nature or ambassadors don't change.

FLEISCHER: No, that's right. But the number, the growth of that kind of limited distribution material was a real worry to me in the late '70s and I can imagine what it is today.

Q: Tell me, did Foreign Service officers want to work in the Operations Center or did you have to dragoon them?

FLEISCHER: Well, we certainly didn't have to dragoon junior officers. We never had any problems attracting top-notch junior officers to assist on the watch or to be editors; those were very sought-after posts. We'd have our choice of people because they could always count on getting a good job after that kind of experience; and we did our best to help them with their next assignments. Even senior watch officers, who I think were FSO-4s, under the old system of classification, had a lot of responsibility. They were always sought-after positions. You know, we were replacing somebody and I had personnel send me up a stack of files, why, I always had good number of people to choose from who were willing to do those jobs. It wasn't always easy and I do think that some people didn't mind the odd hours and working very strange schedules. You'd work a couple of weeks during the day, then a couple of weeks from afternoon till midnight, then a couple of weeks midnight to 8 a.m., the kinds of shifts you were on. But some people didn't adjust very well to that. They had real trouble. But for the most part, they were able to do that. They also liked to do it because there was a little bit of money differential involved in doing that and some overtime, etc., which was another real headache for me at the time I was there negotiating with the money managers about cutting down costs, but at the same time trying to build up enough incentive there that it was going to be well worth people's minds of doing that.

Q: You were there during some exciting developments in our foreign policy. This was when we signed the Camp David agreements I gathered.

FLEISCHER: It was when we signed the Camp David agreements and leading up to that point that Roy Atherton, the regional Assistant Secretary would often come into the Operations Center after some evening event and write a cable to the field. I usually worked during the days and was not there at night, but sometimes if a senior watch officer had to be off or whatever I'd work the night shift or stay on for whatever reason and I remember a couple of occasions when Atherton would come in at eleven o'clock at night after having been at a black tie affair at the Egyptian Embassy or the Israeli Embassy, and having he thought worked out a little piece of the puzzle and coming in and sitting down and drafting his own cables. One time I remember he came in and asked me if he could sit down and do it in longhand if I had somebody who could put it on the machine to sent it out. I said: "We can certainly do that." Another time I can remember very vividly--again this was pre-word processor days--coming in and he sat down at a typewriter, and did a

cable for himself and we sent it out. That's one of the little things I can remember about the Camp David accord.

Q: Then also you were there for Afghanistan when the Soviets moved in there?

FLEISCHER: And the Ambassador was shot.

Q: Yes, McDuff's.

FLEISCHER: McDuff's. I can remember that very well, the time when that happened. And again that was at a time ... I guess we still had the Iranian group going and we had another working group going for some reason, and when I had to establish yet a third on Afghanistan ... We were using every bit of space we had physically ... We had so many people in there working on one kind of problem or another. But when there was a Foreign Service Officer shot abroad or in the case of Iran when the captives were taken that really influenced an operation like no other. It's really a colleague in trouble, or a colleague down ...

Q: We also had the seizure of the Embassy in Pakistan too.

FLEISCHER: The seizure of the Embassy in Pakistan. We had a whole series of such events during that time. What it comes down to what the Op. Center is really the nerve center of the Department when it comes to all of the examples you have just named and the job of all the people there is really to make certain information gets to the people on the 7th floor up to and including the Secretary, that that information is immediately available to them. The operating style of the principals varied a lot, for example. Secretary Vance used to walk in a lot, especially when you had these breaking situations going on to look at the wire ticker, to look at the latest cable that came in not waiting for it to be sent out to his office. Warren Christopher when he was Deputy Secretary, Vance's deputy, especially on occasions when he was Acting, invariably called the senior watch officer several times a night to see if there was just anything he needed to know. Unnecessary in some ways because he would have been advised if there was something he needed to know, but he liked to just call and chat to see what was going on.

Q: Reassure himself?

FLEISCHER: The senior watch officers always keep a log about what was going on and they would obviously log in a call from the Deputy Secretary and when I reviewed those in the morning, he would often call to check and see what was going on, partly to reassure himself, of course.

Q: Now, most of the crises we talked about have been in the Middle East and South Asia, but were there not things going on say in Latin America? I recall this is the time of Somoza's overthrow in Nicaragua and we were having problems in Salvador too.

FLEISCHER: The whole Central America thing started back in those day. We established a working group on a couple of those areas too. I can remember once when ARA had suggested the establishment of a working group. We were using all the available space in the Op Center so we kept one going in the ARA itself at the time. But the great emphasis certainly during the period that I was on there ... nothing compared to the Iranian and the Middle-East situation. Certainly the attention of the Secretary and the Deputy Secretary was focused on these areas, not on Central America. That came later.

Q: Now, when your tour in the Op Center ended, you moved to ACTA.

FLEISCHER: Right. A friend of mine, Ambassador Chuck Flowerree, who recently passed away, convinced me to come down to ACTA, told me that he needed a lot of help; that there was going to be a review of the biological weapons agreement going on and he convinced me to come down and work for him which I did for the next couple of years, spending a lot of time in Geneva and a lot of time at the UN in New York on disarmament matters. Again, an extremely fascinating period of time when the Chinese had just become members of the Committee on Disarmament which is the UN disarmament group which used to meet in Geneva. Dealing with the Russians and Chinese on arms control and disarmament matters in those days was interesting to say the least. Now the truth about a lot of the issues that we dealt with in those days -- including what we knew was an anthrax epidemic caused by a biological weapons plant and of course stoutly denied by the Soviets - has come out from official Soviet documents. We now know of course that indeed was the case and some of that information since the break up of the Soviet Union has become available. It was also my first experience dealing with UN bureaucracy which I must say was not necessarily a pleasant one, spending hours, days, months, weeks debating the meaning of words and sentences. I spent a lot of time trying to negotiate a chemical weapons treaty for example, and the amount of time that went in to these things when you look back on it is really extraordinary. But I guess it all comes down in a sense to the willingness of countries to take a step and to put a certain amount of faith in another country. If you don't have that, no amount of haggling over a phrase or sentence in a proposed chemical ban, for example, will lead to an agreement. Trust and confidence, or at least the absence of strong mistrust, is really the key to those kinds of issues. I think during that time we did make some progress. On the other hand, those same issues are still being fought over today. Now the nuclear non-proliferation treaty is very much on the front burner again. And it looks as if a permanent treaty is not going to be possible.

You know the assignment to ACTA, detail I guess properly speaking, was also very interesting. ACDA has always been sort of a stepchild organization if you will and recently Secretary Christopher had recommended the dissolution of ACTA and incorporating its activities into the Department of State. Personally I think that's probably a good idea. I don't know that you can argue that there's necessarily any reason what amounts to a small independent establishment. There are only about two hundred and fifty officers or something in ACTA and I think it could function very well as part of the Department of State. As it was even in those days we worked very closely with State. For

example in this anthrax thing came out before I flew over to Geneva I can remember working very closely with office directors in PM who were very concerned about the same kinds of issues. Another thing I remember very well about my tour with ACTA was finding out first hand what an incredible bureaucracy the Pentagon is, I had never had an assignment before, except the Op Center where we only dealt with NMCC, the National Military Command Center, which was a very unbureaucratic focused part of the Pentagon. But when you were dealing with arms control issues it was another kettle of fish. I had the mistaken view that if you got a clearance from JCS that that was it. Lo and behold, I learned that you couldn't even get a clearance from JCS unless they in turn got clearances from the individual services. I used to write speeches for the Ambassador, and as a matter of course you clear those through the Pentagon. But they wanted to clear every comma and every adjective. It's impossible to work that way and I found it extremely frustrating until I was able to work out with the guy in the JCS that I worked with. I said: "Look, as far as my understanding is, we clear ideas, I would certainly clear language that was policy oriented language, but I'm not going to waste time arguing about words and commas. So at least back here I was able to work out with people at the JCS kind of ground rules for this sort of thing. But you also had the same kind of problem then in Geneva. You're in Geneva and you got a session going on and when we took a group over to Geneva for a meeting of the committee there was always the JCS representative there and so you could rely on him to clear things back home with whomever he thought he had to clear them with. But again you would run into the trouble that somebody was speaking in a certain committee meeting or something of disarmament group and they wanted to clear what you were going to say. Well often you made interventions according to the flow of the debate and you can't clear all that stuff ahead of time. So anyway it was a new experience for me working with the Pentagon I must say during that whole period of time. I think it's a valid argument that since policy direction for ACTA is always given by the Secretary of State. If you look on charts today you always see a dotted line out to the director of ACTA and it probably makes sense to me at any rate to fold that in somehow into the Department of State. Now in the real disarmament community, the NGO community and what have you which has some influence in this administration with Gore and others, there's a really real dug in resistance to that. They feel I think that if that operation were just part of the overall State Department, that they would no longer have what they would consider appropriate influence on policies. They really were dug in a couple of years ago at the beginning of this administration and it looks as if they may have won the battle again this time. But with the end of the cold war those kinds of issues don't have the same driving force behind them that they did before, so I think eventually that's probably going to happen.

Q: And of course the republican controlled Congress may have some things to say about this too.

FLEISCHER: Absolutely. It was a good experience in any case.

Q: Now at the end of that experience, you went abroad again and were given your own post

FLEISCHER: In fact to Latin America, this time to Venezuela as Principal Officer in Maracaibo, which is the second largest city in Venezuela where all the oil extraction takes place, and again that was an extremely interesting time. I would guess that during that period of time I probably spent at least fifty percent of my time on economic/commercial matters, trying to make sure that a telephone company, (which was just in the beginning stage of thinking about privatization), that US firms had a good opportunity to bid on components. I organized the first ever oil show that we had in Venezuela. The first time that was attempted, we worked with the Department of Commerce obviously. They're the ones who put on these kinds of shows, and the people who do that are real professionals I must say. It attracted huge contingents from the oil industry obviously interested in selling products to the Venezuelan oil industry. After the first go-round, we put maybe a two or three-day oil show, the US companies got about sixty million dollars worth of business out of that the first time we did it. So I was very happy about that and it's continued to this day. That's one of the major oil shows around now, it's the one that was started in Maracaibo some years ago.

Q: Maracaibo is still open I take it?

FLEISCHER: Maracaibo is still open. There were attempts to close it a couple of years ago. It was mostly because of commercial pressure that it was not. It will probably be closed one of these days too. Except for a few very large consulates general in western Europe, it looks as if the name of the game is going to close almost all constituent posts and handle nearly everything out of the capital cities.

Q: How large a staff do you have in Maracaibo?

FLEISCHER: I had four other Americans and then the normal contingent of a local staff. We had a very large USIS operation with a branch public affairs officer, and a binational center. A very successful one. We had a couple of thousand students studying English and all kinds of different activities that we had going on that part of Venezuela. The interesting thing to me there again is to emphasize how the economic interests of the United States have really come to the forefront in recent years and probably the only valid reason for keeping a post like Maracaibo open anymore is for economic/commercial as opposed to political purposes. Political officers in Caracas can read the newspapers from Maracaibo, can come down occasionally, talk to the governor, talk to the mayor, talk to the political leaders, can come down during campaigns, etc. But the thing that we'll miss when we close all those posts is the personal contact that the Consul General or his staff has with the business community, with the top managers in major enterprises around, so that if a businessman comes in off the street, or you get a cable or telex or a message or whatever, and somebody from Houston is coming and they're talking about multi-million dollar propositions with the Venezuelan oil industry, if you're there, and you're living there, and you're on the spot, and you know who to call, who to put the guy in contact with, you got some rapport so you can introduce him, it's not a blind call from Washington. I think it's too bad that those posts are going but I think it's inevitable as the

State Department has to cut down on costs as much as any other department of the government, those are the first things that are going to go, those kinds of operations.

Q: Unfortunately, I think you're right. Now you were there during the Falklands war. Did that have any effect on your acceptance by the Venezuelans? I know that throughout Latin America there were strong views on that subject.

FLEISCHER: Yes, there were. Not so much in Venezuela. It's interesting. If you were in the southern cone, obviously Argentina, but even Paraguay or Uruguay, or even as far away as Chile, I think there may have been more affect than there was in Venezuela. I think the Venezuelans, although they're always Latin American Nationalists and they like to have solidarity with other Latin American countries on such issues, were far enough removed from any real personal involvement as it didn't present any real kinds of difficulties for us in that part of Venezuela or indeed I don't think even in Caracas.

Q: Those were also the years when oil prices were falling too and Venezuela had run up a huge debt. That must have had some effect.

FLEISCHER: That was probably the most interesting part, being in Venezuela at this particular time. Even from a personal standpoint, when we went to Venezuela there was a fixed exchange rate and the bolivar was just a little over four to the dollar and that meant that it was very expensive to live there. It was really an artificial exchange rate and that meant that things in dollar terms were extremely expensive. We seldom bought anything on the Venezuelan market beside food and that sort of thing, and we did go to restaurants and what have you, but we didn't buy goods because they were extremely expensive in Venezuela. On the other hand for the Venezuelans it was just the opposite... in terms of visas for example. The problem for us, visa issuance at that post was not weeding out who should or should not have visas that much at least as far as Venezuelans were concerned. It was a production problem of getting the passport in, actually physically stamping the visa in and getting them back to the people. It was a pure production process.

Q: They weren't going to become public charges.

FLEISCHER: The rate of people who abused that was extremely small. There were many Venezuelans who would fly to Florida to do grocery shopping and fly back. There were a lot of Venezuelans during that period of time who bought condos in Florida with very little down and their monthly burden was not that great. Again the exchange rate was very influential there. Now when the oil prices that you talked about came up and the bolivar was devalued and quickly started falling, very reminiscent of what's happening to the Mexican peso today, although the bolivar never fell quite as low, then that was another story. Instead of a tourist having only to use four hundred bolivars to get his hundred bucks to spend in Miami, it was now double and three times that. So the number of Florida condominiums for example, a lot of Venezuelans simply walked away from them. They didn't have that much equity in them. They hadn't put that much down. They could

no longer afford to meet the dollar payments on those, so they walked away. So there were any number in the Miami area especially in the Fort Lauderdale, etc. inquiries that we would get, and the Venezuelans simply walked away, ...

Q: Just left what they had there?

FLEISCHER: Just left what they had there because they could no longer afford to keep up with the payments. It also had a great effect on the work load in the Consulate just in terms of the number of people no longer traveling. It had a great effect on Pan American. Yes, Pan American was the airline which was still in existence and served Maracaibo, cutting down on the number of direct flights. Again these are all economic issues and again I think it serves to point up the importance of the economic/commercial issues in the foreign service life today and I think it was not the case when I entered the foreign service thirty years ago.

Q: Now, turning to the political subject, there was an election I think in those years. They inaugurated President Lusinchi.

FLEISCHER: You know all over Latin America, and also in Venezuela, we are used to talking in those days about a real economic revolution taking place. There has been an economic revolution. Central governments know that it's no longer appropriate for central governments to have the kind of control that they used to have over the economic systems of their country. But there has also been a political revolution which has accompanied this and I think many people will argue and perhaps correctly so that you can't have one without the other. Venezuela has always very much been a two party state. Powers alternated between one party and the other. Being in Maracaibo was interesting during this election because Maracaibo was the hotbed of the opposition, not of Lusinchi's party. So it was very interesting following political developments there. But since Lusinchi's time, and Lusinchi by the way is still under a cloud of suspicion of having benefited, himself and his family, economically during his position in power. Since his successor from Accion Democratica which was their party, as you know, was driven really from office again under a cloud of suspicion of having enriched himself economically. Whether either one of them will ever come to trial in Venezuela I don't really know. Carlos Andres Perez is still in Venezuela. Lusinchi got out while the getting was good. As a matter of fact he was living here in the United States. I don't know whether he's gone back to Venezuela or not, but there was a great cloud of mistrust then brought about both by the Lusinchi Administration and the administration of Perez, which led to the recent election of the old man of Venezuelan Politics, Rafael Caldera who is having a very difficult time. Venezuela is still better off than many countries in Latin America because of the great amounts of oil reserves that they have there. But there can be I think not much argument that Venezuela has not managed that oil very well over the years. Other countries, Colombia for example which has recently discovered fairly large deposits of oil, are determined that they are going to learn from Venezuela's mistakes and not make the same kinds of errors that Venezuelans have made in managing this huge amount of resources. So Venezuela does have all of these oil resources to rely on, but they are nevertheless ... And I think one of the things that they are going to have to do as

eventually the Mexicans are going to have to do and that is to privatize those resources. This is still heresy certainly in Mexico even as a result of the recent crisis in Mexico, we haven't heard the president of Mexico say: "We're going to privatize PEMEX." What he's going to have to do is work around the edges of that and what I think they will probably start doing is privatizing, let's say some of the petrochemical plants. In Venezuela, it's not quite the same emotional issue as in Mexico. But you got some of the same kinds of problems, so there again and I might add I think that everybody will agree that the Venezuelan National Oil Company, PDVESA, has been better managed than PEMEX. It used to be Esso, and Gulf, and the various other ones. They just gave them different names but kept those separate identities so that there's a little bit of competition between them. They've always been run by well-trained managers. One thing that the Venezuelans did do was use some of their oil money to send engineers to the States and get MBAs and advanced degrees, etc., so that they have a very well trained group of people willing and able to do this. They have not become an employer of last resort which has happened in Mexico, but there has always been pressure to add friends of politicians to the payroll. That has not happened quite so much in Venezuela. But it's still a tempting target. It brings in a lot of money and Venezuelan politicians want to at least tax that and use that in some way to benefit other areas. So eventually it seems to me that that probably is going to be privatized in Venezuela, too. The money that had been sort of flowing into Venezuela from outside for investments has slowed down considerably because of fear that the economy is not as well managed as say in Chile. And when there's competition from Chile, even in Argentina or even in Brazil, with all the difficulty that Brazil has had, Venezuela has found itself in the position of having to make very severe adjustments economically. Selling off state enterprises which grew up almost willy-nilly whereas everybody agrees that there's probably no reason for the central government to own a hotel on the beach, for example, to say nothing of aluminum plants, or steel plants. So all of those I think will eventually go on the auction block. I think Venezuela is one of the countries in Latin America which probably still has a pretty good future. They have made considerable changes in the last ten years.

Q: When you were in Maracaibo, were you concerned about terrorism or drug trafficking and some of the problems that have grown up in recent years?

FLEISCHER: Yes. Most of those have really come up since we lived there. We were concerned I guess, we had private guards at the residence and were careful about things like that. We did not have marines at the Consulate. We had a private security staff and I guess the local police gave us a couple of people out in front. The drug business was really just beginning at the time we were almost leaving Venezuela. It was much more evident at that period of time in Colombia. It was also a problem in the Guajiran peninsula which is that peninsula, almost a no-man's land between Colombia and Venezuela leading up to the gulf. I wanted to drive across that peninsula into Colombia and the State Department security officers in Bogota and Caracas would not hear of it. That had become sort of a no-man's land where automobiles were stolen, let's say in Maracaibo. Venezuela was economically a little better off than Colombia at the time we were living there. They would end up in the Guajiro. Numbers would be erased, they'd be

changed, etc. and before you'd know it, they're in Colombia and being driven by somebody else. There were bands of terrorists there, etc. but we were never really too concerned about our children. We had a very large American school there, because there were a lot of Americans associated with the oil industries there. A lot of US companies had set up operations there partly because the Venezuelans required it, for example, which sold a lot of equipment. Other manufacturing companies which sold to the Venezuelan oil industry and often established their local manufacturing facilities in Maracaibo in order to better serve the oil industry. So there were never really any serious problems I would say connected with either drug trafficking or pure violence and terrorism.

Q: Now you had two ambassadors I believe during that period, Bill Luers and George Landau?

FLEISCHER: Bill Luers and George Landau, both of whom liked to come to Maracaibo. Both Bill and George liked the hot weather for one thing ...

Q: Which you had in Maracaibo.

FLEISCHER: Yes. I didn't particularly like the hot weather, but they liked to come down to Maracaibo. They were very sophisticated and very knowledgeable people. So both ambassadors used to come down quite a bit. Both superb career professionals, I must say. I later worked for George again in another capacity after I left the Foreign Service. He became president of the Council of the Americas which is an association of a couple of hundred large U.S. corporations, mostly Fortune 500 companies that have a lot of connections in Latin America and I spent five years there working for them then in their Washington office after I left the Foreign Service

Q: Now, when your period in Maracaibo ended you came to the US mission of the OAS where you and I worked together under Ambassador Middendorf and you stayed on with Ambassador McCormack.

FLEISCHER: That's right, yes. Now again we have two non-career ambassadors, both of whom had different kinds of strength. In Bill Middendorf's case, he was an experienced Washington hand having been Secretary of the Navy, etc., Ambassador to the Netherlands, so he knew Washington very, very well. It made it interesting I know for you and also for me. It also made it very difficult in some instances that I can remember. And Bill would get bored with what was going on. He always wanted to do something else. It was not unusual for him to drop by the office and say: "Look, come on let's go." And you'd find yourself sitting in Fred Eklay's office over in the Pentagon, expected to be discussing you didn't know what because you had no idea why Bill was taking you over there.

Q: Amen.

FLEISCHER: So it was a very interesting period of time. I liked both guys very much I must say. I'm not sure given the attitude of most Latin Americans however that that is a post to have a non-career ambassador in. Now I'm arguing against what I argued against some time back in our discussion where I thought I'd worked for a couple of non-career ambassadors that I thought in particular situations were extremely effective. I think both Middendorf and McCormack did fine in that atmosphere. I think neither one of them however spoke Spanish. Neither one of them until their posting there had a lot of Latin American experience in dealing with all of these old-time Latin American ambassadors which is the kind of person you usually have representing the countries, fairly senior men. I think maybe it would have been easier for them had they had more Latin American background.

Q: Agree, agree heartily. What were some of these principal issues that you had to deal with there as political counselor?

FLEISCHER: One of the things that I remember most vividly and that I think exists to this day, and is probably doing a very good job at the OAS, was when we established ... got the OAS into the drug business. I should put that a little better I guess. Really got the OAS into the anti-drug trafficking business. Up until that time the OAS ... This has not been a subject with the OAS at all. If you talk to our friend, Irv Tragen, who still runs that operation down at the OAS I think he would tell you that one of the most productive things we ever got into was to establish an inter-American anti-drug council, get the governments together discussing and helping them financially to talk to one another so that each time a new drug problem came up in Venezuela that had already been dealt with in Colombia, I mean, they weren't reinventing the wheel. That has been a very successful operation and that kind of started when we were there. The most frustrating part at the time I was there was the whole Central American imbroglio where the OAS was only really tangentially involved in a way but nevertheless it influenced a lot of things that we did there and I think influenced them not to the good. The Latins themselves were not comfortable dealing with Central American issues in the OAS because they still felt the dominating position of the United States. So they formed their own Contadora Group and operated outside of the inner-American system where they were on their own and not have to then deal with the United States. But then in other things that the OAS was involved in those days, the Central American issues seemed to be impeding and keeping you from making progress in other kinds of areas. One of the things that I think we were never able to accomplish when we were there was to get the OAS really more involved in trade and economic issues. Most of the ambassadors named to the organization who served on the permanent council were more comfortable talking about political issues, and prepared to talk about political issues ad nauseam, but they weren't ready to give the same kind of time and attention and leadership to American economic sort of issues. I think that this was after you had left but it's a time when Dick McCormack was there, who was very interested in economic issues. He'd been Assistant Secretary of State for Business and Economic Affairs. Later went on to become Under Secretary for economic issues in the Department of State. Dick was very interested in economic issues and we tried our darndest to get the OAS more involved in coming trade issues that I think a lot

of people saw coming along. The free trade agreements, sharing of information, but we were never really able to pull that off. Ambassador Bob Sayer worked with us for quite a while trying to get the OAS interested in those things. Now I think with the election of Cesar Gaviria, the former president of Colombia who is very interested in the free trade kinds of issues ... The OAS got very interested in that kind of issues, the negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Now if we are to go on and discuss seriously as the presidents all agreed at the summit of the Americas last December in Miami that we ought to work in this hemisphere toward a really free trade agreement for the whole hemisphere. I think the OAS will get more involved. But when you and I were there, they really didn't want to get involved in that. I think since we were there the organization has also made progress in becoming more involved in elections kind of issues on a non-partisan kind of level, sending observers in. There is now a so-called democracy unit in the OAS which is more involved in these kinds of issues. The whole concept in promoting democracy in Latin America was at the forefront of the founding of the Organization of American States, but in the time when the countries were under the rule of military government and dictatorships and what have you that was never an issue that was very easy to talk about. Now at the time when all the members of the Organization of American States are democratically elected governments it is much easier to deal with those kinds of issues.

Q: Did you find that it was difficult to get your views or OAS views considered in the Department in the various areas?

FLEISCHER: Absolutely. The truth of the matter is US Mission to the OAS which is physically located in the Department of State near ARA front office has always been a stepchild. In some ways the US ambassador to the OAS outranks its Secretary even who in a sense is his boss really, takes orders from him but outranks him. This was a problem between Bill Middendorf and Elliott Abrams I know a lot of times. When Bill was sometimes invited to things or head of a delegation and Abrams as a mere Assistant Secretary was down the totem pole. The only time in my experience there in three years as a political counselor was when the front office of ARA was really interested in what was going on at the OAS was if the decision was made that somehow we needed a cover of multilateralism for whatever it was that the ARA front office was doing. Otherwise there was no real interest in what was going on. I don't think, and this is something that has been debated for years and probably will continue to be debated for years and that is whether the Organization of American States really fits into the policy picture. We're talking about US policy toward Latin America. There are times where it seems to and now we seem to be on the upswing where this administration at any rate has tasked the OAS with certain functions with regard to developing issues for a pre-trade agreement for the Americas that we're talking about. So it seems to be back on the increase again. The pendulum has turned. But at the time that we were there, in any of the three years that I spent there, I can't honestly say that the front office of Inter-American Affairs in the Department of State was really very interested in what was going on. It was always a task for instance if we were having the annual meeting of the Organization of American States, the general assembly meeting wherever it was held. If it was being held in

Washington, it wasn't too bad. You could usually get the Secretary, or if his calendar was really filled up, the Deputy Secretary to come and make a speech and be the nominal head of the delegation. If it was a matter of taking the Secretary to Rio, which we did one year ... George Shultz I remember ... I guess this was maybe after you were gone, Tom, but we got George Shultz to head the delegation and he did come down to Rio and spent at least twenty-four hours. But that was a major effort to convince his staff, to convince the front office of ARA that it was worth them expending political capital on the seventh floor to get the Secretary to do that. That was a major undertaking. Shultz did do it.

Q: Well, following your tour there, you moved in to the inspection corps for a period.

FLEISCHER: Yes, I went to the inspection corps for a good year and a half or so I guess before I finally left the Foreign Service. Again that was an interesting experience for me. And this is still an issue today whether in effect the Foreign Service ought to inspect itself. There is now independent foreign service inspectors. When I first went to the inspection corps, Bill Harrop was the Inspector General. Career Foreign Service Officer, now the ambassador again some place in Africa, where is it? Kenya maybe?

Q: I'm sorry, I've forgotten.

FLEISCHER: I think maybe he's in Kenya now. But be that as it may, the Inspector General was a career Foreign Service officer. Jesse Helms always thought that was not the way things ought to be and I guess it was Jesse who really forced the Department finally to name an outside Inspector General. It is delicate in a way. I mean, here you are, you are a Foreign Service inspector and you're going out to inspect your colleagues, people you know quite well. You're inspecting your friends. That's always been I think a conflict, and you look back through, not wanting to really ... unless you had an egregiously badly-run post, and you had no choice, you were going to get some backing from the State Department in some way, it was almost foolish to write a nasty inspection report on some ambassador or something. I always felt that the most useful thing you could do as an inspector was informal kind of counseling and that didn't necessarily get in the report, or if it did it got in a way that wasn't going necessarily blight somebody's career.

Q: You had to listen. It was important to listen to people.

FLEISCHER: Absolutely. I think I won't name the post because people there are still really active in the Foreign Service now, and there's really no reason to do that. The point is that I remember inspecting a post talking to the political section and everybody was extremely unhappy over the political counselor. They liked him, but felt that he was not letting them in on things. Well. I happen to know that political counselor from other posts and during the time, for weeks or a month that I was at that post inspecting I spent all the time talking with him about what his staff was telling me, and trying to give him suggestions of ways I thought he could improve his operation that would make everybody happy or ... I guess one of the recommendations that I made in the final report had

something to do with that but it was phrased in a way that wasn't going to get anybody's nose really out of joint. But I do think that that whole section, the operation of that embassy, and certainly of that individual benefited from that kind of exchange which he and I had, and his staff and I had during the period of that inspection. And I think he did change the way he operated.

Q: That's what I wanted to ask. Did it have an effect?

FLEISCHER: Yes. Well I knew some of the staff and I followed up on it in other years, and he is still ... That section chief is in a very good position to influence policy in Latin America and I think probably doing a fairly good job of it. I'm not saying that I am responsible for that, but I do think that in the operation of that embassy we did make some headway and that's just one example of it. It seems to me that that's the kind of thing that an inspection corps can do where colleague to colleague is probably very useful.

...at least when it comes to inspecting the Admin. Section let's say of an embassy which I think can more properly be termed an audit where we really are going over the books and checking on malfeasance, property, and big supplies. That can probably be done by an outside group of auditors who'd come in and do that. That makes sense to me. There's no reason to have necessarily foreign service officers going out and auditing books. So I think that's probably what the inspection corps is evolving into. You do need high-ranking... probably some ex-ambassadors to head teams to go down, to have them report to ambassadors. But it was a good experience for me.

Q: Do you think the inspections are chiefly of advantage to the Department or to the post?

FLEISCHER: To both but for different reasons. I think the Department needs to have an audit done. The Department needs to know whether an admin. officer some place ... whether they're using US government funds the way they should be used, etc. I think that's valuable for the Department. For the other operations of the post, to inspect the political section or the economic section or what have you, it's the posts that probably benefit most. I can't imagine of all the reports I wrote which are probably gathering dust some place in the Department of State that that really changed the way the Department of State is operating in any shape or form. But I do think that posts benefit by just having somebody from the outside come in when there are conflicts at posts among senior officers by coming in from the outside, colleague to colleague basis, I think there are ways that you can try to help that situation.

Q: So in summing up I think you'd say that the inspection corps is still germane.

FLEISCHER: Oh absolutely. I think it really is germane to the whole function of the foreign service. I think probably Helms in the long run was probably right, that the Inspector General should probably not be a career foreign service officer. There's an

inherent conflict of interest there somehow. And that when you're talking about malfeasance and wasting taxpayers' funds and that kind of thing on that side of the ledger I think you really need an independent inspector general. That independent inspector general mind you still needs some foreign service officers on the staff to do the kind of counseling and mediating and that sort of thing, but I think it has been fairly ...

Q: I think you put it fairly well, because to have only outsiders would be very difficult since they have to be educated at great length.

FLEISCHER: I think that's absolutely correct. That's absolutely right.

Q: Well then, following your period in the inspection corps you decided to retire I gather.

FLEISCHER: I left the foreign service after that for lots of reasons. One was, I was coming up against a time in grade which I saw coming and I really didn't think I was going to be promoted the following year. There were all kinds of FSO-1s waiting. It seemed to me that you could very easily see the handwriting on the wall, that those ones who were going to be promoted were those who were in an embassy abroad or were involved in some policy issue in the Department that gave them some reason to be differentiated from the herd.

Q: What you mean is that they were in a visible position.

FLEISCHER: That's exactly correct. In some ways that was just the luck of the draw. They happened to be there at the time when something was going on that gave them visibility. That's one of the things I suppose that doesn't make sense about our type of class, type of grading kind of system. But I think you could see that. That was obvious to me. It was a time when a former ambassador I'd worked for I think I mentioned George Landau retired, had just been named president of the Council of the Americas. I had conversations with him and one thing led to another and I knew that I had some place to go and that made the decision much easier to make. I don't regret the decision at all. Those years I spent working for the Council of the Americas issues of Latin America I think were interesting years for me and I enjoyed them. Since I left there I've been spending my time writing and doing projects for the Center of Strategic International Studies and for some other people ...

Q: Including this very nice pamphlet "Colombian policy in the mid-'90s" that you let me have.

FLEISCHER: Which I'm still doing and still enjoying. There are certain things about the foreign service that I miss. I think living abroad is certainly one of them.

Q: And the camaraderie of the people you were with.

FLEISCHER: That kind of thing you can miss.

Q: Absolutely.

FLEISCHER: What I don't miss is the rigid Department bureaucracy, fighting battles that you can never win just because it's the system. That kind of thing I certainly don't miss in the Department of State.

Q: Now, looking back on your career, are there changes that you would suggest in the way the service is now run?

FLEISCHER: Well, yes. I mean I suppose you can't talk to anybody who is no longer there who doesn't have some suggestions to make. I think to give the foreign service credit, it has been changing. A couple of years ago when I was still involved with the Council of the Americas, I started conversations with the director of FSI for example about what I thought I had seen on my trips around Latin America as a non-FSO and somebody dealing with the business community and changes I thought should be made in the training of economic and commercial officers abroad. The director of FSI agreed and got a working group going with some real business people on it and I kind of lost track of that in the last year about what happened. But everybody agreed that there needed to be some changes and some more emphasis put on that kind of thing and I think that has obviously been done. So that's certainly one of the things that came to me. With the shrinking of government, the shrinking of the Department of State, the inevitable shrinking of the foreign service, we have to I think reevaluate some of our long-held dogmatic beliefs and I got into this somewhat when I was in the inspection corps yet, when we were developing a model small embassy for example. You no longer are going to be able to have in every small country in the world, and ambassador, a DCM, or section chief of a big section. That's just not going to work that way anymore. So we have to have to find new ways of working so that we have some kind of personal representation there. But a much more efficient kind of operation where every ambassador ... probably if the truth be known we don't need an ambassador accredited to every country even. We can have an ambassador resident someplace and be accredited to several countries and that happened. If the truth be known, we probably don't even need an embassy in every country. But these are all matters that are going to take a long time to change because, one, the prestige of a country becomes involved, and so those kinds of things are not going to be easy to implement. On personnel matters I don't think we have still come to grips with how to deal with this kind of class problem where a very large number of FSO-1s are still being forced out of the service.

Q: With excellent records.

FLEISCHER: Because there is no place for them to work. Yes, with excellent records, sometimes even with backgrounds, experience that are unique, that the Department and the foreign service are going to miss. We haven't really found out how to deal with that yet. Hopefully we will one of these days. Now the concept of up and out in theory and in general is probably not a bad concept. We do need a constant flow of new people in or

you're going to be caught in some situation some years down the line that's probably going to be as bad as the one which developed a couple of years ago that is crowding us all at the top, but I don't know that we have figured out how to do that yet.

Q: No, we'll be tinkering with this system for the next fifty years I'm afraid Lowell.

FLEISCHER: Undoubtedly.

Q: Now to sum up would you recommend to young people today that they enter the foreign service.

FLEISCHER: Now that is really a very good question because it is one that I have been discussing with my son who is a sophomore in college and who maybe is interested in this kind of thing. I don't think I would hesitate to recommend that. Yes. But it's like everything else these days. The change of work place and this. I am not sure anymore that you enter as an FSO, I don't even know what it is these days, the numbers, but at the bottom level with the idea of necessarily spending twenty or thirty years there. I think there are people who are going to do that and I think they will continue to have very good careers. The way the workplace is changing I think there are people who are probably going to enter, spend ten years, half a dozen years, fifteen I don't know, and they will probably leave and have productive careers somewhere else. I think we're going to see that more and more. But I think that if my son Michael wanted to do that and we've sat and talked seriously about it, I would recommend that he do it. I think there's nothing like living abroad, getting to know people in another society, getting to know well another language, somehow trying to interpret all of that to people back home I think is interesting, more than interesting. I think it's invaluable in that no matter how speedily our communications become and a desk officer back here can pick up a telephone or touch a computer key and be in instant contact someplace else. You're still going to need somebody there it seems to me serving a function that I've described is kind of comforting what's going on back home.

Q: Well thank you very much Lowell. This has been extremely interesting. You've had a career that I think is as exciting as most people have had. You have had interesting posts and met people who made history.

FLEISCHER: Thanks Tom, it was fun to do.

Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan speaking on behalf of the Oral History program of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. The date is January 31, 1995.

End of interview