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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bio Sketch; Growing Up in Philippines

Three Years in a Japanese Internment Camp
- Unusually lenient camp supervisor
- Instances of terror, years of boredom
- The clandestine camp radio – A source of news from the outside world
- Torture by Kempei-Tai (Japanese secret police)
- The Kempei-Tai presence and actions in Philippines was a Japanese mistake

Postwar: Job with Associated Press in Manila

Short Return to Internment Camp Discussion
- No close associations between Halsema and camp personnel except with initial commandant
- Nellie McKim, a camp internee with education and long residence in Japan was great asset to internees

Study Culminating in an MA Degree at SAIS Brought Contacts with Professors whose Influence Guided Halsema into International Information Work

Side Bar: Moral Values of Filipinos Explain Why Many Collaborated with Japanese Occupiers

Motives that Led Halsema into International Information Work

After Long Wait for Security Clearance, Entry into USIE, a USIA Predecessor, November 1949 Assigned to Singapore
- Muslim riot over a Dutch woman
- The urbane Malcolm McDonald and his interests
- Birth of the USIS library in Singapore and its effectiveness

Halsema makes friends with young Chinese who later became leaders in Singapore
In addition to standard USIS program, Singapore USIS also had task of supporting British in their counterinsurgency efforts in Malaya
Effect of Korean War outbreak on USIS Singapore; too much money and inexperienced personnel suddenly flooding the post

USIS Officers Often Make Contacts with Persons who Subsequently Rise to Prominence but are Given Little Notice by Political Elements of Embassy because They are not Prominent at the Time

1952: Home Leave and Short Temporary Assignment to Press Service, USIA, Washington; A Good Learning Experience

Summer 1952: Assignment to Manila; Embassy Covertly Assisting in Getting Magsaysay Elected President
Halsema's research led to conclusion that many USIS reports on numbers of people reached by USIS media were exaggerated and mass audience approach was a mistake
Evaluation of Magsaysay and comparison with Kennedy

Thailand, 1954: Assistant Information Officer Program Being Built Up to Assist Thai Government's Psy-War Effort

Transfer to Washington, Early 1955 – Special Assistant to Sax Bradford, Assistant Director, USIA, for Far East

Halsema Becomes Deputy Assistant Director, East Asia – 1956

George Hellyer, Then Assistant Director of USIA for Far East Gives San Francisco Speech that Counters Official Thinking in Department of State and Gets Him in Hot Water

Halsema to National War College – 1957-1958

Reminiscences of Earlier Trip Around World with Then Deputy USIA Director, Abbott Washburn: Riots in Hong Kong; Cairo as Arab-Israeli War Began; Rome at Beginning of Hungarian Uprising

1958: After War College: Office of Policy and Plans, Headed by Saxton Bradford; Bradford Moves and Halsema Becomes Acting Head

June 1961: PAO in Cairo
Comments on historic role of Arab culture, the sources of real power in Egyptian society, the value of contacts at levels below the political top, Egyptian intrigue

Principal USIS objectives in Egypt during Halsema's tour as PAO
Anwar Sadat given leader grant to visit US in days when he was speaker of national assembly

Agency Makes a Mistake in Not Allowing Officers Extended – Or Better, Second – Assignments in the Same Country

1967: Washington: Director of Training Division, Office of Personnel
Young officers headed for Vietnam received training heavily oriented toward psy-war, which often distorted their beliefs and attitudes toward later USIS work
Agency's Attempt to Examine its Internal Workings – 1970

Halsema Spends Year – 1970-1971 – as Special Assistant to Deputy USIA Director, Henry Loomis

1971 – PAO/ Chile
Situation in Chile was turbulent. USIA caught between Allende government supporters and strong opposition forces, both within Chile and in Washington.
Except for cultural programming, USIS operations were difficult
US did not assist in Allende's overthrow but had talked so much about possible action that we were accused of participation

A Critical Inspection Report Leads to Halsema's Return to Washington
Washington: Office of Research. VOA survey of language and transmitters results in highly controversial report

1979 Supreme Court Decision Supporting Foreign Service Requirement for Retiring at Sixty Years of Age Necessitated Halsema's Retirement

Brief Retrospective

INTERVIEW

Q: I'm not going to say very much myself, Jim, but what I would like to have you do is to start out with a brief description of your background--I think you had a particularly interesting one--how you were educated, but also I'd like a little bit about your experiences during the World War II when you were interned in the Japanese camp. After that, about your education and background in media before you came into the Agency, and what it was that got you started in USIA. That's enough for me to say to begin with. Why don't you start at the beginning and cover the ground briefly that I've just talked about.

Bio-Sketch; Growing Up in Philippines

HALSEMA: Because of my father's participation in the American Army in World War I as an officer in the Corps of Engineers, I was born in Ohio in 1919, but at the age of five months we returned to the Philippines. After a brief period in Zamboanga, during which my father fell ill from malaria, he was transferred to Baguio, which had been the summer capital of the Philippines, as its Mayor and District Engineer of the province of Benguet and City Engineer of Baguio, a position he held for seventeen years. I grew up in Baguio, which was an international small town, and I was accustomed to dealing with people from a variety of cultures from the time I was a small child.

The United States was a distant place in those days. It took at least three weeks just to get to California, and then several more days to get to Ohio, where my parents came from. So it wasn't until 1927, when I was eight years old, that I realized that Americans, like Filipinos, had relatives. Except for one year in Ohio when my mother wanted us to go to public school, as she had, my education was at Brent School in Baguio. In 1936 I graduated from Brent and went on to Duke University.

After graduation, I returned to the Philippines by way of the Japan-America Student Conference in the summer of 1940 and became the editor of the Baguio edition of the Manila Daily Bulletin, the American-owned newspaper. I was in that position until the Japanese Army marched into Baguio on the 27th of December 1941. I spent the next three years as a guest of the Japanese Army, during which I had the same kind of experiences as most people who are interned--a few moments of terror and years of boredom.

Three Years in a Japanese Internment Camp

Q: I've heard you say before that you felt the man who was a superintendent of your internment camp was a much more sympathetic and lenient administrator than there were in many of the other camps. Would you care to say a few words about that fact?

Unusually Lenient Camp Supervisor

HALSEMA: Yes, Rikuro Tomibe from Kyoto, a commandant for one year, was a man of great kindness and intelligence. We became friends in camp. When he left us, he wrote a poem in Japanese to me in the back of one of my notebooks, saying that while during the war we were enemies, some day peace would come, and he hoped that we would remain friends; and indeed we did. We kept in touch with each other until he died in 1984. We called on him at his home in Kyoto just a few days before his death. He was one of the people that I was certainly glad survived because he represented all that was the best in Japanese culture.

Q: Was he in the military at the time?

HALSEMA: He was a civilian employee of the military at that point. Later on he was brought back into the regular Army, and he fought with the Yamashita forces in northern

Luzon until the surrender. I saw him when he was a prisoner of war and I was an AP correspondent, the job I took after I was liberated in Manila in 1945. I was able to talk with him and learn about his experiences and why he was a witness in the war crimes trial of General Kuo, who was the commandant of all of the prison camps in the Philippines. I learned that he was being held in a special prison for people who were suspects. Bob Sheridan, a Catholic priest who'd been in our camp, and I talked to the War Crimes people and found that they were only holding him on general suspicion. We said we'd be glad to testify in his defense; that he'd been a very considerate person. They said, "Well, in that case, we don't have anything against him, we'll send him home," and indeed he went.

Q: You mentioned there were a few instances of terror. Did this result from the early part of your internment?

Instances of Terror, Years of Boredom

HALSEMA: Well, there were several occasions at the beginning when we didn't know when families would be separated. We were told by the Japanese that we were going off to an unknown destination and we didn't know whether we'd see the members of our family again; when I was taken in by the Kempei-Tai and tortured to find out what I knew about how news was getting into the camp; and then, of course, during the liberation when we were in the middle of the battle of Manila. But most of the time it was quite a boring experience.

I was on the garbage crew that took the trash out of the camp and dumped it, which was one of the better things to do. I turned out a daily sheet of one page--plus one carbon copy that went down to the camp hospital. It was a daily summary of what was going on in the camp.

Q: Did you find that, contrary to what was true in a lot of camps, there was adequate food within your internment camp?

HALSEMA: No. At the beginning and the end, our food supply was very inadequate. But, basically, I would characterize our treatment, as opposed to that of prisoners of war, as being neglect rather than a deliberate effort to make us uncomfortable.

Q: Was your whole family interned with you?

HALSEMA: Yes.

Q: You were there as a unit?

HALSEMA: Yes. As a matter of fact, there is an oral interview on this whole subject, which was published by California State University in Fullerton. I'll show you that.

Q: Yes, I'd like to see it. Do you have any other comments you want to make about the internment period before we go on to your immediate post war activities?

The Clandestine Camp Radio - A Source of News From the Outside World

HALSEMA: Well, I think two things. One of them was that I was very interested in the subject of people's morale, and I shared a secret that very few people in camp knew. That was a hidden radio. We could hear the outside world by short wave, which was forbidden, of course. I got used to reading the Japanese newspaper in English, which was published in Manila, and piecing out what was actually happening from what the Japanese were telling us. So that was an early training in learning what was going on without having access to accurate information.

Also, knowledge of what sorts of things people believed. For instance, at the beginning there were wild rumors about our imminent liberation by MacArthur riding a white horse, or something similar. Whereas, in the latter part of the internment period, people were beginning to be rather discouraged about ever being able to get out, so that my role, given to me by the people who had the radio, was to give out information as a cutout between them and the camp.

Then at the end of '43, we got our one and only Red Cross shipment. The Japanese went through it with considerable attention to be sure there were no forbidden materials, like books, or magazines, or newspapers. But they didn't look through it as carefully as I did, and I found a number of scraps of newspapers in the shipment and was able to put together enough information that I could give a lecture to the camp about the conditions in the United States in 1943, including the fact that the American Army had adopted a new helmet, which I saw in a piece of "Gasoline Alley" comic strip that showed Skeezix landing on Attu.

I guess the most cheering news which I gave was a scrap of a financial section of the New York Times. It was a tiny piece, and on it was a quotation for Metropolitan Water Works of Manila bonds which were due in 1990, and they were selling above par. And I said, "Wall Street thinks we're going to get out." [Laughter]

Q: [Laughter] That was interesting. When you had the radio, was this a shortwave radio?

HALSEMA: Yes.
Q: And to which broadcasts were you able to listen?

HALSEMA: Well, we could hear them all, but I suppose the most reliable one we got, as far as news about the European War, was Radio Saigon, which was at that point controlled by the Vichy French. And we could also get, of course, the San Francisco radio KGEI...

Q: Oh, you could?

HALSEMA: BBC, and a Soviet station in Shanghai.

Q: So you must have had a pretty good indication, then, if you could get the San Francisco station, as to how the war was going, couldn't you?

HALSEMA: Yes, although we didn't have access to the radio throughout the period. It got to be too dangerous in the latter part. I think that I had a pretty good idea of what was happening in the war in general terms. I guess we missed some of the later landings in New Guinea, but on the basic trend of the war I got a pretty good idea of what was happening.

Q: Were there very many other Japanese personnel in control of the camp? The reason I ask this is that it seems rather unusual that over a period of two or three years somebody didn't discover or know that you were getting access to information from the outside. That seems to me to be a rather hard secret to keep.

HALSEMA: Yes. Well, as I said, I was asked about this question by the Kempei-Tai, and I told them that I was allowed by the guard to listen to the Japanese-controlled radio in Manila on the guardhouse porch. And I said, "You know, I compare information that I get from time to time." The Kempei-Tai were not skillful at their questioning; all they really wanted was a confirmation of what they already believed. So they never tumbled onto the other things I knew.

Q: But some short wave broadcasting frequently gives rise to certain crackles and shrieks and that sort of thing, and I wonder if somebody hadn't heard that in the camp.

HALSEMA: No. The man who put this together was an electrical engineer. He got a couple of telephone earphones to clamp on one's ears to listen. I guess all the camps had at least one secret radio. These are things that later influenced my career because in camp I was involved in trying to give out the kind of information which would counteract adverse reactions on the part of the internees. The other one was, of course, learning how to find out what was really going on in the place by reading between the lines, which I gather the people in the Soviet Union, for instance, have been adept at for years.

Torture by Kempei-Tai (Japanese Secret Police)

Q: You mentioned that you were tortured by Kempei-Tai. Was this extensive, or was it quite severe?

HALSEMA: Yes, they hung me up by my thumbs.

Q: I'd say that was rather severe.

The Kempei-Tai Presence and Actions in Philippines Was A Japanese Mistake

HALSEMA: Yes, it was. There's a book on this subject which has just come out in the Philippines, which lists me as one of the subjects in a war crimes trial, and that lists some 47 different methods the Japanese used for torturing people. It also points out that basically the Kempei-Tai was a great mistake in the Philippines because they used unreliable interpreters, since most of the Kempei-Tai did not speak English or Philippine languages, and they contributed to the failure of the Japanese to win over the Filipinos, rather than to be an adjunct to their war effort.

Q: These interpreters that they used were Japanese?

HALSEMA: No, they used local people mostly. There were some Japanese who were available, but they weren't too many. They just didn't really find out anything more than what they already suspected. They didn't parlay their information into new fields that they didn't already know something about.

The other thing which I found that was a great education in camp was learning that the Japanese came in all shades, and that the only real difference between us and the Japanese was that their system encouraged the negative aspects; whereas, ours discouraged it. The people had just as great a variation as we did. That really confirmed an opinion which I'd had before, living in an international town in which there were people of all races.

Post-War: Job With Associate Press in Manila

So, after we were liberated in Manila in 1945, I got a job with the Associated Press helping the correspondents there interview the prisoners of war and the internees about their experiences. I stayed in that job until 1948, and became a war correspondent, mostly in the Philippines, but also covered the so-called "police action" of the Dutch, then trying to take back their colony in Indonesia.

Q: You were down in Indonesia when that was going on?

HALSEMA: Yes. But most of my work was in Manila with the Associated Press.

The reason I left that kind of work was the fact that I found the only real interest in the United States about the Philippines was about sensational negative kind of news; the eruption of Mayon volcano, a movie star shooting his girlfriend, a prison break. That kind of story got coverage, whereas a story about economic recovery or something along that nature was never used.

Q: You're saying that the AP itself was not interested.

HALSEMA: Well, it wasn't the AP. After all, you know, the AP is a co-operative. It was what their newspapers wanted, and that's exactly the same situation that prevails today. I've just recently come back from a reunion of our Baguio internees in Los Angeles, and I was interviewed by one of the local papers and the only part of the story that they used was the part in which I was hung up by my thumbs. They weren't interested in the fact that we had a lot of close associations with Japanese, and that this had been an experience which had its positive as well as its negative aspects.

Short Return to Internment Camp Discussion

Q: I come back to a question I asked earlier that sort of got lost because we started talking about the Kempei-Tai. Were there other Japanese in the camp who were assisting the Commandant of the camp, and did you establish any very close relationships with any of them, if there were?

No Close Associations Between Halsema and Camp Personnel Except with Initial Commandant

HALSEMA: No, we had a small guard in camp, and a group of civilians, some of whom were local Japanese in Baguio. This situation changed from time to time, and we had all together three different Commandants. The last one was a real S.O.B., who had been disgraced, it turned out, and was demoted in rank and sent to run this civilian internment camp, more or less as punishment, and he took out his feelings on us.

There was one Japanese who was the official interpreter whose name was Yamato, and he'd been a schoolteacher from Osaka. I did get to know him quite well, but, let's say, I didn't have any great respect for him. He was one of these people who was a failure at everything he did, including that he wasn't really a very good interpreter.

Nellie McKim, a Camp Internee with Education and Long Residence in Japan was Great Asset to Internees

Most of our contact with the Japanese was through Nellie McKim, an Episcopal missionary whose father had been the Episcopal Bishop of Japan. She was educated in the Pieeresses' School in Tokyo, and she spoke court Japanese. Our last commandant, who was from some hill town in western Honshu, I guess you could call him a hick--it'd be sort of like somebody from the Ozarks--was so nonplused by her language that he always addressed her as "Honorable Aunt," and then he'd get very angry at himself speaking with a prisoner that way. [Laughter]

Q: I thought maybe he was turned off by the fact that she was addressing him in such a high class...

HALSEMA: But his reaction was automatic. Then, of course, he just didn't like this. But Nellie McKim was a great asset to us because she not only understood the Japanese language, she also understood Japanese customs. So she was able to give us an approach on how to deal with Japanese in ways which would appeal to them.

For instance, my parents were allowed to live in Baguio, after the first couple of years, because they were well-known people and they were vouched for by Filipinos that they would not be any problem to the Japanese. The one time I got out to see them--we were tearing down a building so we could take the materials to use in our camp, and, of course, we had a Japanese guard with us. Thanks to Nellie, I knew how to appeal to him. He didn't understand much English, but he knew a few words, and I pointed out that my parents were living next door and that I wanted to pay my respects to my parents, he couldn't resist. I'd learned from Nellie McKim, to appeal to his basic code of filial respect.

Nellie was insightful in many ways and was a great help to us. She further contributed to my education in terms of understanding that you have to learn peoples' values before you can appeal to them. You cannot use your own values and expect them necessarily to be worthwhile in persuasion.

Q: Well, we've pretty well, I think, covered the internment experience, unless there's something that you think we should go into.

HALSEMA: No.

Q: Let's get back for a short time to your period as an AP correspondent. Did you do any work in Japan for the AP during that period?

HALSEMA: No. I've visited Japan; I've never lived there.

Q: I wondered if you covered any stories in Japan while you were there.

HALSEMA: No. The only places I worked for AP were in Manila and in Indonesia, which was only a period of several weeks.

Let's say the reason I left the AP was, one, this feeling of discouragement, that the things I was interested in and I thought were important, were not important to the American press. It's the same problem that the American press has right now. I've just come back from the Philippines, and there are lots of things going on there which are of great interest, but which never get into the American newspapers because they're not negative or sensational enough.

The other one, was that, thanks to my newspaper contacts, I bought some stock in the San Miguel Brewery and sold it a year later and had enough money to take a year off. [Laughter]

Q: If you'd held onto it longer you could have taken several years off. [Laughter]

Study Culminating in an M.A. Degree at SAIS Brought Contacts with Professors whose Influence Guided Halsema Into International Information Work

HALSEMA: Yes, but this really was a great opportunity; it was in 1948, and I came back to the United States and went to the School of Advanced International Studies. A professor there was Paul Linebarger, who'd been my professor at Duke University. He encouraged me to come back and get my master's degree.

Q: Was SAIS in Washington at that time, as it is now?

HALSEMA: Yes. But of course, it was quite a small school.

Q: Yes.

HALSEMA: Christian Herter and Paul Nitze were very much involved with the affairs of the school. I found my year there was really fascinating and I learned a great deal. I particularly wanted to get more information about economics, which I felt I hadn't gotten enough of, and to get a wider scope of information about the post-war scene. Frances Wilcox was one of our teachers, and the NATO legislation was just going through the Senate, and he gave us, of course, an insider's view of what was happening in the Congress. Dean Thayer gave us a seminar on international law and diplomatic practice, which was extremely useful because it was founded on his own practical experience, as well as his legal training. In my subsequent career, for instance, the point that is so often not picked up on by media reports, is the difference between consular and diplomatic establishments. But I was in Washington...

Q: Talk about class discrimination in that case.

HALSEMA: Yes. The whole year there was extremely valuable to my subsequent career. Most of my class went to work--a lot of them for ARAMCO, a lot of them for the CIA, and a few of us for the State Department.

During that year I also met Alice Cleveland, with whom after I had gone on a couple of dates, I realized was going to be my wife. I got a background in how Washington operates which was also very useful.

Wentworth Linebarger and Catherine Porter, and, of course, Paul Linebarger were really responsible for my deciding that I wanted to get into the international information work.

Side Bar: Moral Values of Filipinos Explain Why Many Collaborated with Japanese Occupiers

Q: Just before we go into that, I had one question I had meant to ask you when we were back in the Philippines. There had been various stories about the degree of Filipino *collaboration with the occupation groups, and I wondered if you got any sense of that. Of course, you were somewhat divorced from it because of your internment, but what do you have to say about it?*

HALSEMA: Yes, I was directly involved with it because the trials of the collaborators was something that I helped cover when I was in Manila. I also covered the war crimes trials of Generals Yamashita and Homma.

But the whole issue of collaboration was a complicated one. It's been explored in a book by Steinberg, who's now president of Long Island University, who points out that the Filipino sense of values made this a much more complicated thing than it would seem, because Filipino values are basically different from ours. Most foreigners don't realize this, which makes it very difficult to understand why Filipinos do some of the things that they do. What they did as collaborators made a lot of sense in terms of their own value system.

They felt that with their collaborators--their motivation was the most important thing, not just the fact that they collaborated. Therefore, if people collaborated because they had to do so to save their families, or because they were trying to protect their families and their people from the Japanese, they were regarded as being people who'd done the right thing.

The people who collaborated for their own benefit, were the ones that they did not regard as being worthy of protection. But you notice that the Filipinos eventually decided to just forget the whole thing. The collaborators were, for the most part, returned to where they had been before. The same phenomenon is going on now. Just the fact that you worked for Marcos doesn't taint you.

Q: Was there any feeling in the Philippines, or among other people who then went to the Philippines, that perhaps to some extent, the Filipinos looked upon the Japanese as potential liberators from the American domination because of the fact that they still felt that the Americans had not done well by them after the Spanish-American war?

HALSEMA: No. I think there was only a handful of people, relative to the total population, who were really enthusiastic about the Japanese, and most of them lost their enthusiasm after they'd been exposed to the Japanese.

The Japanese and the Filipinos basically don't get along too well. Their value systems differ. The Filipinos, for one thing, are Christians, and their idea of what is right and wrong and the Japanese idea is not the same. It's one of the reasons the Japanese, I think, at the end were so cruel to the Filipinos, was that they said, "How could people who are Asians like we are, be so different?" And it's certainly a part of the Filipino psyche today, that the Filipinos regard Americans as members of the same family with whom they can quarrel, but, no, don't let strangers get into the act. I think, basically, you could say that was the attitude, and still is, really. "Don't you get into our family quarrels, because you're an outsider."

Probably the most revealing thing is that on my trip to the Philippines last month, I noted that the main post office in the Makati, which is the main business district of Manila, has a number of slots for mail. One says "local," one says "domestic," and then there's "foreign." Then there's one for "New York," and one for "San Francisco." [Laughter]

Q: You know, just a side comment, the war crimes trials in Japan were looked upon completely differently than the Americans probably thought they would be. As far as the Japanese were concerned, they weren't taught any lesson by it. To them a person who commands the fighters in a war and loses, has lost face, and it's expected the victors will simply put them to death. So as far as Yamashita was concerned, it wasn't a matter of his being declared a war criminal, no matter what he might have been responsible for. Just the fact that, well, we knew the conclusion of this from the beginning, because that's the way it's always has been.

HALSEMA: I think those of us who covered the trial were almost unanimous in believing that Yamashita had not been found guilty of the crimes he was charged with, because he didn't really have any control over the troops that committed them--I always felt that if we had played that smart, that we would have turned the prosecution over to the Japanese and had him tried for atrocities against Japanese civilians, for forcing them back up into the mountains where they died of disease and hunger, without any help from the Army.

Q: It probably would have been much better understood by the Japanese themselves and, I think, perhaps even by the Americans. It was a misreading of what the war crimes were supposed to accomplish, and it never accomplished what American authorities hoped it would.

HALSEMA: Yes. I always felt that Yamashita was, by our standards, unjustly found guilty, because we hadn't proved him guilty of what we were charging him with. Any precedents that came out of that were the wrong ones.

Q: Do you think you've said enough now about the Philippine situation and also your time in SAIS? Is there anything further you want to cover at that point?

Motives that Led Halsema into International Information Work

HALSEMA: No, I think what I really am trying to get at is, what were the motives that led me to want to get into the overseas information program.

Q: Why don't you go into a little elaboration of that now, because that's very pertinent to what we're going to cover as we go along.

HALSEMA: I think, for one, the exposure to other peoples and their cultures, I've been with all my life. The idea that there was something which would be more important than movie stars shooting their lovers, and the fact that there were currents in the world which

I found were threatening to our own way of life, were things I wanted to do something about. I certainly emerged from the war as a very patriotic American, and I did not believe that we could get along with the Communists.

I didn't point out that while I was a correspondent I had interviewed the head of the Hukbalahap guerrillas when he was out in the rice paddies of central Luzon leading the revolt against the Philippine Government. It was the first interview he'd had since he'd gone underground, and I found his point of view interesting. He was obviously combating some very deep-seated injustices in the Philippine system, but I didn't think he was going about it in the right way.

Q: Do you think he was a committed Communist, an ideological one, or did he know enough about the Communist to really have that kind of a feeling?

HALSEMA: Luis Taruc--and he's still alive, by the way--was a person who was an idealist, and I think that eventually he came around to believe that this was not the way to achieve his objective.

Q: So you would say that he was not an ideological Communist in the usual sense of the word in that it was his ideal which he thought perhaps the Communist system supported and, therefore, he should fight for it as a means of getting a betterment for the Filipino people?

HALSEMA: Yes. He was an idealist, and I think he eventually became disillusioned. He was not a--you know, when you think of the dyed-in-the-wool Communist, he either has to be stupid or cynical about what he's doing. I just don't understand how anybody could rationally think otherwise.

Q: From the standpoint of the current insurgency in the Philippines, have you had enough contact with it or studied enough about it so that you can make a comparison between the ideology of the Huks and the present Communist insurgency?

HALSEMA: I would say the present insurgency is probably much more sophisticated than the Hukbalahaps were. Not the top people, but certainly this is a much better organized, and much more nationwide phenomenon than the Hukbalahap, which was confined largely to Tagalog-speaking areas of Luzon, whereas, the New Peoples' Army is nationwide in scope.

Q: But is it ideologically motivated by a Communist philosophy?

HALSEMA: Yes. Of course, when you use Communist philosophy today you're really talking about such a wide variety of ideas. I say that probably the New Peoples' Army thinks more along the lines of Pol Pot and his Cambodian barbarians and murderers, than the idealism of the past.

Certainly the New Peoples' Army today is a threat, but it's not an imminent threat. I don't know of any army that's had more experience at counter-guerrilla operation than the Philippine Army. Their problems really are more of their own making.

My experiences, as I was talking about in terms of my motivations for getting into the Foreign Service, there were also the practical considerations that I was planning on getting married, and I wanted to have a reasonable source of income. All of these were things which led me to have an interest in the Information program--which, at that point, was under the Department of State--and, of course, the influence of knowing people who were already in the organization. I knew Katherine Porter, and I knew Went Linebarger, and Paul, of course. Paul was rather disappointed that I didn't go to work for CIA. Nevertheless, he felt that the State Department was the next best alternative. [Laughter].

Q: An accepted evil.

After Long Wait for Security Clearance, Entry Into USIE, a USIA Predecessor, November 1949 Assigned to Singapore

HALSEMA: My problem, though, was that I had lived and worked in such a variety of places, that my clearance process took from April until October before I got an okay. I think the only reason I got one then was the fact that I had known Ed Lansdale in Manila from--and an interesting thing, as I was reading his recently published biography, I noticed that the author has the same problem I have, which was where was Ed Lansdale in the early part of 1945? He claims he didn't come to the Philippines until 1946, and yet my memory is that I met him in Manila in April 1945. And this new biography doesn't do anything to change that mystery of what he did. I think Ed Lansdale vouched for me--I gave him as one of my references--the fact that my interview of the Hukbalahap leader and my association with the entire Politburo of the Philippine Communist Party was all a part of my journalistic duties and had nothing to do with my ideological convictions. So, eventually, I did get a clearance, and the first of November of 1949, I was sworn in over in the--what was the building that was, you know, the other building of the...

Q: Walker-Johnson?

HALSEMA: Walker-Johnson building. Yes, that's where.

Q: Down on New York Avenue.

HALSEMA: Yes. I'd even forgotten--now I can picture the building, but it's hard to remember the Washington of 1949.

Q: I had the same experience in a recent interview--I've forgotten which one it was now--but I also couldn't quite remember the name of the building. I got Walker, but I couldn't remember whether it was Johnson, or something else. Finally between the two of us, the person I was interviewing and I we were able to identify it.

HALSEMA: So.

Q: Then, what was your first assignment? Well, you got married then, before you went out to...

HALSEMA: Yes. Alice and I had a honeymoon that lasted from the 18th of June until the 1st of November, which I think is a fairly good period, during which we had seen most of the United States. [Laughter]

Q: Pardon my interrupting, but when I first met you and Alice in Singapore, she recounted how she did a good deal of the driving and that you frequently laid down in the car and hung your feet out the window on your trip across the United States. [Laughter]

HALSEMA: We traveled quite a bit that summer, but I was glad to be getting back to work. We arrived in Washington--I think it was the day they had a crash at a National Airport and Helen Hokinson was killed, one of the passengers.

Q: That wasn't the crack-up where the plane collided with the Bolivian Air Force pilot?

HALSEMA: Yes, I think that was it.

Q: That was the one?

HALSEMA: That was it. I remember listening to that on the radio as we were coming into the District. We were assigned to Singapore and, of course, this was a trip which was very interesting for Alice, because she really had never been outside of the United States before. We flew to Manila first, and we stopped over there for several days just after Christmas, and spent New Year's in Baguio, my hometown. We met a number of old friends in Manila, including Ted Lewin, who was the gambling czar of Manila, you know. Ted had been in the Chicago mobs and then went to Los Angeles.

HALSEMA: And then went to Shanghai, and then came to Manila and ran all the gambling casinos. We were his guests at his casino and he said, "Now Jim," he said, "anything you want, except, don't play." I'm not a gambler, so I wasn't planning to, but nevertheless he was explicit that his friends didn't play. He didn't want them exposed to his odds. [Laughter].

Muslim Riot Over a Dutch Woman

So we got to Singapore at the beginning of 1950, and this was the time that the so-called Malayan Emergency was under way. It set a precedent, because every foreign post that I had was a place where something was happening which caused the country to be in a state of crisis while I was there. I don't think I caused any of these crises, but I certainly was involved in them. [Laughter]

Singapore itself was regarded as being relatively safe, being an island. Although we managed to have a bloody series of riots over a so-called Maria Hertogh, who was a Dutch girl who had been adopted during the war by a Javanese Muslim family.

Hertogh. H-E-R-T-O-G-H, I believe is the way it was spelled. She was raised as a Muslim, and after the war her parents tried to reclaim her. This caused a great deal of stir among the Muslim Malay population of Singapore who felt that a true Muslim was being dragged away from their midst. This led to a three-day riot in which a number of people were killed, and the AP man was seriously hurt, so that even Singapore itself was not quiet during our period there.

The Urbane Malcolm McDonald and His Interests

We were in Singapore. At that point it was the headquarters of the British overall representative for Southeast Asia, who was Malcolm McDonald, the son of the British Prime Minister during the Labor period. I guess he was coordinator--the exact line of command I was never too sure of. But Singapore was a British crown colony, Malaya was then a British protectorate, and, of course, there were Sarawak, Brunei, and other places in Borneo, which were also part of his jurisdiction.

McDonald was a very urbane, intelligent, and delightful person to know. His mistress was Elizabeth Marcos, whose brother later became President of the Philippines. At that point she was a journalist in Singapore. We knew her quite well. She used to come to visit us, and we were present among the handful of guests at the time that McDonald married her off to an Australian newspaper man by the name of Michael Keon. We were so full of champagne at that point, that I have regretted ever since that I didn't tape-record the introduction of the bride by McDonald. It was full of double-meaning allusions to their relationship. [Laughter]

Q: What was his motivation? Was he about to return to Britain?

HALSEMA: No, his wife was about to come from Canada for one of her rare visits.

Q: I see.

HALSEMA: But aside from that, McDonald ran a very good show out of a part of Singapore called Phoenix Park. He was in charge of all British operations in the area, including their propaganda to counter the Communists. Our main job was to help the British in this process.

Q: Your USIS work?

HALSEMA: Yes. Along with our conventional job of representing the U.S. I was a hundred-percent addition to the staff of Henry Lawrence, who was our PAO. Henry had been in Singapore for about a year by the time that I got there. At that point, they were just beginning to build up the program. Our consul general was Henry Langdon, who was a very old fashioned Foreign Service officer from the old days on the China circuit. Like most of the people who were in Southeast Asia at that point, they were refugees from the mainland, who were being sent to places supposedly because such places had a Chinese minority--in Singapore, of course, it was a majority--and it was assumed they would be well thought of there.

But Langdon thought very little of the Information program. I remember at one point he confided to me, "Jim, you know, there's no future in this kind of a program that the Department is running, but I think you could probably do very well as a public relations man at one of our larger embassies. I'm sure that there will always be need for that." But the powers that be were building up the program.

Birth of the USIS Library in Singapore and Its Effectiveness

One of the first things that Alice did was to work with two of the local employees. One was Bill Lim. The other was Rita Han, wife of a Chinese Nationalist air force officer who was on Taiwan. Lim was a Singapore Chinese who'd been educated in the United States and who affected, at times, a southern accent. Alice once asked, "Why do you speak with a southern accent?" and he said, "Because Ah'm from south China." [Laughter] He was a great guy.

Neither Alice nor her two assistants had ever run a library before, but at that point USIS didn't have a librarian, and we wanted to open one. Henry Lawrence was a bachelor, and his house was filled with the books for the library which had been sitting there for several months because there was nobody around who could get them on the shelves. So the three amateurs got the library together, so that by the time the USIS librarian from Jakarta finally did arrive to check on the progress, he found that the library was there and in operation.

Q: Did they set it up on the Dewey System?

HALSEMA: Yes, they had read books and they'd put it together the way it was supposed to be done. The library was opened on Raffles Place, right down in the center of Singapore, a few blocks away from Change Alley. The consulate was in a building right on the waterfront, so it was a short walk between the two buildings. That was the first expansion we had.

Q: Did it get a considerable patronage?

HALSEMA: Oh, yes. Because it was the first free library that they'd ever had in Singapore, and the whole idea...

Q: First one of largely English books, I suppose, because of the long British occupation.

HALSEMA: Yes. The library was really a big addition to the life in Singapore, because a lot of people were able to use it who couldn't really afford to belong to subscription libraries. My office was in the same building, which was a converted warehouse, that was full of the smells of the various spices that had been stored there. A very dusty place that gave me a lot of allergies that it took me years to recover from. And it was hot, it was not air conditioned. That was considered a luxury in those days, which consuls general enjoyed, but not the troops. Henry had his office in the consulate, and I had my office in this library building. It was really quite a good set-up for me because it meant that I really wasn't directly under the thumb of the consul general.

Halsema Makes Friends with Young Chinese who Later Became Leaders in Singapore

As a former newspaperman, of course, I felt at home with journalists. And there were coffee shops on Raffles Place, and we could go down and most of the press were in that general vicinity, anyway. There was the Straits Times, of course, the British newspaper, and the new Singapore Standard, but there were several Chinese newspapers like Nanyang Siang Pau, and I got to know the newspapermen very quickly, as a former journalist. I also got to meet some very interesting young people around there, like a young lawyer who'd been educated at Cambridge, who was regarded with rather a great deal of suspicion by the Consulate and the British authorities because he was considered to be pretty far over to the left. Certainly pinko, if not further. His name was Lee Kuan Yew.

Q: The subsequent prime minister.

HALSEMA: Yes. It seems to me this is one of the places, if I could give an aside, where USIS has had a great opportunity, and usually took advantage of it, and that was to get to know people who were not in the center of things, who were too young to be important, but who were obviously comers and the kinds of people that we would send on leader grant programs, for instance.

I've always noticed that USIS knew people before they became important and got them on leader grant programs. The nominations that came from the embassy usually were people who were already well established in their jobs and were prominent for one reason or another.

I felt that some of the most useful work that we did was done through our operating in fields that were not really considered important by the diplomatic or AID establishments.

Q: By any chance, did you get Lee an exchange appointment, or didn't you get to that?

HALSEMA: No, we didn't. I also knew the previous leader in Singapore, Lim Yew Hock, a labor leader. We gave a grant to Lim, and several of the newspaper people. You know one of the big problems, I feel, in USIS, is the fact that we're engaged in a work which is long range in nature for the most part. Things like the leader grants, that whole cultural side of the operation, and yet we never stay in the post long enough, or ever really go back to find out what's happened to the people that we used to know. This has been one of our great deficiencies, our lack of institutional memory.

Q: A lack of adequate policy, I think, on the part of the Agency. They insist that you move around, rather than to establish or reconstitute previous contacts.

HALSEMA: Yes. It seemed to me that every time you arrive at a post, you have to reinvent the wheel. You have pick up all of the knowledge that your predecessor acquired, and usually you have to do it by yourself. You don't get it from your predecessor because he's gone and there's no process. Of course, I don't know about now. I've been ten years retired.

Q: It's not invariably the case, but I think you're basically right. There's very little overlap.

In Addition to Standard USIS Program, Singapore USIS Also Had Task of Supporting British in their Counterinsurgency Efforts in Malaya

HALSEMA: So that you have to start in all over again. But we had in Singapore the conventional USIS operation with the media and the cultural side. Then we had this third side, which was more like what we did in Vietnam, for instance, where you were helping out in a psychological warfare program. In Malaya, our job was to assist the British. We were not doing any of this directly, but we did turn out materials and that so-called Campaign of Truth was during my stay in Singapore. Incidentally, at that point, Singapore was the USIS post for the whole Malaysia region.

Q: To the extent you covered Malaysia, it was covered from Singapore.

HALSEMA: Yes. We got to have a branch in Kuala Lumpur, but it was under Singapore, so that the whole arrangement was different than it is now. We worked with, for instance, the university in Singapore. There were a number of very interesting British professors, including Parkinson, the author of Parkinson's Law, and we, of course, had quite good relationships there. Although there was a real problem. In those days, the British did not recognize American university degrees as being valid, and one of the big jobs that we were working on when I was left Singapore, was to convince the authorities. Bill Lim, for instance, graduated from Northwestern University, but he couldn't get a government job with that university degree.

Q: So you were propagandizing the British as well as the local population?

HALSEMA: Yes. Singapore was very much a British crown colony in those days, and indeed, I guess, it was most epitomized by the time when Henry Lawrence and the consul general were both out of town and it turned out that I was by default temporarily the senior American present in the consulate general. So we got invited by default to a official party being given by Sir Franklin and Lady Gimson--he was the Governor of Singapore, and we got a real touch of Victorian colonial atmosphere at Government House where dinner was served--it was typically British, it was practically indigestible. But there was a printed menu and on the left-hand side was a list of the selections which the police band played outside the window during the meal. After the meal we were separated.

Q: Men from women, you mean?

HALSEMA: For a while, yes. I was escorted to the bathroom. I told my escort that I could take care of my own needs, thank you. [Laughter] Then we were escorted back eventually to join the ladies. Alice will remember particularly, you'll have to get the story from her about the time that she talked about cricket. You'll ask her about this later. But this was really Victorian British colonialism, whereas Malcolm McDonald's establishment--he lived in a palace that he rented from the Sultan of Johore across the causeway in the town of Johore. Malcolm McDonald was the kind of person that when you arrived at his palace the first thing he said would be, "Jim, take off that goddamn tie." [Laughter] Very informal and quite different.

But because of the Emergency, life was quite dangerous on the mainland. We had one example of it when we established the branch of the consulate in Kuala Lumpur. We got a new vehicle that had to be delivered up there, so our Malay USIS chauffeur, Ahmad, drove it up there and then came back on the train. The train was attacked and he was killed.

Q: As a matter of fact, he will be one of the names on this new plaque we're going to put in the lobby of USIS, because you've recommended him for inclusion. His name will be on the plaque.

HALSEMA: Well, I'm glad to hear it. He was an innocent victim of this indiscriminate kind of attack. But this was going on all the time, so we usually traveled by air. I didn't see nearly as much of Malaya as I would have liked. When you went up to the consulate--I remember one time we spent the whole evening at dinner at the consul's house and you could hear the guns firing not far away.

Q: A little unsettling.

Effect of Korean War Outbreak on USIS Singapore; Too Much Money and Inexperienced Personnel Suddenly Flooding the Post

HALSEMA: It was. And, of course, the other event that first year we were there, I was visiting the newspaper editors on the Malayan mainland, and the Korean War broke out. We were on the Peak above Penang, spending a weekend up there. I spent the most frustrating 24 hours in my life. The funicular that went up the mountainside where we were didn't run on Sundays, and I didn't have a radio, and there weren't that many radios around. So here I was trying to find out what was going on. I knew the war had started, but I didn't know anything else about it until Monday when I was able to get down the hill.

Q: How did you know that it had started? Had you heard a radio broadcast?

HALSEMA: No. I'd heard about it just as we went up. There had been rumors that there was a war on. Well, the Korean War had several effects in Singapore. One was, of course, the alarm that the U.S. Government had that the whole of Southeast Asia was about to erupt, and that the Chinese were going to be a fifth column who would take over the whole area.

So there was great deal of emphasis on expansion of USIS operations, as you know full well. So we got a big increase in staff, and it was a time of great disruption. The problem that nobody seemed to realize--and yet we've done this several times--was that when you're trying to do a job and you've got a whole bunch of new people who are untrained, you spend all your time trying to take care of these new people. Most of them had never been in Asia before, hadn't a clue as to how to live in that area, or what to do, had had no briefings, and they were really a drag on what we were trying to do. I think that the net would be a small loss, if anything, because it took at least a year before they became effective.

Henry Lawrence, of course, had been with SCAP in Tokyo, and he knew something about Asia, having studied Japanese during the war as a Navy officer. He'd been in Singapore a year when I got there. I'd grown up in the Philippines and had visited Singapore and knew something about the area. But these new people were really completely unprepared for the kind of situation they were getting into.

Q: And they got no training in the Agency before they came out, because I don't think the Agency knew very much about it either.

HALSEMA: I've written my father's biography. I've finished it now, and one of the things that I learned in researching it was that the Americans who were sent out to join the Philippine Civil Service like he was in 1908, didn't get a briefing about the Philippines either, but that was a part of a deliberate policy. They wanted to establish an American kind of organization and didn't want them to know too much about Filipino customs. But this was just a pure, I don't know, lack of--it was one of these places where the government decided to do something and throw money at it.

Q: Well, as you know, the Agency itself was really very new at that time, because although there was a short interlude after the war when they still retained the elements of the old OWI, the program was completely eliminated for about a year or so until the Smith-Mundt legislation was enacted. Then State had to reestablish the whole thing. So *this was 1950, and really the Agency itself, or rather, one of its two predecessors, USIE, had not been in existence more than about a year.*

HALSEMA: I mentioned this thing about the Foreign Service having been mostly staffed by people who'd been refugees from China, that was true. Of course, the only experienced people that were around were also people with experience in China, like Harry Hudson and Earl Wilson, for instance. That tended to put a Chinese slant on operations in places like Southeast Asia. Now that was very useful in Singapore, which had a largely Chinese population, but not so useful in the other countries where the Chinese were an important minority but still very much a minority.

Q: And often suspected, too.

HALSEMA: Yes. So our operations even included under this Campaign of Truth making a film called "Kampong Sentosa", which was a full-length feature film. They sent out a film crew from the U.S. to do it. It wasn't finished by the time I left in early 1952.

Q: Would you mind spelling the name of that film?

HALSEMA: Yes. K-A-M-P-O-N-G, which is village, and Sentosa, S-E-N-T-O-S-A, which was the name of the village. This was complete with villainous Communist guerrillas preying upon these poor Malays, etc. This was all carried out by a crew that more or less had very little to do with us. It was all being run out of Washington, so I hope it didn't do as much harm as it might have. [Laughter]

I found that the most important things that we could do, as far as Singapore was concerned, was the usual USIS operations in terms of establishing contact with the future leadership and that, as I've given you an example, I think we did get to know some people who were much more important in the long run than anybody suspected at that point.

USIS Officers Often Make Contacts with Persons who Subsequently Rise to Prominence but are Given Little Notice by Political Elements of Embassy Because They are not Prominent at the Time

Q: I'd like to ask, do you think that your contact with people like Lee, who subsequently became leaders in the Singapore government, had any bearing on a favorable relationship or a favorable opinion of the United States, or was that too uncertain at that time, and because you were disconnected from it later is it difficult for you to make any comment?

HALSEMA: The British in Malaya-Singapore were certainly no friends of the United States. We were allies but only in some directions. At the same time, I think, we were perceived as a threat to their continued rule in Singapore and Malaya. We did make a good many contacts with people who were subsequently important in Singapore. A good example would be a young reporter for Nanyang Siang Pau by the name of Wee Kim

Wee, who is presently the President of Singapore, which is largely a ceremonial post, but nevertheless it does indicate how prominent he was in the country's affairs.

Q: Would you spell the name of the newspaper?

HALSEMA: N-A-N-Y-A-N-G, which is the Chinese and Japanese name for Singapore. S-I-A-N-G P-A-U, which was the South Seas City Newspaper, I guess is the way you translate that. This was rather typical of the kind of operations that we've had. We got to know the working stiffs, which Wee was. Alice was just recalling how he used to come to our house and just sit quietly and talk, or even look at some of our books and magazines. It was this kind of contact that it seems to me has been of greatest importance, because these people got to know us as Americans, and talk to us and realize what we were like. In many cases, we were the only Americans they had ever really known that close up. I think that the influence that we've had has always been underestimated even by ourselves. In particular because of this phenomenon and the fact that we go off and seldom see the people again, we don't really know what happened to many of our contacts.

Q: Do you have any way of knowing whether any of your successors retained those contacts or not?

HALSEMA: I don't know. When I left Singapore, which was February 1952, we had all new staff--the staff eventually had nine people on it. From one when Henry Lawrence was there, and two when I arrived in '50, we got up to nine. They were floundering around when I left. I trust they made the contacts.

Q: You had no role in introducing them?

HALSEMA: Yes, I introduced people to my...

Q: You don't know whether they took advantage of it?

HALSEMA: Of this, I have no way of telling. I talked to Haines Mahoney, who was later on PAO many years later in Kuala Lumpur. I think they had built up quite a collection of contacts. What I'm really suggesting here is that our role has always been to expand the range of contacts that the formal diplomatic establishment has, and I think we've done pretty well at it. A notable example is the fact that we naturally come into contact with media and the higher education people, and the arts people, who, if they're sufficiently prominent, the embassy people probably have met them. But we very often get to know people when they are far enough down the ladder that others don't pay that much attention to them.

Q: I think this is a very significant thing to note, and I'm going to note it here for the record, and that is that people like Fulbright and a great deal of academe in United States persist in finding this complete separation between the informational side and the cultural side of the program, and there's no realization on the part of these people that the two are completely intertwined.

If you're doing your job as a PAO, you know both of them, and you cultivate both of them. Even on the part of some of our own people, and on the part certainly of the embassy, there is a lack of appreciation of the political influence that is held by people that are in the artistic and performing-arts world. They assume that this is lost because these people are not necessarily politicized.

HALSEMA: The word intelligentsia is really pejorative in the United States, but it seems to me that that is the audience that we naturally have abroad. It's the forming members of the intelligentsia that we usually get to know, that are--for instance, I would be willing to bet that our people in Warsaw right now probably know more about the new prime minister than anybody else in the embassy, because he was a newspaper editor. Our effect is usually long range, and it's building on a series of contacts. It seems to me it has the greatest value, in that I get to know somebody, you get to know him later, he remembers both of us and our successor has further influence on him. But who's to say what it is because none of us have felt more than one piece of the elephant. And it's that way that we've had more influence, I think, than any of us have even given ourselves credit for, and yet we can't really give ourselves credit for it because we don't know the whole picture.

Q: We don't know, and the influence on the people with whom we dealt is so multitudinous after we leave that it's hard to sort out the portion of it which applied to our career of work and knowledge with these people, and what they've experienced in later times. But I, like you, agree that if we have established friendships with people, even if at the time we did not think that they were necessarily a future political benefit, the fact that we did it probably has had a long range effect that's very difficult to sort out.

HALSEMA: I think that in the life that we led--Singapore was probably the dullest of the posts that I've been in, because you felt that Singapore was full of people who were immigrants and for whom it was not home. I think that situation has changed now. I haven't been back to Singapore for many years, but the fact that Singapore has been an independent nation now for a generation means that people have a sense of identity they lacked then.

For instance, even going to Jakarta, in many ways Jakarta was a much more difficult place to live in. This was when Willard Hannah was in Jakarta. Willard used to come up, and occasionally had business in Singapore. He'd stay at our house, and the first thing he always did was take a hot tub bath because there was no way to do it in Jakarta. [Laughter] But I envied him in the sense that he was at the center of a culture, which Singapore was not. Singapore was everybody's place of residence, but not their home when we were there.

I also regretted the fact that we didn't see more of Malaya, or that I never got over to Borneo. But we had our hands full. There just weren't enough people there on our staff until later on to make it possible to take any time off.

But from the subject at hand in Singapore, the only time I left Singapore on business were these occasional trips up-country to newspaper editors. One trip I made just by myself into Johore. I'd always wanted to see a rubber plantation and a tin mine, and I went to a relatively safe area in Johore state, found everybody armed to the teeth. Of course, while we were in Singapore, the governor of Malaya was killed in an ambush not far from Kuala Lumpur. So I think on the war side, we did quite a lot of work in terms of supporting the British.

Q: Your support was primarily furnishing them with materials. You didn't do any of the actual field work?

HALSEMA: No, we didn't distribute material. The British built up a very sophisticated propaganda organization for psy-war in Malaya, which I think, had we studied it earlier, might have saved us a lot of time and effort in Vietnam. But Hugh Green, the brother of Graham Green, who later on became the head of the BBC, was running that show in Kuala Lumpur. I think it would have been helpful if we'd been more in Kuala Lumpur than in Singapore at that particular point. And as the Korean War went on, of course, this became such an important element of our activity that the nature of the job that I'd been sent out originally to do was more in that direction. Of course, I found useful the fact that I'd lived in the Philippines in dealing with Malays. I didn't know the Chinese that well, but the Malays seemed quite familiar, although they were Muslim, not Christian. The other thing that I wanted to say was that when I joined the Foreign Service, I started out at the bottom of the ladder. What was it? The grade was a...

Q: S grade.
HALSEMA: S-8. I think that was the lowest grade you could get.

Q: No, there was an S-13 grade.

1952: Home Leave and Short Temporary Assignment to Press Service, USIA, Washington; A Good Learning Experience

HALSEMA: But I mean as an officer. So we were very junior. Then Charlie Arnot came in as head of the Press Service in Washington, and he made a trip around the world to look at our posts. He took quite a fancy to me, and I said I really needed to know something about Washington operations. He said, "Well, I need to have somebody who could give me some kind of perspective on a part of the world that I know nothing about. All my experience has been in Europe."

So I was very fortunate at the time of our first home leave in the winter of '52 to be given a temporary detail. I spent the spring and summer of '52 in Washington working for the Press Service. That I found was extremely useful to me because I got my first experience of how Washington operated and where these materials were coming from. I hope that I was useful to them in terms of trying to point out that we really were not turning out material for Americans. We were turning them out for people of quite different cultures.

Q: We haven't gotten over that difficulty with the media service operations in Washington yet, if we ever will.

HALSEMA: No, and I think the only way we ever could would be to get more people working for the media who have field experience. I think that it's been very good that we've used Foreign Service officers at the Voice (VOA), for instance, that's been a great help there. But this ought to be true in all the media, except the trouble is that they're such technical operations.

Q: It's more difficult in the Voice (VOA) I think, than it is elsewhere, because if you haven't had broadcasting experience it takes you quite a bit of time to get on to what's going on in the VOA operation. It's even more difficult also because the old radio hands resent these newcomers coming in who don't know anything about it, and they're not necessarily willing to indoctrinate them.

HALSEMA: There is a lack on both sides. But I spent that time--it certainly was an education for me to be exposed to Washington. I found that those were the days in Washington they didn't have air conditioning either, except in the assistant directors' offices. Some of the hottest days of my life, I think, I spent that summer in Washington.

Charlie was, I felt, a very inquisitive, intelligent person, who really tried to do what needed to be done. He was, to me, one of the best people, as an outsider who was media director, that I'd run into, because he was willing to learn. So many of them were there to tell you what to do. That was the time that they were getting their regional service center--called the Regional Production Center then, wasn't it? The time that we went to the Baguio PAO conference of 1951 we saw that that operation was just getting going. We were just beginning to get some of their output when I left Singapore, and the idea of having a regional magazine which could be adapted to each country was a very good one, I thought. That was, I think, Charlie's idea, as I remember it. Maybe it was Earl's. I'm not sure.

Q: I don't know. Each one, I think, claims a certain part of the credit for it. Probably that's true.

HALSEMA: Certainly that concept was one which was applicable to our media output generally. In other words, have a central product, but then adapt it to the local conditions.

Summer 1952: Assignment to Manila; Embassy Covertly Assisting in Getting Magsaysay Elected President

Then in the summer of '52, I was assigned to Manila. In '51 when we were there for the PAO conference, the Hukbalahaps were regarded as being a real threat to the government.

By the time we got there in '52, the menace had greatly reduced because Magsaysay had become the Secretary of National Defense.

The job in Manila--I was information officer, Ralph Busick was the PAO, and Harry Hudson was his deputy. Ralph, of course, was an old Philippine hand, and Harry was a China hand. I think a lot of the China hands suffered from the problem of thinking that the rest of Asia was like China and, of course, it isn't.

The operation had been built up greatly under this Campaign of Truth, and we had branch PAOs all over the place. From the extreme northeast end of Luzon, down to the extreme southeast of Mindanao, there were USIS posts, all manned by eager young men of varying capabilities. I felt that they were a great bunch to live out in some of these situations they were in, but most of them didn't know beans about the Philippines.

Q: One of them was Bernie Lavin, whose interview I've just gotten through editing. He was down on one of those branch posts, and I've forgotten which one it is.

HALSEMA: We were heavily involved in the U.S. Embassy's support for a free election, which was our way of supporting Magsaysay. That's pretty well spelled out in the Lansdale biography, which I think is well worth reading from what I've seen. I've learned a lot of things about Ed Lansdale from that that I never knew before. But, of course, I had met Ed, as I said, in Manila.

By the time we got there in '52, Ed was already starting work in Vietnam. I remember one time he came into my office, he'd just come back from Saigon, and he said, "The trouble is, I can't get Diem to take off his necktie," and it gave me an idea that Ed got along fine with Filipinos, but he didn't understand the Vietnamese.

Q: You mean, he couldn't get the Vietnamese to take off their neckties.

HALSEMA: Yes. And I don't think he could have gotten Diem--Diem was a Mandarin. Ed was very effective working with Filipinos. The Filipinos and Ed just clicked. They really got along beautifully, but the Vietnamese were a different kettle of fish. Ed knew that he didn't know anything about Vietnam, and in the book it points out that the only person in the embassy in Saigon that would talk to Ed was George Hellyer, and that George had been his real right hand. He was the one who was Ed's interpreter when he first talked to Diem.

I'm sorry you didn't get an interview with George before he went because there were some fascinating things about their psy-war operation--getting the people from North Vietnam to move south--that he was involved in at that point. I knew Ed quite well, and I knew his Philippine contacts quite well.

One of the things that I stumbled on was the fact that Magsaysay was being groomed to become a presidential candidate. I learned this from Lorenzo Tañada, whom I had met when he was the prosecutor in the war crimes trials. Lorenzo Tañada had been a prosecutor at the trials of Filipinos who had been collaborators with the Japanese, and Tañada told me all of the tactics that were going to be used for getting Magsaysay elected. I reported this to the embassy, and it was received in utter silence. What I didn't realize was that the embassy was involved in this and that Bill Lacy, who was the DCM, was intimately connected with Ed Lansdale and the support for Magsaysay. Of course, what's not understood by most people, including Filipinos, was that our role was not a direct one of "you vote for Magsaysay," but the indirect one was "have a fair election because it's so important." And of course if you had a fair election we were quite sure that Magsaysay would win. We did a lot of work to support that with media, but our activity was largely in terms of the importance of good government and the importance of free elections.

Q: Let me ask you, were you doing this strictly on your own, in the sense of your own as USIS, or were you in collaboration with the embassy in the process of doing this?

HALSEMA: No. This was embassy policy, to support free elections.

Q: Then you were not necessarily coordinating your effort directly with the embassy?

HALSEMA: Yes, we were through the PAO. I was so junior there that I was never involved in any of the senior staff meetings, so I don't know. But let's say what we were doing was certainly with the knowledge and approval and endorsement of the embassy.

The big problem then, as I guess it's been over the years, is the problem of audience. For what audience were we designing this material? Some were still under the illusion that we could go for a mass audience, so our materials were put out on that basis and with all our outlets we certainly got a lot of paper around the Philippines. How effective it was, I wasn't sure, but Harry was certainly a great supporter of "give them everything we've got." I wasn't so sure.

Halsema's Research Led to Conclusion that Many USIS Reports on Numbers of People Reached by USIS Media were Exaggerated and Mass Audience Approach was a Mistake

Those were the days when we had mobile units going around through all the barrios. And as information officer, of course, I was in charge of the media operation. I began to suspect that maybe some of our figures were inflated. So one of the things I did was get into some operations research on my own. I had a wonderful Filipino secretary who really helped me a great deal, and she even did some public opinion surveys.

She lived outside of Manila in a small town that I thought was much more representative of national opinion than Manila was. She would do some surveys for me on what people thought about various issues. One of the things that I came across were the figures on the number of people who attended some of these outdoor movies that were shown by our mobile units and just calculated--Alice is the mathematician in our family--but how many people could stand in an area where they could both hear and see the movie. Remember, those things were shown on relatively small screens, and they had a couple of small speakers out there in front. Well, I concluded that even if people stood on each other's shoulders, there wouldn't have been enough that could get in that range to have come up remotely to the number that we were talking about.

This made Harry very unhappy when I said that I didn't think the figures were accurate. I even looked at the census statistics on the populations of the villages included and I came to the conclusion that even if the people from the surrounding barrios had come too, they couldn't have had that number of people.

So, I think there was a certain amount of self-delusion in our reporting. On the one hand, there were many successes that we had which we could never really assess because we weren't around long enough to see the ultimate effects. Conversely, that there was a lot of figures claimed for our media operation which you'd have to look on with some suspicion.

Q: You were using a lot of, I presume, pamphlets and posters and that sort of thing, and that, I would presume, was also put out by the RSC, wasn't it?

HALSEMA: Yes. It was right in town. Manila has always had a disproportionate call on the resources of the establishment.

But I think the question of audience, at that point, I began to think about this in terms of--obviously, people like Arthur Goodfriend, who was one of the great proponents of the mass audience...

Q: He later became somewhat of a critic thereof.

HALSEMA: Yes. But I pondered this a lot as information officer in terms of effectiveness, and I came to the conclusion that we really, by the very nature of operations, were not essentially a mass audience kind of an organization, that really our targets should be people who were actual, or potential influences on their own society. That we couldn't hope to reach the masses. Not only because of the physical problems involved of distribution, but also because we needed to have what we had to say interpreted by people who knew their own people, and that we couldn't hope to do it successfully ourselves.

Q: Another factor that I wanted to ask in passing, did your mobile units distribute a lot of these pamphlets?

HALSEMA: Oh, yes.

Q: The question is what was the degree of literacy of the people to whom you were distributing these?

HALSEMA: Well, the Philippines has a high literacy rate, so this wasn't the problem in the country.

Q: Were these in English, or Tagalog?

HALSEMA: They were in both, it depended on what the material was.

Q: Because in Thailand the problem we had--and the conclusion to which I came--was that we were wasting a good deal of our time and effort because the villagers to whom we were bringing this stuff in the boondocks, were so basically illiterate that I didn't think really a great deal of it was getting across.

HALSEMA: Over the years this is something that I've given a great deal of thought to. In later years, for instance, I didn't see much value in having USIS branches all over a country; that there were only certain places that had an influence on events in the country as a whole, and that we ought to concentrate on those.

For instance, in the Philippines, instead of having 10 or 15 branches, that maybe two would be right. Maybe, I might add, today three. But there are places that influence the rest of the country, and that as those places go, so goes the country. A good example would be the so-called "EDSA Revolution" in the Philippines in 1986.

The revolution, so-called--I think it's more of a restoration--took place entirely in Manila. The rest of the country was not involved in it. It was affected by it, yes. But the course of events was determined by people who lived in one city.

Q: I think the situation in Thailand, just as an aside, was different because what we were shooting at, particularly in north Thailand, was to immunize to the extent possible the villagers against the Communist recruitment of, and subsequently response to the insurgent group. It was not a matter of a nationwide propaganda effort in many respects, but primarily to keep villagers, who were little in touch with what was going on in Bangkok, from succumbing to the Communist insurrection which was going on in the countryside.

HALSEMA: Well, of course, I'll come to that because I was in Thailand after the Philippines. But it seems to me that in a situation like that, a mass effort really has to be something that's done by the some local organization, rather than by ourselves.

In the Philippines we had a role to help Magsaysay get elected. Another one was to work with the Philippine armed forces in their psy-war effort against the remainder of the Hukbalahaps. That was the thing that our provincial offices did a lot with.

My problem as a junior officer in the embassy was that I had lived in the Philippines, of course, for my whole adolescence. I had worked there as a newspaperman, and I had contacts which a junior officer normally doesn't have in an embassy. The result was that Alice and I were invited to the kinds of affairs where the only other embassy representative was Ambassador Spruance and his wife. It wasn't our fault; these people who were inviting us were old friends of my family. I got contacts with people like Tañada, as an example, from my newspaper days. And it didn't go over too well with the rest of the embassy, so it was rather an uncomfortable position to be in.

Subsequently, when I became more senior in the Agency, I always turned down suggestions that I go to Manila to be the PAO because I knew Filipinos and I knew that they would expect that as an old friend, I would be in a position to give them favors like leader grants or influencing the consul to give them a visa, or that sort thing, and that I would be torn between my official duties and those of my knowing the Filipinos as well as I do. Things that they would expect me, as their old friend, to give them.

It's just so natural to help a friend that I didn't want to be in that position. As a junior officer, of course, I could say, "I don't have any influence in the embassy, because I'm too junior." But it's a great problem, and that's one of the real dangers, it seems to me, of being in a place too long, is that you get to know so much about a place, and people get to know you so well that they expect that you can use their value system. That probably would go against the idea of having a person in a post too long.

The British, I noticed, got around this in places like Thailand by having a resident Britain who was a real expert on the country, but who had no place in the chain of command. He was an advisor to the embassy.

Q: Sort of like the British process of having a permanent under secretary of their ministries, in a way.

HALSEMA: Except that this particular man that I knew had no authority of any kind. He couldn't exercise it. But he was the one who knew who slept with whom, and who was related to whom, and all these things which are of vital importance in a society, but which require years of local knowledge to acquire. So that's the other side of the coin in terms of length of stay at a post.

I traveled around the Philippines as much as I could, and I certainly enjoyed the time that I was there. It was a period when the U.S. was still very much number one in terms of the position of influence in the Philippines. Then came along the events of 1953 which led to Dien Bien Phu and the collapse of the French position in Indochina with the whole pressure on countries like Thailand. I was tapped to go to Thailand to join Donovan's staff.

Evaluation of Magsaysay and Comparison with Kennedy

Q: Before we get to Thailand, I'd like to ask just a couple of questions about the Philippines. Magsaysay is generally looked upon, I think, as having been a great *president. On the other hand, I have come across a few detractors who felt that Magsaysay was, not entirely, but somewhat of a myth, and perhaps wasn't really as great a man as he's given credit for being, both in the Philippines and in the States. What is your own opinion?*

HALSEMA: Well, I guess, Magsaysay was like John Kennedy. Their deaths were unfortunate but fortuitous as far as their reputations were concerned, because they were never put to the test of having to deliver. Both of them faced hostile congresses. Magsaysay really never was able to get the Philippine legislature to enact the kind of programs that he wanted, and neither was Kennedy. Remember, it took Lyndon Johnson to get the new Great Society going, because he knew Congress and they would do want he wanted.

So I think Magsaysay was certainly the best president the Philippines has had. But whether he would have been effective is conjectural. He just didn't live that long. He certainly has a great reputation.

Q: He certainly did.

HALSEMA: I think it was well deserved. He certainly was a charismatic figure.

Q: He was an activist too, wasn't he?

HALSEMA: Yes. I have a picture of him when Nixon, who was Vice President, came out to the Philippines. I was the press officer for that visit. And there's Magsaysay leaping over a fence with one hand just to go over to see. He didn't want to walk around it to get to where the Vice President's plane was. That kind of an activist.

Q: Did he deserve a good deal of credit for having resolved the Huk insurrection?

HALSEMA: Yes. I think that this was something that he and--Ed Lansdale was obviously his tactician. But Magsaysay understood Filipinos very well and he knew how to reach them. They made a great team. I think that whole operation was a success and that that was the kind of intervention that was justified. The trouble was, it gave us delusions that it could be replicated elsewhere.

So, did you have any other questions?

Q: No, I was going to say you went on to Thailand after the Philippines.

Thailand, 1954: Assistant Information Officer Program Being Built Up to Assist Thai Government's Psy-War Effort

HALSEMA: Yes. I was drafted to go to Thailand, whether I wanted to or not. Alice was about to produce a child and we had only been in the Philippines for 18 months, but none of my protestations seemed to do much good. I left the Philippines just a few days after our daughter, Peggy, was born to go to Thailand. Alice brought Peggy and the rest of the family when Peggy was only six weeks old, so we really arrived in Bangkok under very unfavorable circumstances.

Q: This is when, in '54?

HALSEMA: January '54. But it was part of a build-up that brought people from all over the world to beef up the USIS Thailand staff, to essentially assist the Thais in the psy-war effort.

Q: Who was the PAO, Meader?

HALSEMA: No. Jim Meader, who had been the PAO in the Philippines, was...

Q: Jack Pickering?

HALSEMA: He came later. Meader was the PAO. Earl Wilson was the information officer. There was no regard for what people's previous jobs had been, so I was in the very uncomfortable position of having been information officer in Manila and then being assistant information officer in Thailand, which I didn't think was quite the right way to treat me. I knew nothing about Thailand, I didn't speak the language, had no briefing for the post, and was suddenly launched on this new psy-war effort. So I was uncomfortable physically and psychologically, but I did enjoy working as part of a first-rate team. I thought the people who were sent there knew what they were doing, and that working for Ambassador Donovan was very inspiring. He was a great leader.

We were in Bangkok at the transition period between it being a picturesque backwater port which had all the attractiveness of the old days, and it's becoming a modern city. It was halfway in between. We had all the inconveniences of both. We lived in a house in Bankapie. Alice used to have to clean the water meter, disconnect the water meter and clean the mud out of it every day. We didn't have enough electricity to run an air conditioner and the power went off a lot of the time. My office was in the process of being air conditioned so I didn't have the air circulation, but I did have the heat. I look on that period as being one of the most uncomfortable ones in my experience.

Q: Were you over in that old compound?

HALSEMA: Yes, on Sathorn Road. I was very fortunate that we had some excellent interpreters on the Thai staff, and I worked very closely with them. I've always felt that one of the most important things that a USIS officer can do, particularly if he's on the information side, is to cultivate the translators and make them realize that translation is a process that requires an infinite amount of care, and that you are perfectly willing to discuss with them any of the subtleties of each other's languages. This really pays, because when they understand that you're not looking for a hurry-up job or just any old kind of a translation, but really do want to get into the nuances of language, they become intrigued and will give you the kind of product which you need to have. But if you don't do that, you're likely to get a product which is doing you more harm than good.

So one of my big jobs there was helping in the psy-war effort that was going on. That was probably the principal activity that I had, and my biggest job was to produce a Thai version of a Handbook of Communism, which I don't know if you ever saw. It was turned out originally by the RPC Manila. I redid it for the Thai audience, then had it translated into Thai. It was widely circulated. It was my first book and I couldn't read it because it was all in Thai. [Laughter] I could read the English original, but I couldn't read the translation. We worked with the Thai Government regional administrators.

I was only in Bangkok from February until the beginning of October.

Q: Just a few months.

Transfer to Washington, Early 1955:
Special Assistant to Sax Bradford, Assistant Director, USIA, for Far East

HALSEMA: Yes. But it was at that point that Sax Bradford became the area director for East Asia, then called the Far East. I told Sax my problem and he was really outraged by what they had done in terms of dragging us off with an infant to a place that we really weren't prepared to live in at that point, and particularly in the middle of a tour.

So at the end of our tour in October, we were transferred to Washington. Sax made me this special assistant, and that was my first regular Washington tour. This was the end of '54, beginning of '55.

Q: Before we get into that, I'd like to ask you just a couple of questions about the Thailand program at that time. Were you conducting pretty much a village-type of visitation program in getting your material out? Did you have a lot of mobile units running out into the village boondocks?

HALSEMA: By the time I left, we hadn't really built up that kind of an effort. We were mostly doing it through the Thais themselves.

Q: I see.

HALSEMA: The whole thing was a hurry-up psychological campaign. Dien Bien Phu fell that summer.

Q: How much of an insurgency was there in Thailand at that time?

HALSEMA: It was potentially dangerous, but it hadn't really gotten to the extent that it did later. It was a well-founded fear on the part of the U.S. Government of what the consequences of the French defeat would be.

Q: There had not been a series of assassinations of local officials?

HALSEMA: There had been a few here and there. For instance, it wasn't unsafe to travel around Thailand at that point.

Q: It was never unsafe for Americans we found later, because all the insurgents had orders not to shoot the Americans. It was less safe for the Thais who doing the work, but not for the Americans. We didn't know it at the time, but that was the case.

HALSEMA: I didn't see a great deal of Thailand. I was mostly in Bangkok. I guess I went up to Ban Me Phuot, on the Burmese border, to distribute some material in Chinese to a group of Chinese Nationalist guerrillas who came across the border.

Q: Leaders in the opium trade. [Laughter]

HALSEMA: We got down to the beach a couple of times, but that was about it. I was mostly right there working long hours in embassy, or in the USIS office, actually. We seldom saw the embassy itself.

When I got back to Washington, I was in the midst of the program to build up USIS in Southeast Asia. That was my job--to be the gofer in the IAF office, to try to get people in the media and personnel and everywhere else to get the show on the road for Southeast Asia. This was fascinating work for me because it brought me in contact with every part of the Agency in Washington, and I had Sax Bradford's full backing. Sax could be a pretty influential voice when he wanted to be, because he had Ted Streibert's full backing.

Q: Of course in those days the four area directors were practically the powers, outside of Streibert, in the Agency.

HALSEMA: I thought that was an excellent operation, because Sax had the executive clout, George Hellyer and I had the area experience, and we could really get things done. That period of '55 and '56 was one of the highlights of my career, because we really moved the Agency and could get things done the way we wanted to get them done.

Q: It probably was the most propitious time to do that sort of thing, because the power the area directors had not yet waned. You had the power to put over what you were trying to get across to the media and output.

HALSEMA: Yes. I don't think I had the respect for all four of the area directors that I did for Sax Bradford, but you could get things done and things were done. Then Sax went over to run IOP at that point, and as I remember--was it 1956?

Q: I don't remember that. I thought he went to Spain as PAO.

Halsema Becomes Deputy Assistant Director, East Asia: 1956

HALSEMA: Yes. I guess maybe he went to Spain. That's right. George Hellyer became area director and he made me his assistant, or deputy, rather. So I was deputy to the assistant director. Well, that was even more fun because George and I thought alike, and we thought, I think, pretty unconventionally about East Asia.

George Hellyer, Then Assistant Director of USIA for Far East Gives San Francisco Speech that Counters Official Thinking in Department of State and Gets Him in Hot Water

One result of that was a speech that he gave at the World Affairs Council in San Francisco, which got him into real trouble with--was it Willis Robertson who was the Assistant Secretary for the Far East?

Q: Yes, I think it was. I didn't know too much about George's difficulty because about that time I was in Rio. Then I came down with polio and for the next seven months spent practically all my time in the hospital getting rehabilitated. But supposing you just say a few words about that, because George isn't here to say anything for himself and I'm not familiar with it.

HALSEMA: This was a speech that really raised the hackles over in State, because it went against all the conventional wisdom. First, we asserted that the Chinese couldn't possibly be a fifth column in Southeast Asia, because the fifth column that Ernest Hemingway was talking about was Spaniards in Spain, and these were foreigners in Southeast Asia.

Q: Suspected by most of the native population.

HALSEMA: Yes. Who had a lot of economic clout, but no political clout, and it has repeatedly been shown that whenever the local government wanted to clamp down on them it always did so successfully. So that was an illusion--which I think was spread by the old China hands who were in Southeast Asia, who always looked on the Chinese as the people that they were familiar with and therefore they must be important. The only place in Southeast Asia where they were important was in Singapore, where they were the majority.

The other point George made was that the Sino-Soviet friendship wasn't going to last, because there was a generation gap, and there was a cultural gap between the two, and sooner or later they were going to split. Well, this was absolute heresy. [Laughter]

George really go into trouble on that one. You remember L. K. Little was running personnel then, and of course he knew George. They both were old China hands.

Q: He was Director of their customs office in China for many years.

HALSEMA: Yes. He was the only American head of the Chinese Maritime Customs. And George was third generation East Asia. His grandfather had been a tea merchant in Japan in the very early days when it was opened up. George himself had been a tea merchant in Taiwan right after the war, before he joined USIS.

Q: In fact, he was a CIA man.

HALSEMA: Yes.

Q: I don't think he was employed by them, but he was one of the contact people.

HALSEMA: No, but he worked with them. So we felt fairly confident--George knew Northeast Asia, and I knew Southeast Asia. We insisted that the only people that be sent out would be people who we thought could fit into that kind of milieu. Either they already knew something about the area or they had the kind of mentality where they would have the curiosity to learn. This made personnel very unhappy at times when we would reject one of their prize candidates and say, "Nuh uh, he's not going to work out."

Q: Since L. K. [Little] knew that situation and knew George so well, what was his role in personnel selections for the area?

HALSEMA: Well, sometimes L. K. would just go with the flow. It was just so much work to get a new candidate that they...

Q: I felt that in the field, but I didn't have any first hand confirmation of it.

HALSEMA: They were old friends, and yet they were not always on the best of terms with each other. But I think that the people who were sent out then were really hand picked by George. George would often ask me to do a double check on somebody to see what I thought of them. We usually thought the same. Occasionally we would have differences of opinion, but George and I, I think, always got along very well. We were good friends as well as associates.

George had his problems in terms of sometimes, I think, his judgment for people was faulty, that if he was a friend of somebody he would overlook their faults. I can think of several people that were sent to positions in the area that I didn't--it was all right if they were juniors, but if they were going to be the PAO then I think he picked a couple of lemons that I know of, and I think you know of, too. But that was a great association.

George, of course, would send me on field trips to the places that he didn't want to go to. So I never did get to see Australia and New Zealand. [Laughter] But I spent a lot of my time traveling, and I found that being from the area director's office you became a wailing wall for all the people's troubles, and that this was really a very necessary thing for people in places like Vientiane, for instance.

Q: What an unfortunate place to be.

HALSEMA: We had real problems, speaking of Vientiane, in keeping that place staffed, because we'd send out people and they would quickly come down with some tropical illness or another one would go off his rocker, or something would happen to them. It wasn't until the Millers went out there, Hank Miller and his wife, Ann--I'd known Hank in Manila when he was in the radio business right after the war. We knew they would fit, and of course they didn't come down with any diseases because Hank ate at home. Ann prepared his food for him, and they also had the kind of personalities that worked in a post like that. So they were first successful people in that job, that really stayed their whole tour.

Q: I remember the famous picture of Hank as a bonze, dressed in a saffron-colored robe, among the priests up there in Vientiane on a Life magazine cover. [Laughter]

HALSEMA: I think I missed that one.

Q: You missed that one? There was a cover on Life magazine somewhere in that period of Hank with a saffron robe on, which hit him at about the knees because of his height, amidst all these bonzes [Buddhist priests] sitting around. He had established this great contact with the Wats up there [the temples]. He got this coverage from Life magazine and there's his picture covering the entire front cover page of Life magazine.

HALSEMA: Well, I missed that one, but I could well believe it because Hank was always a gregarious, outgoing kind of person. I think that Hank was a great success as far as communication was concerned. I don't think he was much of an administrator or an executive, but this is one of the dilemmas about being a successful PAO that I see. The kind of personality who can be successful at the two roles is limited. I've seen the same thing happen in churches, where you had a bishop who was like, for instance, Bishop Brent in the Philippines, who was a wonderful charismatic leader who could sway audiences, extract money from rich people for his missions, build up new institutions, but was a lousy administrator. The solution that I saw for him was that he should have had a deputy who was the administrator. You can't always expect people to have both of these talents.

Q: The only problem with having a deputy who's savvy in that characteristic is to be sure that you've got the kind of personality mix that will permit the deputy to take that kind of a role and that the PAO won't be jealous of it.

HALSEMA: Let me conclude this section by saying that it seems to me that the problems of USIA organizationally are not much different than those of other organizations. We've been running into the same problems administratively as other organizations do. Perhaps, if anything, it seems to me we've probably handled them better than the average organization did. For all of the faults that I've seen in the administration of the Agency, it seems to me that we've dealt with problems better than most U.S. Government agencies.

Q: I think so, and I think in balance we have dealt more successfully with the personal needs and personal interests of our people than have most other agencies. Maybe I'm just being prejudiced, but I saw enough of it to think that we did.

HALSEMA: I think one of the other things that helped was, we inherited a lot of administrative people from State who were not greatly different than the rest of the administrative people in State. But I think they were given much more scope and treated with more respect in USIA.

Q: They were treated and given a role in the policy formulation, and they made all the difference in the world.

HALSEMA: In USIA they were not second-class citizens, as State had treated them. I think we got the benefits of that, because we had some very good people in administration, who otherwise would have been very disappointed in their careers and not given the kind of work that we saw they could do. Where would a Ben Posner have been, for instance, or a Lionel Mosley in State?

[Tape interruption]

HALSEMA: We're talking about the period of the area directors and when they were given the authority of--they were actually--deputies to the director, and acted in his name and had his authority, which I've always felt was an excellent idea, as long as you had the right people in those jobs. At the same time, there was no real check on them if they turned out to be wrong in their decisions. But all in all, I would say that working in an area, to me, was fascinating. Even though I was away from home for weeks at a time on these overseas trips, I found them a most intriguing and worthwhile experience. Particularly when you could help some people in a post to get action taken in Washington on a problem that they had been unable to get solved because somebody either didn't understand what they were asking for or didn't understand its importance and, therefore, didn't give it the priority it deserved.

Halsema to National War College; 1957 - '58

This existence was doing very well for me until the time came up and George said, "The nominations for the National War College are coming up. Do you want to go?"

I said, "George, much as I like working for you, this is something I've always wanted to do. From all the people I've heard that have gone there, it's been an experience of a lifetime. I went to graduate school nine years after I got my bachelor's degree, and now it's nine years since I got an M.A. I think I would like to get some additional information, particularly since we do so much work overseas that is related to the military. Although

I've been in numerous wars by accident or design, I've never actually been a member of the armed forces."

So George nominated me and I went to the National War College in the class of '58. I found there that really my most useful experience was my classmates, because they were people who had experiences in places that I had been to, but of quite a different nature than my own.

Our biggest problem at the beginning was that I knew virtually nothing about the atomic weapons, "special weapons," I think they were called. I had my Q clearance and, therefore, I was hearing things that I had never really been exposed to before and I didn't have any background in it. My military colleagues did, of course. So I had to go back and look at our children's World Book Encyclopedia under "A" for atom to find out the basis of what was being discussed.

One of our visiting professors was a man from Harvard by the name of Henry Kissinger.

Q: He was one of ours, too.

HALSEMA: The military liked him very much because his book: Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy fit very nicely into their way of thinking.

During the year, most of the Air Force people began to realize that "clobber the bastards" wasn't necessarily the best way to handle every situation. At the same time, I think, those of us civilians learned something about the limitations of military power from some of the wiser people. I found that the Navy officers were, in general, the best educated and most sophisticated. Then maybe the Marine aviators, then the Army, then the Air Force. Then finally at the bottom, the rest of the Marines, in terms of their sophistication. Part of that, of course, was the basis of their selection.

I think the services took varying attitudes towards the desirability of a War College assignment, but for me this was a real sabbatical. I found that it was possible to look at the world in broader terms. I had really been too much limited to Southeast Asia in my experience. For the first time I was exposed to problems of other areas. I made some very good and useful friends there, like Len Unger, with whom I've had association over the years ever since.

Q: He was my ambassador in Thailand most of the time I was there.

HALSEMA: Len and I shared a common interest in geography as a hobby, but I learned from one of his colleagues in Rome when he was stationed there that he'd been the man who had really prevented a war between Italy and Yugoslavia by knowing more about the geography of the Istria Peninsula than either of the contending sides when it came to settling the Trieste problem. They were so overawed that they accepted his idea on the boundary. [Laughter] He knew about underground rivers. Len has struck me as being one of the best informed ambassadors that I ever ran into in terms of really studying the countries that he's been assigned to.

That was an experience that I found very useful in my next job after the War College, because one of my colleagues there was Phil Burris of State. When I got out of the War College, I was assigned to Office of Policy and Plans, and my job was essentially to--I was asked once what I did and I said, "I try to tell the media every morning what in the New York . . .

Every morning I'd try to tell the media what in the New York Times that day was true and what wasn't. Phil and I, having been classmates and use to working together, would either on the telephone or over at the Fort McNair officers' club bar at lunchtime decide what it was that we wanted to officially say to each other. Then and only then would we put it down in a memorandum, which I found was a most useful way for interoffice correspondence. We never said anything that we knew was going to be looked on by the other side as a challenge or too preposterous. I would recommend it for anybody in a bureaucracy. Always discuss something official unofficially beforehand to be sure that you are on the right track. I think our collaboration worked out quite well.

Q: I'd like to go back just a minute to the War College and about your assessment of the relative sophistication of the respective groups. I think I found in my experience at the War College that the rankings of the services were a little different. I still agree that a half a dozen or so of the Navy people probably had the top sophistication and comprehension on world matters. But I found a rather large group in the Army, because the Army had suddenly either realized that they didn't have the kind of political background they ought to have, or because suddenly they were faced with a problem of having too many fairly senior officers with no place to put them in commands. So the Army had begun sending a fairly large number to graduate schools. A few of them even had Ph.D.s. So that I found that the Army was pretty well informed, and they came a close second to the top Navy men. It was the Air Force and the Marines, on the level of political sophistication, that were really babes in the woods. Did you see any of that in the Army group when you were there?

HALSEMA: Yes. Of course, this was the class of '58. You were there what year?

Q: I was the class of '60.

Reminiscences of Earlier Trip Around World with Then Deputy USIA Director, Abbott Washburn: Riots in Hong Kong; Cairo as Arab-Israeli War Began; Rome at Beginning of Hungarian Uprising

HALSEMA: '60. Yes. I think the Army was beginning to make that change. I'd like to back up here a moment. I just recall one thing. One of the trips when I was in the Far East area office was to go around the world with Abbott Washburn, who was then the deputy director. It was long trip, a fascinating one, though. We managed to get into a riot in

Hong Kong and to arrive in Cairo the day that the Arab-Israeli War of 1956 began. We were the last people out of Cairo before the British got into the act. We left on a British Airways plane.

In Vietnam we called upon Diem and were treated to a monologue about that twerp Sihanouk over in Cambodia, about whom he had very few nice things to say. Diem just thought he was a "crazy" kid who didn't know which end was up. We got up as far as Hue and looked at the country when it was relatively in that lull between the wars.

Got to Rome in time for--of course, the Hungarian revolution had begun. I had one of the first transistor radios at that point, and I listened to AFN in Munich and heard about the beginning of that uprising and was able to tell Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, who hadn't heard about it through the embassy yet. She greeted us in a beautiful long red taffeta dress and said very graciously, "Ah, my first refugees." [Laughter] That was a most memorable occasion.

1958: After War College: Office of Policy and Plans, Headed by Saxton Bradford; Bradford Moves and Halsema Becomes Acting Head

Well, to go back to Office of Policy and Plans, I was working with Sax Bradford at that point. Policy and Plans had a role which was mostly policy and very little plans. One of my ambitions was to get the Agency into the planning business, but I found that I was butting my head up against a brick wall, that nobody really wanted to plan. I found repeatedly in my experience that the idea that an agency which is essentially in a long-range business of trying to influence people ought to be taking a long-range look at where it wants to go, but that nobody really wanted it to go that far ahead. It's part of the same problem we have in American business today. There's no strategic thinking, nor is there any--again, I'm talking about the Agency as I knew it when I retired. I'm not that well acquainted with what goes on now. Then there was no interest in trying to assess what the future impact would be of current or projected actions, but which you knew, if you really stopped to think about it, that five years down the pike you would be facing the consequence of actions that you were taking or about to take. But nobody wanted to look that far ahead. It's been to me one of the great failures in our planning, that we didn't have any plans really. I certainly met no success in that phase of my activity.

One day I found that Sax had transferred his office from USIA to State. So I inherited his responsibilities but not his authority, and I was the acting head of IOP for months. It was really a very uncomfortable position to be in, because I couldn't really speak as the third ranking officer of the Agency. Yet somebody had to run the shop. So there I was until the--one of the other things I wanted to say about IOP was that we had at that point a number of specialists in subject matter areas. One of them was disarmament. I suppose one of the greatest frustrations I had was trying to get the officer who had that job, who was not a Foreign Service officer, though, to see that most of what was being talked about in the field of disarmament was so esoteric that we would never succeed in convincing foreign audiences about the rightness of our position, because they didn't understand what the subject matter was about, let alone the particular niceties of the U.S. position on it. That was true with a number of issues of that nature. You really have to deal on a more emotional level and not a technical one. You can't really sell a program on technicalities.

Q: If it's beyond the comprehension of the vast audience that you're trying to approach, you just can't get anywhere with it.

HALSEMA: I took the position that if I didn't understand it, I was sure that our audience didn't understand it either. A lot of what we did was along that line. Then in the anomalous position that I was in, I was really quite relieved when after the Kennedy election Tom Sorensen, whom I'd known vaguely as a junior officer [I think he was a class 4 officer in 1961] came and said that he had been appointed as the head of Office of Policy and Plans.

Q: As a matter of fact, I remember that you and I were one day sitting in Ed Murrow's outer office. Marian Anderson was there, and Ed came out and took Marian Anderson into his main office. She was there about 15 minutes. When she came out, Sorensen came in and walked directly into Ed's office. We had to sit there another 15 minutes until he came out. You said when we went down the hall, "Our new deputy director?"

HALSEMA: As a question. Yes. I suspected that this might be the case. Let's say that I thought Tom treated me very well, considering things. He made it clear that I was welcomed to stay on, but if I wanted an overseas assignment he'd be prepared to give me a good one. I indicated that I really thought this was a good idea. I was then assigned to Cairo as PAO.

June 1961: PAO in Cairo

Q: How long were you there with Sorensen?

HALSEMA: Only a few months. Because I went to Cairo in June of 1961.

Q: It had only been about four months.

HALSEMA: Yes. But in that period, I remember one particular case. I haven't discussed this with Tom or I don't remember that he recalls it. He had just come from a meeting with his brother at the White House at which--was it Lemnitzer? Who was the one that went over--no, it wasn't Lemnitzer. It was the one that went to Vietnam on behalf of Kennedy in '61 to survey the--I'll think of it in a minute.

Q: Lemnitzer was the Chief of Staff.

HALSEMA: No, but it was the man who had developed the theory of graduated deterrence. Maxwell Taylor.

Q: Yes. I couldn't immediately think of who that was either.

HALSEMA: At any rate, Maxwell Taylor had gone on a mission to Vietnam, and he'd come back and he talked about the things that the U.S. was going to do for the Vietnamese. And I said, "And what are we going to get in return?"

Tom said, "Well, we don't ask for anything in return."

I said, "That's the greatest of mistakes. The Vietnamese will have one of two reactions, or both. One of them is, the Americans have got something, a hidden agenda, that they don't want to discuss with us. So they're going to get something out of us, but we don't know what it is. Or else, We think they're fools." One or the other, or both.

I guess, Tom didn't react to that at all, but looking back on it, I think I was right.

Q: I think you were.

HALSEMA: I think we started off on the wrong foot right there by escalating our involvement without demanding actions on the part of the Vietnamese government.

Comments on Historic Role of Arab Culture, the Sources of Real Power in Egyptian Society, the Value of Contacts at Levels Below the Political Top, Egyptian Intrigue

I then went to Cairo and, as usual, I went to Cairo with no language training, no area training; I'd never been in the Middle East before. I was very fortunate in that my first ambassador was John Badeau, who was the expert on the Arabs and Moslem world. I learned a lot from him. I think that the most educational experience in my career was to be in Egypt. Indeed, it changed my whole approach to things.

I found that after I'd been in Egypt for five years and I came back to the United States, I got a real cultural shock to find that I was no longer listening to people in terms of what they were saying, but in terms of "what is that person trying to get me to believe?" A cynical point of view, which on the other hand, is a realistic one. I guess I haven't lost it since.

But I found the Middle East and Egypt had really affected my way of thinking. I was in a part of the world that is surfeited with history. I had to recall everything I'd learned in college, and learn a lot of new things, including the fact that there was no such thing as the dark ages in the brightest ages in the Arab world and much of Western civilization had passed intact through the Arab world from Greece and Rome and then back into Western Europe.

Q: And developed further while the Arabs had it.

HALSEMA: Yes. I got a respect for Arab culture that I'd never had before. I think both Alice and I feel that our time in Cairo was the most interesting and rewarding of all the Foreign Service experience, because here we were in the center of a once great culture and in the leading city of the Arab world. It was not an easy post to have because once again I was in a situation of turmoil. Relations between the United States and Egypt in 1961 were poor, and they got worse. However, I found, that as in other places, personally this didn't affect us. We made a lot of friends or acquaintances, and after we returned to Cairo--it was three years on my first assignment and then two years on another one--but after returning from home leave, we found all kinds of doors opening to us that weren't there before. People took the attitude, "Oh, you've come back. You really are interested in us. You want to know more about it. Well, we'll tell you." At that point, I realized how little of the conventional wisdom about Egypt was true. For instance, I found that clans were still controlling local politics and local activities. Despite all of the Nasser dictatorship, he still had to bow to what local people wanted to do who had influence, and that the Army officers were marrying people from these local clans who had money. A lot of things were going on which I had no concept of before I came to Egypt, and even after I'd been there a couple of years that I wasn't too sure of.

But John Badeau used to always tell the story about the scorpion and the frog. I don't know whether you've heard his Arab story about this?

Q: I'm not sure that I have, so why don't you tell it anyway.

HALSEMA: Well, the scorpion came to the banks of the Nile and he knew that he couldn't swim such a big river. Just then a frog came by and the scorpion said to the frog, "Will you give me a ride over to the other side, because you can swim and I can't."

And the frog said to the scorpion, "Do you take me for a fool? I know that you have a lethal sting in your tail, and that you'll kill me if we go across."

The scorpion said, "But why would I want to do that? If you sink, so will I, because I can't swim."

The frog thought about this a while and he said, "Well, I guess you're right." So he took the scorpion across, and half way across the scorpion stung the frog.

As they both went under the frog said, "Why did you do that? We're both drowning now."

And the scorpion said, "Because this is the Middle East." [Laughter]

I've thought about that ever since. It's such an apt story about what's happening today in the world. It isn't always logic that governs.

I guess in Cairo I began to realize something that has struck me since retirement many times, and that was the ultimate reward of working in our agency is the people that it gives you an opportunity to meet. That the very nature of our work makes us have to know the most interesting people in the country. We met people even in Egypt--now mind you, we were there at a time when Egyptian contact with foreigners was looked on with great suspicion. We knew one of our servants was an informer for the secret police. It turned out to be the cook. We knew that one or more of the people on the local staff were informers for the secret police. It turned out to be our chief Egyptian local. It turned out that on our second tour they told us all about their contacts with the secret police, and what kinds of questions they were asked.

Fortunately, we had listened to John Badeau's advice and we adopted a policy of, "Let us be more than candid in what we're doing and be sure that everybody knows in advance what we're going to do, and why we're going to do it, so there's a logical explanation for things." That way we were able to get people to come to our functions who normally would have been afraid to come, because if you had a proper excuse--for instance, if you had a poet in town as we did with--I'm trying to remember again the most noted American poet of this generation. Robert Lowell. To have him go to a party in Maadi and talk with the leading Egyptian writers, was a logical excuse and they didn't have to--if asked by the secret police, the Egyptian could say, "Because I'm a poet, and I wanted to meet the leading American poet and hear what he had to say." And if you had a ballet dancer, you had the ballet people and others who were involved, the drama critics, etc.

And of course, with my own newspaper background, I knew the press people pretty well, but the Amin brothers and Heikal, they were the ones who were already the contacts from the ambassador, and the DCM, and the political officer, etc., but I knew the reporters, not the editors. Very often the reporters were telling me things. For instance, one of the reporters I knew said, "You know your CIA is getting most of their information about what's happening in the president's office from the Amin brothers." But he said, "They don't realize that the Amins have been out of the inner circle for years now." Lo and behold, one day the Al Ahram had spread across the front page a picture of the CIA man meeting with one of the Amins, and they had been surprised by the secret police. One of the Amins was arrested, and the CIA man PNGed. [Laughter] I was getting this kind of information from people who were working stiffs, again, who were willing to talk about it with me because we were colleagues.

Q: Did you ever bring this to the attention of the embassy?

HALSEMA: I tried to in a subtle way, but this was not something I felt--I'd realized by that time that this kind of information wasn't appreciated. You were upsetting the apple cart when you got into fields like that. It was none of my business, really supposed to be.

Q: I had the same experience in Turkey in another context, but I don't want to put it on the record.

HALSEMA: I would say that when I left Egypt in 1966, after five years there, I wrote a letter to each of my main contacts. I got back, I guess, better than a 60% set of replies. I had expressed my regret at having to leave Egypt and my thanks to them for having been willing to listen. I came to the conclusion that the most effective way to communicate is to give busy people--and the people you want to reach are inevitably very busy, because their people are doing something important--selected information which would be useful to them in their work. And that if you did that on a regular basis, you would find them very receptive when you came to that point where you really needed to enlist their interest in something that was vital to the U.S.

Most of the people that I knew in that category in Egypt knew English better than I would ever learn Arabic. I tried to learn Arabic, but English is the second language in Egypt and the people that I worked with invariably were people who were quite fluent in the language. But the other thing that struck me was that there are no real barriers to communication between people who are doing the same kind of work. For instance, when Buckminster Fuller came to Egypt on his own and offered to give a lecture, I took him up right away on that. We invited in all the architects and building engineers and people like that, and they had a wonderful time together. They spoke each other's language absolutely right down the line. Or a symphony conductor, whatever else you had, this is the key to international understanding and that that really solves the question of what audience you should reach. No matter how sophisticated or unsophisticated a country is--for instance, in Laos, you get a Lao doctor and an American doctor together and they can talk shop together, they've got something in common.

So I felt that we were getting our point across despite the problems with the relationship at the government level. That's when Nasser made his statement, "Let them drink the waters of the Red Sea," to the Americans, and our library was burned down--ostensibly because of the Belgium paratroopers landing in the Congo. But, actually--and I was told this by an Egyptian official--he said, "You know there are two factions. One of them wanted to do this, and one said it was a bad idea. But you see who won out."

We were able to maintain a working relationship with a lot of very important Egyptians at a time when Egypt was heading more and more into the embrace of the Soviet Union. Those are the same people who surfaced again after this relationship was less warm. I remember the director of the ballet school in Cairo, she told us, "The Russians are sending us instructors from the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad and we know that that is a great institution, but," she said, "now when you bring in American dance groups, they have new kinds of dances we've never seen before. The Russians don't want to associate with us. After they finish their work at the end of the day we invite them in for tea or something like this, they never accept." She was saying, "But you're so easy to get to know!"

I suppose that was also part of it, the Egyptians and Americans seemed to get along quite well. I don't know, but we seemed to have the same sense of humor. An Egyptian minister of higher education once said to me, "That sense of humor is how you really get to know whether two cultures are compatible." He said, "The Indians understand the British humor very well, but the Egyptians--I've been in both countries and," he said, " I get American jokes much better." [Laughter]

Q: Would you look upon your principal objectives in Cairo as essentially a matter of personal contacts, rather than the standard type of broad-scale dissemination of information?

HALSEMA: Yes. We had an existing publication which went out on a fairly large scale. Obviously, not in a country that size, 20,000 wasn't an awful lot. But I never felt that we got an awful lot out of that. I felt that our most meaningful contacts were personal ones. I think that the longer I stayed in the business the more I was reinforced in that belief. That if you know some of the key people in the society and communicate with them, they will communicate in turn with their own people in a way which I could never do, because I don't know their society that well. And they are obviously the people who are most successful in their society at doing that or they wouldn't have the kind of jobs that they had.

Principal USIS Objectives in Egypt During Halsema's Tour as PAO

Q: What did you figure your principal objectives were in the Egyptian program?

HALSEMA: During the time we were there, on the foreign policy side, that they would understand why we took actions that we did without necessarily hoping that they would support them. Because in most cases their government did not. But at least they would understand that we were doing these things for reasons which made sense to us, and we hoped they would realize that we were not doing it because we had a bias against Egypt, or didn't understand what their point of view was. At least respect what we do. Whether you like it or not is not the main consideration.

And at the same time, the longer-range goal of realizing Americans and Egyptians had a lot of things in common, and that in the long run there were more of those than there were points of separation.

I suppose that the most memorable thing I did during my stay in Egypt was going into the office of Anwar Sadat. He was speaker of the National Assembly, which was an absolute nothing job at that point because the National Assembly had zilch to do with what was actually being carried out in Egypt.

Q: Was Nasser still in power?

Anwar Sadat Given Leader Grant to Visit U.S. in Days When He was Speaker of National Assembly

HALSEMA: Nasser was still in power. Sadat was one of his close associates, but he was the furthest from being the center of action. Now he was chosen--this was a country-team decision. I certainly was in favor of it, but I wasn't the one who made the final decision, the ambassador was. That we should invite him to the United States on a leader grant, and he was sounded out on this, and he checked back and he indicated to us that he might well be able to go. So I went to his office at the National Assembly and delivered him his leader grant invitation letter from the ambassador. That struck me as being particularly interesting, because that was a very successful trip.

Mike Sterner, who was junior political officer in the embassy, later on became ambassador to some of the Gulf states as well, a very astute young man, was their escort officer. Alice and the DCM's wife tutored Jihan Sadat, who was part Maltese and had known English, but she hadn't really used it for years, to get her English back into practice. When they came back from their trip, those of us in the embassy who'd been involved in the trip were invited to a private dinner by Sadat, and thanked for the trip. That was, as I say, memorable considering where Sadat went afterward.

This is the sort of thing that was at a chief-of-state level, but I think these are things that we all remember, instances of people at lesser levels in governments, and intellectual life in the countries we've been in, where these things have happened. People really have appreciated their opportunity.

Q: On a different subject, the PAOs in many of the Arab countries felt that they were very inhibited in any effective action which they could take because of the U.S. relationship with Israel, that they were constantly being upbraided by their contacts in the Arab countries where they were serving, about America's position vis-a-vis Israel, and the Americans, apparent lack of understanding on the Arab position. Did you encounter any of this in Egypt?

HALSEMA: Yes, I did. Of course, it was the usual excuse that was given for whatever actions were taken against the American interests. I knew President Nasser's chief adviser on Palestinian affairs. I was so intrigued by having lived next door to Israel and been right on the border--we took a trip right up to the north end of the Gaza Strip one time and looked across to the Israeli checkpoint--that I wanted to see this country when I left Egypt. So before I left I went to call on this man and told him what I was going to do and the reason why I wanted to do it. He said, "That's a very good idea, Jim."

Q: Was it at the end of your five years or the end of your three years?

HALSEMA: My five years. I didn't dare do this while I was still in Egypt. But I wanted him to know why I was going to Israel. If you let the Egyptians know where you were going and why you were going, you could get around. In those five years travel by the members of the American embassy often was severely limited. The military attachés, in particular, found it very difficult to go places. I never had any trouble going anywhere, I went all over Egypt. Again, it was the reason. There always some reason why I was going, and they always knew when and where I was going. I probably saw as much of Egypt as anybody in the embassy did. We got over to Sinai, up to the Gaza Strip, we went down to Abu Simbel, and we were in the oases of the western desert.

I think that that was the key to it. They're very suspicious people, they've lived in a society that has had more than its share of intrigue, and they looked on all foreigners as being potential secret agents who were out to do them in. I don't think it's changed as much as we think it has in Egypt.

Q: I imagine it probably has not.

HALSEMA: I would adopt exactly the same policy if I were to go there now. The thing I was conscious of was that Egypt has been a nation for five or six thousand years. They've experienced just about everything there is. They're very sophisticated.

Q: Although the ethnic composition of the people who are Egyptians now is not the same as the ethnic composition of the people who were Egyptians several thousand years ago?

HALSEMA: It hasn't changed much. For instance, Sadat looked very much like some of the people on the tomb portraits at the Valley of the Kings. I've got a great respect for Arab culture out of being in Cairo for five years.

We went back to Egypt for the 150th anniversary of the founding of the American consulate in Alexandria, saw some of our old Egyptian friends. Butros Ghali was a junior officer in the foreign ministry then and had become foreign minister, and we've met a number of old friends like that and felt right at home.

I learned an awful lot about the Bible from living in Egypt, too.

Q: Yes, I'd think you would.

HALSEMA: I don't think we realize how many contacts we have from the Mediterranean world, or how intimately the countries involved have dealt with each other, or how much Egypt is part of our Western heritage.

But it seemed to me that Americans were better prepared to work in Egypt than Europeans were, because we had such a long distance to travel to get there, whereas Europeans arrived there from this little jaunt across the Mediterranean and they weren't really prepared to deal with such a different culture.

Q: I think, of course also, the Europeans have a greater history of intervention in the Egyptians affairs than the Americans do, and maybe we're trusted a little bit more for that reason.

HALSEMA: Yes, that's true. But I think that we and the Egyptians really have a more natural affinity than we realize, and that our long-range cultural activities had a lot to do with making Egyptians aware of those infinities.

Q: Evidence of the contribution that the cultural side of our program can make.

HALSEMA: You know, on that particular subject, it seems to me that one of the things you have to realize in cultural affairs, particularly in the performing arts, but in all of them, is that if you're going to have the full effect of these, you have to publicize them. And if you publicize them, you use the media. You can, particularly in the day of television, you can multiply the effect of your activities greatly. It's what people see on the tube that really makes the impression. Therefore, you can have an exhibit. If you get it covered by television, you've reached millions of people. Even if it's only brief, they know about it.

So that takes care of the audience problem right there in terms of, do you get mass audience? Yes.

Q: You get it in a visual way, which is often much better comprehended than in a written form.

HALSEMA: But it wasn't really until I was in Chile, much later, that I fully comprehended that idea of the role of television, particularly in the cultural programs, because so many of them involve visual effects, or sound and visual together, which is very powerful, has a way of reaching audiences all over a country.

When we were in Egypt, television was not yet the principal medium. It was a matter of timing, it was in the process, but radio was still the major medium. And, of course, we could have no access to Cairo Radio, even though I knew the director quite well. It just wasn't possible. So we had to rely on Voice of America broadcasts from Rhodes.

Q: With the performing arts you don't get the same impact, for the most part, unless it's a musical concert. You don't get the same impact that you do on television, anyway.

HALSEMA: No. I think that on the cultural side we were able to impress Egyptians with the variety and the vitality of American culture, as opposed to the classical sterility of the Soviet culture that they were getting. The ballet director's comments were rather typical.

Agency Makes a Mistake in Not Allowing Officers Extended - Or Better, Second - Assignments in the Same Country

Q: Do you have anything further you want to say about the Egyptian experience now before we go on?

HALSEMA: I think that covers some of the highlights. Of course, in five years you accumulate a great deal. I do suggest, though, that reaction to our returning to the country is one that ought to be thought about in terms of assignments. So often, and I think my Filipino contacts have said this, "We'd like to know people in the embassy, but they come and go so often." We were very fortunate in Manila to have had the assignment of two officers as ACAOs who were, for one thing, either born or grown up in the Philippines, and who were in the Philippines for two tours; Terry Kneebone, for instance, and Frank Jenista. I've heard about both of them on my subsequent trips since they left the country. They made a real impression on Filipinos. I'd bet that in both cases that they were much more effective on their second tours. I'd hope that we could come to some resolution--we used to discuss this in personnel a lot. It seems to me there's a happy medium between leaving a person in a post so long that he or she goes native, and yanking a person out so fast they never get a chance to make any real substantive contacts.

Q: I think the happy medium is probably exactly what you're talking about, and that is a moderately long period of initial emersion, followed, perhaps, by a absence of three to five years, and then a return to capitalize on what you have and to build further.

HALSEMA: Or two successive tours. Remember, I was talking about the reaction of my first State Department superior in Singapore, the gradual changing over of the attitude of Foreign Service. Of course, John Badeau was not a career Foreign Service officer. He was an engineer, missionary, university professor, university head who knew a lot about the Arab world. He understood the importance of the information and cultural programs, more on the cultural than on informational, but still he was good support to us.

Q: Was Luke Battle there at any part of the time you were there, or was he there in the latter part of your second tour?

HALSEMA: Yes, in the second tour. I don't want to record this, but...

Q: You want me to turn this off momentarily?

HALSEMA: Yes. You know, we talked--one of the old arguments as to whether an ambassador should be a career Foreign Service officer or a so-called political appointee, is one that has been argued back and forth for years. I've always felt that the argument should be, "Is the man qualified for the job or not?" I could say that I've seen unqualified people from both walks of life, but the most important thing is the question of attitude. Are you willing to learn, do you want to understand the other society, and are you willing to look at it with the other person's eyes and understand what his point of view is without losing your own?

I've seen ambassadors who were political appointees who were not able to do that, and make real problems for U.S., and I've seen so-called political appointees who did, who were most useful. Or you could get a man like our ambassador when I was in Manila, who was Admiral Spruance, who said very little, but who commanded enormous respect on the part of Filipinos. And who'd never give any public statements, except once when we persuaded him to give a lecture to the Philippine Columbian Society, which is sort of the graduates of American University, Filipinos, on the Battle of Midway. Which I regret to this day I didn't record, because it was such a ...

Q: Masterpiece?

HALSEMA: It was. I knew that you could never learn too much about a host country's sense of values, and that in the case of Egypt, I was fortunate to get it directly from a scholar. But in most places, this information is available from scholarly sources and that you should spend as much time as you possibly can knowing what makes people in other countries tick. For all the years I lived in the Philippines--I guess more than 25 now--I'm just beginning to get glimmers of what really makes Filipinos what they are. The more I go to the Philippines, the more I realize that I didn't really understand as much as I should have.

But to return to Cairo. While I was PAO in Cairo, we had an inspection of the post by a group, which at that point included Agency personnel and an outsider who was either head of the team or a member of it. In Egypt we were inspected by a man named Arthur Meyerhoff, who was a Chicago business man.

Q: He was the public representative?

HALSEMA: Yes. Apparently the Agency's relations with him were very touchy, and I was given to understand that it was going to be a really crucial inspection in terms of his attitude towards the Agency in general. He apparently had connections that were important to the Agency. He was indeed a rather prickly person to deal with, he and his wife both. But all went well.

At that time we had had a change of directors, and the deputy director came out to see us not long after that and said we'd passed the test. Shortly after that, I learned that my next assignment was going to be in Washington. It was Howard Chernoff.

Q: Nominally, he wasn't the deputy director.

HALSEMA: No.

Q: He, in effect, was.

HALSEMA: Yes. He was really the deputy director.

Q: The nominal deputy was a figurehead.

1967: Washington: Director of Training Division, Office of Personnel

HALSEMA: Yes. My next assignment would be to Washington, and that I was going to be working in the Office of Personnel, running the Training Division. Chernoff felt very strongly about this, that the training of Agency officers needed to be looked at again.

Not long after I got back to Washington, I finally got my promotion to the Class 1--all the time I'd been in Cairo I had been in a Class 1 post, but getting a Class 2 salary, which had been the case all through my Foreign Service career up until then--and got an Agency award. Frankly, I think it wasn't so much for what I did in Cairo for the Egyptians as what I did for Meyerhoff, or didn't do. [Laughter]

Q: Because it was good for the Agency.

HALSEMA: So be it. I asked for a period of a month before I went to work actually running the Training Division. So I spent that time looking at the training divisions of those U.S. Government agencies which I heard had the best reputations, and finding out what they did. Then I started out looking at the whole question of how we should design our own program.

Q: Which do you consider were the best agencies?

HALSEMA: Internal Revenue Service was one at that point. I don't know, I guess they must have fallen down later, judging from the criticisms--but training was fascinating for me because it was a field I'd never been in before. When asked what did I do in my career, I say, "In my whole U.S. Government career I had one employer, and I had seven different jobs." Because, like all of us, we're asked to go into a field, particularly in Washington assignments, which is quite new. I think I was lucky to have Mose as my boss, and I had the support of Chernoff, so I was able to get a lot of things done and work closely with the Foreign Service Institute.

Young Officers Headed for Vietnam Received Training Heavily Oriented Toward Psy-War,
Which Often Distorted Their Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Later USIS Work

I think the most difficult thing about that training assignment was the Vietnam War and the way, in my opinion, it was distorting the training of our young officers. That we were sending people without other Agency experience directly to the Vietnam program and giving them an essentially a psy-war kind of orientation, without their having had an opportunity to see what our regular program looked like.

Psy-war was something I could see the necessity for, but it seemed to me that to put a young officer in that kind of a situation distorted his idea of how we should operate.

For one thing, the fact that in Vietnam we had virtually unlimited resources. It wasn't at all typical, they didn't really get a chance to look at major aspects of our program. So that when some of these young officers--I experienced them later on--I found that they were very difficult to work with and that they really had very peculiar way of looking at what we were supposed to be doing. It was also the question, at that point, of beginning to get into the generation gap. We weren't really talking each other's language I found in many situations.

I was in that job technically longer than I actually was, because I spent quite a lot of time when I was there on inspections and went to various parts of the world. I found the inspection process fascinating, I learned a great deal from it myself. Ideas as to what worked and what didn't work from looking at other people's posts. I, like you, got my first--I took the War College trip to Europe because I knew I'd never be assigned there at government expense. I was right, but I did get to see both Western and Eastern Europe on inspection trips. I went to Ecuador, and finally, years later, went to Vietnam. Inspections, I think, are as useful to the officer who's doing the inspecting as they are to the post. If they're done right.

Q: I think they are, too.

Agency's Attempt to Examine its Internal Workings: 1970

HALSEMA: The Agency had a project to look at itself internally. Henry Loomis at that point was the Deputy Director. It was a question of first, the government contract process of developing a request for a proposal (RFP), and then evaluating the bids, and then choosing a contractor. We ended up with Arthur D. Little, and it was difficult for them to understand how the Agency worked. But I think that we eventually did reach an understanding, and I think their report had a number of useful conclusions, but it flew in the face of Agency wisdom, so really all that work was for nothing.

Q: Which Arthur D. Little report are you referring to?

HALSEMA: This is the 1970.

Q: I was the one who was trying to synthesize the results of that report. I found much opposition within the Agency itself, and the leading opposition was Barbara White. She sabotaged the conclusions at every single step of the way. She kept bringing trivial points of objection into it, and finally it reached a point where the thing was rewritten so many times to accommodate a mass of different opinions that it was worthless when it was finished.

HALSEMA: Well, it was a disappointing work, but it was certainly interesting to be exposed to the Agency's looking at in the broad sense, the philosophy, or lack thereof, that we had in our operations.

Halsema Spends Year (1970 - '71) as Special Assistant to Deputy USIA Director, Henry Loomis

So at the end of this job, Henry asked me to be his special assistant, and I did that for a little over a year. I guess one of my most important jobs was give him my opinions about the Foreign Service and to keep him abreast of what was going on in the Agency and other agencies. Then when he made these trips abroad he'd come back and I'd give him a long memorandum on what he ought to know by the time he got back to get him back into the swing of things. The time was 1971. I, of course, sat in on the Director's staff meetings and was aware of the great concern that was developing in the Nixon Administration about the situation in Chile.

1971 - PAO/Chile

First it was Portugal and then it was Chile. You'd think that the heavens had fallen in. But I was asked to go to Chile to be the PAO in 1971. Allende had been elected, and I didn't know of course about what the U.S. Government had thought it might want to do about Chile, but I was aware that there was great concern at the top level of the U.S. Government about Chile.

That was the first post that I went to where knowledge of a foreign language was absolutely vital, so I went to the Foreign Service Institute. I did have adequate briefing for that post. I was given time to get a brush-up course on Spanish at the Foreign Service Institute. I was given time to talk to people in other agencies about Chile, and even got a trip to eastern Europe to look at what communist countries were like before I went there, so I was pleased with that kind of background.

I got to Chile and I found I was in a kind of milieu, which was sort of a never-never land. It seemed to me that Latin America was the most isolated of all areas as far as the United States was concerned. There we really were doing things the way they'd always been done. It was a really laid back kind of situation in which most of the people had circulated around within the area the way they used to do in the European area, but they never really got much exposure to the outside world.

I found, for instance, that my predecessor had such a schedule that he had a blanket and a big couch in his office and he used to take a siesta to catch up on the sleep he'd lost at the parties the night before. [Laughter]

Situation in Chile was Turbulent. USIA Caught Between Allende Government Supporters and Strong Opposition Forces, Both Within Chile and in Washington. Except for Cultural Programming, USIS Operations were Difficult

I also felt that we had far too large an establishment. We had offices in places that were really never going to be important in terms of what would happen in Chile. I could see only three places in the country that really were vital to the politics of the place, and that we could cut down drastically on our staff, because the emphasis was on reducing the American presence with a hostile government. So I did this, and I didn't realize what a hornets' nest I'd stirred up, and how this was going to affect me after Henry Loomis left the Agency.

I made a lot of enemies there, which I didn't know about at that point. I once more was in a turbulent situation. I don't know how, but I've seemed to inherit posts where there were problems. Relations between the U.S. and Chile were bad and getting worse. It wasn't too long after I arrived that the Chilean government came out with its attacks on IT&T, the CIA and all the rest. It was further complicated by the widespread sympathy for the Allende government among the liberal element in the U.S., sort of the same way that Nicaragua has been in more recent years. Indeed, one of my staff who went to Nicaragua as PAO said he recognized an awful lot of the same faces that he'd seen in Santiago.

I was in Chile for two tours, too, nearly four years in all. During the first tour all of the turmoil which led up to overthrow of Allende occurred. It was an odd situation in which the people who were against Allende were very friendly and we had no problem placing material with the opposition press, etc., and they did still control one television station. So that part was easy. Very rarely did you get anything into the government-sympathizing media. It reminded me in some ways of Egypt, though, and that was that I felt our biggest job was to maintain continuity of contact with the intelligentsia of the country. In that particular situation our cultural programs were much more acceptable than our information programs. In Chile we did have outlets for the information side of the activity.

One of the complications was the fact that CIA was also running a pretty important media program. I knew about some of it, but, as usual, they knew more about what we were doing than the converse.

Q: Yes, you never know anything about what they're doing most of the time.

HALSEMA: That was, incidentally, one of my jobs I had when I was in IOP(USIA office of Policy), I was the Agency's working-level contact with CIA. The director was liaison at the top level, but I was dealing with the lower level, largely to be sure that they knew what we were doing so we wouldn't interfere with each others' activities. They told me very little about what they were doing.

I felt the Chileans who were in the opposition were almost telling me too much of what was going on. They were trying to involve the U.S. Government in their opposition to Allende in ways in which the U.S. Government didn't actually want to be involved. Of course, we got tarred with the brush of what we'd thought about doing, but didn't do. That was the big problem in the U.S. with all of that; it was not so much what we did, but what we talked about doing.

Q: Getting back just a moment leading from that, I guess it's pretty well accepted that we had a big role earlier in Chile in the Frei days.

HALSEMA: The Frei days, yes.

Q: Did you actually think that the Americans did a great deal in Chile in fighting Allende when he was elected? The suspicion is that we did.

U.S. Did Not Assist in Allende's Overthrow But Had Talked so Much About Possible Action that We Were Accused of Participation

HALSEMA: No. I think that the truth is that we talked a big game, but we didn't actually carry much of it out. Our internal position within the embassy was that we were going to do everything in our power to keep the opposition alive until the next elections, which were going to be in 1976, on the basis that our opponents were pouring in resources, including people as well as money, to prop up Allende. Therefore somebody had to help the opposition, and the U.S. Government was one of the principal sources for that help.

The whole thing has been badly distorted. It's a good indication of the fact that there were so many sympathizers with Allende in the United States, that it was extremely difficult to carry out the U.S. Government's objectives because these people were always maligning your motives. I think we probably had more trouble in the U.S. than we did in Chile.

At the same time, our cultural activities were perfectly acceptable. We had no problem carrying on the program, and I think that's another reason why the two need to go together, because you have to have a full repertoire of instruments to carry on your activities. Sometimes one side is more appropriate than the other. If you don't have any relationship with that side, you don't have anything to draw on.

It was a very delicate role for me, too, in terms of trying to point out to Chileans that we did not have a role in trying to overthrow the government. That was not our activity. I was approached by at least two fairly important Chileans who later on were given positions in the military government with proposals that we do this, that, and the other thing. I had to say, "Well, I'm sorry, but this is not our position. We're not really here to do that."

It was a difficult situation, too, in terms of the pressure of all this turmoil going on in the country. Alice felt it as well as I did, because the International School there was left without a director and she filled in for a semester as the headmaster until a successor could be found. All of the frustrations of the American official community were vented on the school because the school wasn't doing this, that, or the other thing.

We also found the economic distortions difficult, and Chile was the only country I've ever been in where the embassy authorized use of the black market because there was such a disparity between the official and non-official rate of exchange.

The fury went on in the U.S. after Allende was overthrown. After that period it turned out that the only people who really had many contacts with the new government were the military attachés, who had known these people in their official capacities, and a couple of us in USIS, because the chief spokesman for the junta was Frederico Willoughby, who had been one of our chief radio and press contacts. Now he was sitting right in the president's office. So we had no problem communicating. But I was really embarrassed; our problem then was to avoid getting too close to the new government.

A Critical Inspection Report Leads to Halsema's Return to Washington

So I enjoyed Chile personally, but I found it a very nerve-wracking place to conduct a USIS program because of the problems that I had with Washington. After Henry left the Agency, particularly, I began to be exposed to some of these things that I hadn't known about before in terms of opposition. They were climaxed by the inspection of the post, which I felt I got shafted on.

I have no hesitation in saying I think the area director and chief inspector did me in at that point. I did not get any support in Washington as a result. I felt that the inspection report was grossly unfair, and that I'd taken the program through some very difficult days very successfully without getting the kind of appreciation in Washington that I felt I deserved.

Washington: Office of Research. VOA Survey of Language and Transmitters Results in Highly Controversial Report

So I came back to Washington and was assigned to Office of Research. Jim Moceri and I had worked on several of the Voice of America language surveys, one of things I did before I worked for Henry Loomis. It was a moderately interesting job, but I realized I had been parked there, and the first opportunity I had to get into a really interesting job, to me, was when we did another one of the language and transmitter surveys for VOA--we came up with a report which was violently controversial as far as the Voice was concerned.

Q: What is it?

HALSEMA: Well, this one is one in which not only did we look at language priorities but we looked at where the Voice (VOA) should go technically. We consulted with authorities in Washington who obviously knew what they were doing in both private and government sectors. I came to the conclusion then that somewhere in Washington is an expert on anything you can name. The only problem is find him, but he's there.

We recommended, among other things, that the Voice go to satellite transmission to its overseas transmitters. Well, the Voice was absolutely opposed and appalled--they could think of ten thousand reasons that this was absolute poppy-cock.

Q: Was Ed Martin still the chief engineer in Voice at that time?

HALSEMA: No, Ed had left. It was the whole engineering crew there at the Voice that was convinced that we were absolutely off our rockers to suggest anything like this. We even suggested that there might be a possibility of direct broadcasting satellites before the end of the century. All of this was met with sort of, "What are these amateurs saying to us?"

I enjoyed that survey a great deal and as a result of that I gradually moved myself over to looking at the whole question of the Agency's use of modern communications technology. By the time that I was retired in 1979, I had invented the job for myself as communications technology adviser. I was able to persuade the Agency to get a contract to look at the Agency's use of technology, which was fascinating. There was, as a direct result of having looked at some of this technology on the radio side in recommendations for the Voice and having met some of the people, I realized that I could get information on all these things right in Washington that the Agency just didn't seem to know anything about, including, for instance, the use of computers for communication.
Q: Of course they're doing it now.

1979 Supreme Court Decision Supporting Foreign Service Requirement for Retiring at Sixty Years of Age Necessitated Halsema's Retirement

HALSEMA: Yes. It took the Agency a decade to actually utilize the recommendations of that report. I don't know whether they ever used that report, or whether they just found out about it on their own. That was what I was doing at the time that the Supreme Court decision came along. I'd been assigned to Sao Paulo, Brazil, as PAO at that point, and was getting ready to go to the FSI for a Portuguese course when I was retired.

Q: That was the time when they decided you still had to retire at 60?

HALSEMA: Yes. But I felt that my assignment there had vindicated my feelings about whether I had done the right job in Chile. The situation I found in the official American community in Santiago was echoed on the business side with few exceptions that American business in Chile was still operating on past ideas and with a very--I can only describe it as laid-back attitude towards how you should conduct things. This is probably one of the reasons why Latin America has fallen so far behind East Asia. As an example, when I go to the Philippines, for instance, and talk to people I find they're just so much more with it. I suspect that Chile has changed since the days when I was there.

Q: I'm sure it has.

HALSEMA: From what our daughter, Jane, who has traveled there a number of times, says, that they're a very progressive bunch now. It's unfortunate that--I guess one of the reasons was that we've been operating there under one guise or another since 1940.

Q: Yes, but we've also been operating there with the business interests who admittedly in the early days were extremely exploitative of Latin America, and very contemptuous of the civilizations down there. We've probably got that kind of a background to contend with, too.

HALSEMA: For instance, the whole embassy was involved in the Horman case in Santiago where the consulate was accused of having led this young film maker to his death, and complicity, etc. The embassy didn't know anything about him until after the coup. He was one of the many Americans who came to Chile as a sympathizer and was producing a film on the glories of the Allende regime. I guess, again Nicaragua, is the current situation, the same sort of thing. I suppose that you--no, I don't know whether Israel would be a place like that, but where there's a strong U.S. domestic stake in what's going on in the country. It may be a minority, but it's a very vocal minority that takes it on.

Were there any other questions you wanted to ask?

Q: No, I guess not. Do you want to give any retrospective on your career, or anything you want to say in summary?

Brief Retrospective

HALSEMA: Well, I can't think of a more interesting career than the one I've had, principally because of the opportunities that it's given me to know countries in depth and to meet the most interesting people intellectually in the countries that I'd been assigned to.

I haven't been back to many of them, but those that I have returned to, I find that they're getting along in years as I am. They are still people that are friends, and that you still have inside contacts. When I was in Manila a couple of years ago, I happened to be staying at a hotel where the former editor of one of the newspapers, but this was of course, both--I'd met this man during the Marcos period, but this was post-Marcos. He had a bunch of younger reporters around him, and a couple other old-time newspapermen, whom I knew from the old days.

They were having their coffee session and sort of rehashing what was going on in Manila, and I was invited in as just one of the group. I really was very flattered by that because they considered me one of the boys. I suppose that's probably true of most of my effective colleagues, that we can all say that we feel at home and are made to feel at home in the societies in which we worked because we know people.

Probably the most dramatic evidence of effectiveness that I could really point to directly was in Chile. When the Nixon affair came along, we were listening to the national television network at that point was controlled by Pinochet. The commentator on the national channel was somebody with whom I'd worked, who'd been with the leading newspaper, El Mercurio. He had recently been on a leader grant to the United States and he came back to give a commentary at the end of the news. It was short but very much to the point, which was that this whole affair shows the great strength of democracy in America, there's a peaceful transition. The people decided that the president had done wrong and he resigned, and he was succeeded and there was absolute continuity. He said, "What better lesson could there be for the rest of the world than that?" I felt, "Well, all the work I've done with that man has certainly paid off. He said exactly what I would have liked him to say." I suppose we all have examples like that in our careers, of where people have said, or probably even more important, are things that editors didn't say, that we would just as soon they didn't say as a result of the fact that they thought about their old friend Bill, or Joe, or whoever he was.

Q: That's right. The trouble is that if you try to talk about it now you get the same kind of a response we used to get from old Senator Ellender, "Oh, you don't mean to tell me that anything you ever did in USIA ever had any effect."

HALSEMA: One other thing I was trying to remember was about Ed Murrow when I was still acting there in IOP, and I went along to the hearings before Congressman Rooney. Rooney said, "Now Ed," he said, "remember we've been here," (and this was off the record) but he said, "We've been here a lot longer than you have. We know what your predecessors told about this, so don't try to pull any wool over our eyes," and he was so right.

Q: Yes. I think we've pretty well covered your career, Jim, and I repeat what I'd said off the record, I think this has been one of the three or four finest and most interesting interviews we've had. I thank you very much for subjecting yourself to it.

HALSEMA: Thank you.

End of interview