Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program

FREDERICK (TED) G. MASON, JR.

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is second of March 2000. This is an interview with Frederick G. Mason, Jr. known as Ted. This is being done on behalf of the Diplomatic Studies and Training. Can you tell us when and where you were born and something about your family?

MASON: Yes, I was born in Waterbury, Connecticut on May 25, 1926. Both my parents were born there. My father and his father and his grandfather were involved in the brass business in the area. And you may know, Waterbury in WWII was known as the Brass Center of the World. But after WWII, the brass industry declined, and by the 1950s or 1960s, the old mills had closed, and the buildings torn down. We have shopping malls there now. A hundred thousand people still live there, but I don't know what they live on. Thankfully, I left there myself at the age of 18 when I went into the army, though I am involved now in supporting the local Mattatuck Museum and have funded scholarships to nearby Taft School and Yale for students from the general area.

Q: Let us talk about growing up. In the first place, could you talk a little bit about the background of your father, Mason, a Yankee

MASON: My father was a Yankee, he was a Mayflower descendent. He went to Yale and the Taft school before that in Watertown, Connecticut, where I grew up. He was in the first class of the Taft school in Watertown. He was born in 1879 and entered in 1893 and graduated in 1897.

Q: I used to play football against them. I went to Kent School. Can you tell us about your mother's background?

MASON: My Mother's mother was Swiss and her father was Austro-Hungarian. Both were immigrants who came separately to America in 1885 and married in 1898. My mother was born in Waterbury in 1900 and became secretary to the executive director of the local manufacturers association, where she met my father, who was involved with the Chase Brass and Copper Company at that time. They married in 1924 and took a wedding trip to Europe. I was born in 1926 when my father was retired and living well on income from stocks. He bought a house, and took out a mortgage on it. It cost $25,000, which was a lot of money in those days. But with the Crash of 1929 and the Depression my father lost most of his income. Kennicott Copper Company stopped paying dividends. It was a very tough decade for him. He was 47 when I was born and 50 in 1929. So it was very hard for him to find a job at that age. We moved several times. The house became too expensive to heat, and so we found people who would take it for a year or two, permitting us to move to Waterbury, and into houses that were cheaper to run. In the winter of 1937-1938, my parents even moved to Florida to avoid paying heating costs, and so I spent most of my seventh grade, at age eleven, at Fort Myers, where I was known as, "That little Yankee boy." Then we came back and I finished my grade school education in Watertown.

I had begun my education at the Watertown Country Day School, which was an expensive experimental school for the elite. This was hard on my parents financially. But the school itself closed in 1937, and I finished seventh and eighth grade at the public school. I greatly appreciated the change and was happy there. But with Taft next door I wanted more than anything else to go to Taft School like my Dad. I was awarded a scholarship, and I went through Taft in four years as a day student.

Q: You went to Taft from when to when?
MASON: From 1939 to 1943, Class of 1943. And graduated *cum laude* and entered Yale on a scholarship.

Q: Let's go back a little bit. When you were at home what were the family interests, you know, books, reading, music?

MASON: Yes, books and music. There was a good-size library. My father had the library of men of his class, big sets of Stevenson, the Great Events, and the Bostonian and English authors and so on. So I did a good deal of reading. But I did develop a great interest in foreign affairs, especially European history. I remember in WWII following the invasion of Russia and the retreat of the Germans with a huge wall map with colored pins, marking every move that was made in each direction. I won a contest at Taft given by *Time Magazine* on current events. As a prize I was given *The Secret History of the American Revolution* by Carl Van Doren.

Q: I got, I think in 1943, I got Here's Your War by Ernie Pyle. I won mine, too. I have the book around somewhere. I would imagine that WWII, for all of us that paid attention and read, was a tremendous geography lesson.

MASON: Yes, I learned more names of towns and places

Q: You learned where Benghazi was.

MASON: Yes, of course.

Q: Iwo Jima.

MASON: The South Pacific, I do not know too well. I still can't place all the new countries

Q: Well they change their names...

MASON: True, yes.

Q: How about reading? Can you think of anything you liked to read? Were you not much of a reader?

MASON: As a kid, I subscribed to "The American Boy" and read Tom Sawyer, Call of the Wild, Terhune, Curwood, etc. But as a teenager, I liked Shakespeare, King Lear, Julius Caesar, and these are mostly if not entirely political. They all have political context and that increased my interest in foreign affairs. I liked drama. I had the Modern Library edition of Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill, I thought it was great stuff. I was disappointed when my teacher at Taft, who let me report on these plays at first, turned me away, saying, "You have no time for this. You should be studying what we have in class." I resented this because I was fascinated by what I was reading. *Mourning Becomes Elektra,* for instance, though I didn't understand it because I hadn't yet read the *Oresteia*. It was only later that I read the Greek tragedies, which to me are the supreme example of great literature. I wasn't great at sports, I played soccer, but I wasn't a football player or a baseball player (though later, at Yale, I was on the varsity swimming squad under Bob Kiphuth). I was on the debating squad, doing inter-school debating on subjects of foreign and domestic policy. I should say here that I've always had an interest in writing-short stories, novels, plays. I've drawn inspiration from the classics, but until 1999, when one of my novels was finally published- *Hostage to Fortune* by Ted Mason-I had been writing all my life in my spare time and had sold only one story back in 1951.

Q: Did the war affect you at all at Taft?

MASON: No, the curriculum and the scheduling were the same. We did a little community work around Waterbury, sweeping sand off the streets after the snows and that sort of thing. I took jobs for a week or two during holidays, once at the Princeton Knitting Mills downtown. I remember at the Waterbury Post Office over the Christmas season I found several masters sitting there working like myself, and I remember being ashamed for them because I thought a master much too august a figure to be sorting mail in a post office. But I got used to it. And one summer I did work at the American Brass Company as a messenger. I don't think I was outstanding in any of these jobs, but I did get a little experience.

Q: Well, if you graduated in 1943, you must have been prime meat, weren't you…?

MASON: Oh, yes, though I was only seventeen at the end of May 1943 and so had a year in college. I went to Yale on my scholarship on the first of July, in the Class of 1946, assigned to Timothy Dwight College. We were living in a building which has since been torn down-the Colony Club at 17 Hillhouse Avenue. We had an interesting summer there, but then I moved into Timothy Dwight for the fall term. It was a disastrous year for me. I had never failed a course before. You had no choice in your courses. You were assigned one course in each of six general subjects, one being the sciences, and they put me in physics and I failed it. I was absolutely crushed by that. I'd had no counseling and didn't know where to go from there. I never took another course in physics or in any other science. Of course, my hopes for Phi Beta Kappa were dashed.

Then by the spring of 1944, as I approached my 18th birthday as a sophomore (these were three-term years, with the third term squeezed into a summer session), I was able to finish half of sophomore year before I went into the Army. But I was "gung ho" and didn't want to be thought of as a draftee. I joined the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps, even though it was almost the same thing. It allowed me to finish that term in June before going into the army in July, a month after D-Day, and reporting to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. I had been at Taft since the war in Europe began in 1939 and at the time of Pearl Harbor, and my entire memory of those school years is one of war. Since I was a year young for my class, most of my class mates had already gone into military service. Many had very fine combat records, and several were wounded and more than one killed. I wanted to do my share. In fact, I was so eager to serve that the first time we lined up at Fort Devens and the platoon sergeant asked for volunteers to pull KP (Kitchen Patrol), I actually volunteered! I worked until about four o'clock in the morning. Then after a day or two we boarded a troop train and rode through the Hoosick tunnel to Troy, New York, and then on to Cleveland and points west. Only after we were safely on board did the T-5 who was in charge open our orders and say, "You're going to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to the Field Artillery Replacement Training Center."

I had never been out west before. I had spent two winters in Florida, and I had once been to Bermuda. But there we were, out in Oklahoma, where we even saw a few buffalo on bivouac. They put me in a clerk's battery, but rather than spend the war as a clerk, I applied for OCS. I didn't volunteer for Artillery OCS because I didn't trust my ability in math, so instead I volunteered for Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was accepted, as an 18 year-old kid, to become a combat platoon leader if I could get through the 17-week course.

After a few weeks, the members of each platoon had to rate every other member, and although I don't know how I was rated, I was surely at the bottom, never having even seen an M-1 rifle. I went up before a Board after the 12th of the 17 weeks, and could have been flunked out. But fortunately, the Board liked the way I gave orders and moved imaginary troops around in front of them, and so they started me over again, in the next class being formed. At age 19, I was commissioned a second lieutenant infantry on the 19th of July 1945, three weeks before the bomb was dropped, and since then I have

always said the bomb saved my life. And the lives of a million other men.

Q: Sure, getting ready to invade Japan with horrendous casualties…

MASON: As a result, I have always felt that that put me under an obligation to try to live a life that would somehow or other justify this tremendous piece of luck. On the other hand, I didn't have my so-called "moment of truth," which would have made a difference.

Q: Of course, sometimes these moments of truth end up as the last moment of truth.

MASON: Yes, or I could have ended up like Bob Dole, who was a couple of years ahead of me at the same OCS. He spent I don't know how many years in rehabilitation and he still doesn't have the use of his arm. I do and was very lucky. So, having taken four years of French at Taft School, I had the grammar down pretty well but had no conversational ability, of course, because we didn't do that in those days in language classes. I could pass a test, but I was no great shakes at French. At Yale, I had started with German, hoping it would prove useful. My grandmother was Swiss and spoke *Schwietzerdeutsch*, which I never learned to understand - except for a few ditties. So, I did have a year and a half of German in addition to French before I went into the army.

Now, with the war over, it was the end of August or the middle of September 1945 and I didn't know where we were going. So I went to a major in Personnel whom I had never met before. I think his name was Evans. I remember nothing else about him except that he changed my life. I told him I'd studied German and French, and asked if I could go to Europe instead of Japan in the occupation. Within a week or so I had orders assigning me to the AGRC, the American Graves Registration Command in Europe. It was humiliating for a gung-ho infantry officer who wanted to fight for his country, but it meant I would go to Europe for the first time. They sent me to Fort McClellan outside Anniston, Alabama, for a week, and then to Camp Lee, which later became Fort Lee outside of Petersburg, Virginia. Then in December to Camp Shanks up the Hudson from New York City. From here, I boarded a cruiser, the USS Boise, and crossed the Atlantic in the winter.

Coming into Le Havre in December 1945, you could still see the funnels of sunken ships above the water line. We landed as young second lieutenants and with tags on our caps and were herded into open trailer trucks with just our heads sticking up. As we were driving up to the casern, where we would spend a few hours, down came another truck with men on their way home, and did we get a horse laugh. I remember having conversations in the casern with German technicians who were being sent to the States. I assumed they must have been working on the bomb or the V1 and V2 rockets in Germany.

We boarded a train and arrived in Paris the next morning, ready for a few days of work at the Trianon Palace Hotel in Versailles. The Graves Registration Command operated with three field commands, while the headquarters remained in Paris. The commanding

general was Major General Littlejohn, who later headed the Veterans Administration. The whole thing was under the Quartermaster Corps and most of the higher-ranking officers were Quartermaster officers. One field command was established in Fulda, West Germany, northeast of Frankfurt. The second one was in Brussels and the third one at Aix-en-Provence, in the south of France. The Brussels Command was to move down the west coast of France and into Spain, in search of isolated graves, while our Third Field Command moved up the Rhone from the Mediterranean, putting out the word in villages and towns that if anyone had an airman buried in his yard - and this happened, too - to please let us know and we would transfer the remains to a cemetery. They sent the bodies either to the States - if the families so requested - or buried them in a cemetery in Europe. But there were to be no cemeteries on German soil.

Q: I think Luxembourg had a very big one.

MASON: Luxembourg had one at Hamm, and Henri Chapelle in Belgium. But they were in the Brussels, or Second, Field Command. We, in the Third Field Command, followed the Seventh Army up the Rhone valley. We established our headquarters in Aix-en-Provence, spending Christmas there, but after the first of May we moved up to Strasbourg. We had units in Grenoble, Lyon, and Dijon which moved with us. From Strasbourg we followed the Seventh Army across Southern Germany and into Austria. My jobs were of no great importance. I was mess officer for a time, and served as Defense Counsel on two or three Special Courts Martial. I was only a second lieutenant, after all. But I did see something of France and Europe. I was lucky enough to be sent back to Paris on TDY a couple of times, and I was able to drive a jeep up through the Alps to Grenoble, and from Strasbourg to Reims and back with the unit payroll. From Strasbourg, in the summer of 1946, the Red Cross or the Special Services ran a Swiss-Rome tour. One could take two weeks or 10 days of leave and board a train from Strasbourg to Basle and from there take a Swiss train stopping in Lucerne and overnight in Lugano, continuing on to Rome and spending something like five days at the Hotel Excelsior, then back by the same route. This was a magnificent trip.

Lugano was lovely, but in Rome we had an audience with Pope Pius XII, which was a very impressive affair. Later, I had to drive to Reims again from Strasbourg with a .45 on my hip and pick up the payroll for all our subordinate units. I even had an opportunity to take a jeep on a five day trip to our unit in Austria with an Alsatian driver who was fluent in French and German and was an ex-member of the Wehrmacht. We slept in Salzburg and drove up to Hitler’s villa and Eagle’s Nest above Berchtesgaden. The villa was bombed out and was later demolished, but I have a photo of myself framed by the picture window.

My driver knew a girl in Austria, where he’d been stationed, and we drove to her hometown in Kärnten (Carinthia) on the way back to see her. I don’t know if he was able ever to marry her or even to get back there. Our unit was in Kindberg. I’ve been through there since then several times. It’s on the main road through the mountains from Salzburg to Vienna, via Semmering, a Viennese winter resort where you can go from a thousand meters elevation down onto the plain to Vienna. My orders said go to Kindberg, pay the

troops and come back. But with Sunday off, I had an extra day, and without orders, I decided to try for Vienna. So I took the jeep and my driver, and at Semmering stopped at the Soviet Zone. Out came a tough-looking Asian trooper. I showed him my orders. He looked at them and gave them back to me and mentioned, “Go ahead.” We did so and saw another of the great cities of Europe, but one which was in worse condition than when Carol Reed made his film.

Q: What movie do you mean?

MASON: *The Third Man*. On the way back it rained hard on the southern highway out of Vienna and we skidded off the road into the ditch, which gave us a real problem. The jeep was on its side, though we weren’t hurt, but one wheel was bent out of shape. I flagged down a convoy of Soviet troops, in trucks, who changed the wheel. I have a photo of that, too. We got back to Kindberg safely and the next morning the motor pool officer grudgingly gave me a new wheel in exchange. We drove back over the Brenner and Arlberg Passes to Strasbourg thanking our lucky stars and within a month I had my orders back to the States. I was sent through Frankfurt to Bremerhaven and boarded the *Colby Victory*, a Victory Ship. The sea was very calm and pleasant coming back into New York harbor. I guess we must have docked on the Jersey side because we were sent directly to Camp Kilmer, where we were demobilized. Of course, we were glad to get out of the army, since “nobody with any brains at all would stay in the army.” We were all cocky and going to do something great individually, and never work for Uncle Sam again.

So when I signed out, I was of two minds when they asked me if I wanted to stay in the Army Reserve, where I would have two weeks of training in the summer after 24 weekly meetings each year, and if I earned 50 points, one for each meeting and 14 for my two weeks training, I’d have a good year for retirement. So, I agreed. And what a difference that has made in my life! Except for the pension, the benefits far outweigh anything in the Foreign Service because the military offers possibilities not only for the PX (Post Exchange) and the commissary at Fort Myer and Walter Reed Hospital, but for free trips to Europe on cargo planes or anywhere you can go out of Dover Air Force Base, which my wife and I are planning for next week, by the way. So I stayed in the Reserve and earned 20 years, making me eligible for benefits at age 60 as a lieutenant colonel.

To digress a bit, during the 15 years that I lived and worked in Europe as a Foreign Service Officer and as a Department of Defense employee, almost every year I took my two weeks training at Oberammergau with my wife, staying in Garmisch. She would enjoy the mountains while I spent the day in class. It made a wonderful vacation. We even flew once to Fort Leavenworth to complete Command and General Staff College.

Now, back from my digression, I’m at Yale in the second half of sophomore year, in September 1946, where they looked at my record and told me that since I had the GI bill I didn’t need a scholarship. The GI Bill also made a difference in my life.

Q: You got extra, didn’t you, if you were overseas or something? I don’t remember. I got

it for the Korean War, which was essentially the same as yours.

MASON: Well, in my case it was simply a month for each month of service plus 12 more, making 38 months altogether in my case. I don't believe serving overseas made a difference. I finished at Yale in June of 1948 with two years remaining on the GI Bill.

Q: What were you majoring in at Yale?

MASON: I majored in sociology. Originally, I'd wanted to be a lawyer. But I was lured away by my interest in foreign countries. As they say, "How do you keep them down on the farm after they have seen gay Paris?" I'd never dreamed of getting into the Foreign Service because Waterbury, Connecticut is hardly a center of culture and world affairs, and I'd never met a Foreign Service Officer, let alone an ambassador. I didn't feel I had the social graces I would need to be a diplomat. However, I did take a course under a very famous French professor, Henri Peyre, on French 20th century literature - reading Proust, Gide, Giono, Malraux, and others. So when an opportunity arose to go to the Sorbonne at government expense (there was no tuition, so the government had nothing to pay except the $75 a month living allowance, which was a nice stipend), it was an opportunity not to be ignored, and I took it. Besides, I had an opportunity to take the Foreign Service Exam over a three day period in New York. I made a passing grade with no preparation, and my French was still shaky.

Unfortunately, my parents were not too favorably disposed to having me leave, and I have felt guilty about it throughout my life. My father had had a serious operation and was a semi-invalid. I could have stayed in Waterbury, in the brass industry without any particular backing. Some of my father's friends would have helped, and perhaps I would have amounted to something in business. But I dreaded that fate, and since I wasn't really needed at home, I did go.

I sailed on the SS Washington, in October 1948 and immatriculated at the Sorbonne. Through Yale professors I knew I lived at a pension de famille on the rue d'Assas, the Pension Domecq, and where I sat at one of three or four long tables with a half dozen professors and their wives who were going to the Bibliotheque Nationale every day to do research on French literature or history during their sabbatical year. There were students there too, an assortment of respectable, well-behaved people, and there were interesting discussions, always in French, which was how I became fluent. There, as I looked across the table one day, I saw a young lady whom I found very attractive. I didn't say anything to her, but it turned out that on Armistice day, the 11th of November, there was no particular seating arrangement, and I found myself sitting next to her. I asked her, "Would you like to go out, go to a movie? And then take a walk around Paris?"

She agreed, and we went onto the Champs-Elysees, where they were having a riot. There was a general strike and the Communists were picking up paving stone blocks - the Champs-Elysees still had paving stones and when you got one up the others would come up, too - and throwing them at the police. Cafe chairs and tables were used to make barricades, heads were bloodied and we had our baptism of fire in a sense. She

(Geneviève) seemed a very nice girl, and we went out just about every evening for the next 10 or 20 days, when I asked her to marry me. We're in our 52nd year of marriage right now. She was working for TWA at the time. She was from Marseille, and like myself, she was an only child. Each of us was on his own, trying to make his way in the world, and we decided to join forces and make it together. We married in 1950 at the American Church in Paris, on the Quai d'Orsay, and at the Mairie du Sixième Arrondissement in a civil ceremony.

After our marriage, we lived just outside of Paris teaching English in a French school for the 1950-51 school year. This was a struggle because disciplining the kids was no fun, our accommodations were primitive, and our means were limited.

We did return to the States after waiting weeks for my wife's permanent visa in Marseille, at my father-in-law's home. We took passage on a ship called the *Corsica,* which had been the private yacht of the Kaiser, complete with marble staircase. But it was an old tub now, carrying Greek refugees from the Greek Civil War to Canada. These poor people were in steerage, and they were being dumped in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the month of November on their way to Winnipeg. I felt sorry for them, but it was a chance to see what it had been like for immigrants in the 19th century. After 19 days at sea, no less, I brought my wife past the Statue of Liberty and into New York harbor, almost as I myself had done in 1946.

I'd come to Paris to write. I was interested in world affairs, but above all else, I wanted to be a writer. I wrote two 60,000 word novels in the first two years, 1948-49 and 1949-50, plus at least a dozen or two dozen short stories without selling anything. In summer of 1950, just as the Korean War was starting, I'd had no contact with the Army Reserve since coming to Paris, and wasn't even sure they knew where I was. At least they never called me up. I kept on writing, and just before our wedding I finished a story which eventually, after many months of effort, was sold to *Argosy Magazine* as an adventure story. This meant that I could go home with my bride with at least something to show for my efforts. I didn't have a degree from the Sorbonne, and I'm not sure a degree would have done me any good, because when it came to entering the Foreign Service, it was just the fact that I knew France and could speak French that counted. In the summer of 1951, in Germany, I did have two tours of duty back to back - in class at the Intelligence School in Oberammergau and as an intelligence analyst in Heidelberg, having transferred to Military Intelligence Reserve in 1948.

Q: In the reserve?

MASON: In the Reserve, still as a second lieutenant. It was already six years since I had been commissioned. I was 25. We went first to Oberammergau, to the Intelligence School for two weeks. Then to Heidelberg Military Post as an intelligence analyst for two weeks. There I made what was debatably a serious mistake. The major offered me a job as a GS-7, and a chance to live in Germany with my wife indefinitely. But I had my sights on a writing career, and said, "No, I'm going back to the States to become a writer." I had just published one story and of course others would follow. I'd already missed a chance

to take the oral exam for the Foreign Service in Washington in order to pursue a writing career. But I had had one Foreign Service experience while a student. I had registered in at the embassy and I was offered a temporary job, along with up to a dozen other students with a similar background as messenger boys at the embassy during the Council of Foreign Ministers Number Seven, which ended the Berlin Blockade and started NATO. I remember seeing Dean Acheson, Foster Dulles, Philip Jessup, Robert Murphy and other ambassadors. My function was to work at night with a mimeograph machine helping turn out the minutes of the session for the delegates to read the following day. Again I had a great piece of luck, because one of the delegates was a lawyer named Goldthwaite Dorr. He was a distinguished elderly gentleman with a goatee, who'd been given the assignment of visiting Athens and Ankara to brief King Paul in Athens and the Turkish government in Ankara on what had happened at the conference. He was flying in General Clay's C-47, a Gooneybird.

Q: Yes, the C-47. The C-54 was the four engine.

MASON: Yes, that's right, the C-47, the two engine, sitting in bucket seats. Since he was the only passenger, he opened it up to a certain number of us. We all signed up, and I was number two or three. So, I was chosen to go. One of the others was Bob Jones, who ended up in USIA with me. I didn't see him again for 20 years, when I ran into him in Vietnam. It was a fabulous experience to land in Athens with a government vehicle and driver at our disposal and drive to the Mycenean ruins near Argos, home of Agamemnon and site of the Oresteia, which I now knew thoroughly.

When I got back to the States, I went to the literary agent who had sold my story. Her name was Ad Schulberg. She was the mother of Budd Schulberg the author, I believe.

Q: Budd Schulberg, who wrote What Makes Sammy Run?

MASON: Right, right.

Q: And his father was one of the heads of the major studios in Hollywood, one of the big moguls.

MASON: I didn't know that. Anyway, she was very favorably impressed with my story and I was going to write a lot more of them. My wife and I set up in Bridgeport, Connecticut because it was near New York and I didn't want to go back to Waterbury and work in the brass industry. Besides, Bridgeport had a great variety of industries, and I could always get temporary jobs, for a few weeks or months, while I wrote, which I did. But I didn't sell any of the stories. I never sold another story, which was a real disaster for me. My wife was working at the University of Bridgeport, in the language lab while I worked in a steel mill turning out hot and cold rolled steel from the open hearth and I learned a lot about the American working man. That job lasted six months, part of which was during the great strike that Truman ended by nationalizing the steel industry.

When the strike was over, my job in the steel industry was over too. I wrote for a while,

then I went to the employment office and took a job in another mill and worked there for six weeks, as long as it lasted. Then in the summer of 1953, after I had already been there a year and a half, I got a job with a tree climbing outfit, men who could throw a line over a branch and haul themselves up into a tree. I was the ground man, not a climber. But I wrote stories about the experience, and 30 years later I sold one of them to *Yankee Magazine*. The story was due to come out, and I waited. After two years I dropped in on them in Dublin, New Hampshire and asked about it. They said they would look into it and they wrote back to me saying, "There have been changes up here" and so on and so forth. They had paid me $450, I believe. They gave me back the rights but never published it. I would gladly have given up the money to have had the story published. Maybe it will be someday.

Anyway, I was again a failure as a writer, if you judge success by being published, and how else can you judge it? I had looked down my nose at some of the slicks and the stories that would appear in these magazines, and I didn't even consider that the one I had sold in 1951 was basically an adventure story. In Paris at the Vincennes Zoo, I had seen a hybrid lion and tiger, which the French call a "tigron" which was known as a tiglon in the United States. I wrote a story about a brass man from Waterbury who had hunted animals all over the world and had acquired this tiglon for the zoo which his father had created. It was his proudest accomplishment. The hybrid beast from the opposite ends of the earth was a metaphor for the working people of Waterbury. One day the beast escapes and terrorizes the town until they call in the local Army Reserve unit and finally find it hiding in a sewer, where they shoot it down with machine guns. The President of the brass company is devastated because there isn't even enough left to make a skin of it. I had used Blake's poem, "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright," And, of course, Argosy, which bought it, did not use that. "What mortal hand or eye *dare* frame thy fearful symmetry?" You see? This is the question I was asking in my story. "Did He who made the lamb make thee?" The environmentalists would love it.

Anyway, I had given up trying to write full time. I had to get a permanent job somewhere and write in my spare time. I remembered the job back in Heidelberg they had offered me, and - this was during the McCarthy years - wondered whether to try to get into the Foreign Service after all. I was reaching age 31, which was the cutoff date then. But I had a foreign wife, and I understood you had to get permission to enter with a foreign wife. Then I looked at the "Who Lost China" case. Coincidentally, I had the occasion a few weeks ago to talk with Robert Service on the telephone. I had never met him but I asked if he was the son of John Stewart Service, because in 1974 when I was working at the State Department in Media Services, I attended a luncheon on the eighth floor where Barbara Tuchman was speaking about the China years and Stilwell, maybe that was the tie in. I don't know, but at the end of their talk they introduced John Stewart Service, who was being rehabilitated after his shameful treatment at the State Department. It was an emotional moment for me. I remembered that his experience was one reason that I didn't try to go into the Foreign Service in the 1950s, in addition to the fact that my father was an invalid, and I couldn't accept being sent just anywhere in the world and not be able to come back easily in case anything should happen to him. I remember Dean Acheson saying, "I will not turn my back on Alger Hiss," without really knowing whether he was

guilty or innocent and thought this was what a gentleman should do: stand up for one of his own But that is not the way they treated John Stewart Service and the other China hands. I asked myself, "Is this what our government is like? Is this what bureaucracy does to us? The novel I have just published, Hostage to Fortune, is in large part about bureaucracies and CYA.

Q: "CYA" meaning?

MASON: "Cover your ass." Instead of trying for the State Department again, my wife and I put our savings together and went back to Europe to look for a job. We sailed on the *Andrea Dorea*, in September 1954. It was a magnificent crossing on a fine ship. We were in the tourist class, with a deck of our own, a swimming pool and fine food. We sailed past the Azores, a whole day of passing one island after another, then through the Straight of Gibraltar, into the Bay of Naples and then to Cannes and Genoa. We disembarked in Genoa and took a train to Marseille and stayed with my wife's parents for what turned out to be much longer than I had intended.

I left my wife there with her parents and went up to Paris to look for a job. I signed up in the Army personnel office in the rue Vernet near the Arc de Triomphe. They were creating the Army Supply Line (called the Communication Zone) to the Seventh Army in Germany.

I filled out the forms, but there was no promise of anything. Then, an enormous piece of luck, which again made me want to get into the Foreign Service after all. My wife's great grandfather, who was a Greek citizen from the Dalmatian coast, was named Slavick. When the canal opened in 1870, he had been able to establish himself directly on the canal in Port-Said and found a ship chandler's company: James S. Slavick and Company, which was still in existence. He was dead, of course, and his widow, who was an Austrian, had run the company for many years, and now it was in the hands of the next generation, my wife's Greek great-uncle, who died in the early 1950s, but whom I had met at the time of our wedding in France, and his wife, who was my wife's American great-aunt. She was named Hilda Barnes, from Elmira, New York, and as American as you can be and still live in Port-Said, Egypt. When she was in her late 70s, she had come to our wedding. Every summer she would take a ship to Marseille and a train to Paris and Le Havre and sail directly to the United States and visit her family in Elmira. But after the revolution in Egypt, her funds were blocked, preventing her from going, and so when she heard we were back in Marseille, she offered us a trip to Port-Said with money she could spend in Egypt but nowhere else.

So in December of 1954 my wife and I boarded the *Ionia,* one of three ships, with the *Aeolia* and the *Corinthia,* owned and run by a Greek line, and were treated to a magnificent tour through the Straight of Messina and the Corinth Canal, with less than a yard of room on either side for the ship. We spent a day in Athens and then sailed directly to Alexandria for a few hours, then back up to Limassol, Cyprus, and over to Beirut, where we grabbed a taxi, which was how travel was conducted, and with several Arab travelers drove to Damascus. We visited the city and the Mosque of the Omeyades. Then

from Beirut we sailed to Port Said, where we stayed with my wife's Aunt Hilda for six weeks, including the Christmas holidays, at which time she took us to Cairo and sent us on a tour of Upper Egypt. So we saw Luxor, Karnak, the Valley of the Kings, and Aswan from the Cataract Hotel. We stayed in close contact with her until her death in 1968 at age 96. She didn't have anything to leave us, since the house was owned by the Slavick family, and was divided among several family members. But my wife's father owned a quarter of it, and just three years ago, after his death, we were able to sell our share after negotiations with a lawyer in Alexandria. At Hilda Slavick's home, in 1954, we had met the American Consul in Port Said, whose name was Curtis Jones. Is he still alive?

Q: Oh, yes, he is down in North Carolina, I think. He has been interviewed by the program.

MASON: Really, I would like to run into him again and talk to him. I was a green kid at the time, and I still hadn't had a permanent job in the government or anywhere else. So, after those six weeks we came back to Marseille, where a letter was waiting for me saying they were "considering" me, as they always say when they are ready to offer a job, as a training officer in one of the depots being set up to supply the Seventh Army in Germany with the various items and material they needed. There were signal depots, engineer depots, quartermaster depots, and so on across France in a line from La Rochelle and other ports on the west coast up past the headquarters at Orleans and into Germany.

The Base Section was near the ports, and the Advance Section was in Northeastern France. I reported to our personnel office in Nancy in the middle of winter, again without my wife, and was assigned to the Signal Depot in Verdun as a GS-7 with a salary of $4, 205 plus a 10% differential, which shows you how hard up I was. Verdun was the heroic city of World War I, but it was snowed in when I visited the place and the depot was deep in mud on the other side of the Meuse River. There was a colonel in command of a few warehouses and the beginnings of what they called the Stock Control section, where huge computers filled a large room. This was how they kept track of the signal equipment being stored or sent to the Seventh Army in Germany. I spent two years there with my wife conducting supervisory and technical training to the employees. We met a family whose sister lived in Marseilles and was a friend of my wife's mother, and so we had a contact there. They had a couple of rooms on the third floor under the roof of their house in Verdun, with a pot belly coal stove. You could only heat one room, the living room, and the bedroom had no heat. The bathtub was a sit-down tub next to the kitchen sink. This is where we lived after six months in a hotel room. You would climb a spiral staircase to get up to our apartment, but we considered ourselves lucky and spent the next year and a half there. I was promoted to GS-9 toward the end of that time, but as you can imagine I was not anxious to spend the rest of my career in Verdun.

In the civil service, I'm sure you know, a job is created and you are put into it if you are the best qualified on paper. But unless there is a vacancy or the job itself is upgraded, you don't get promoted. My job had just been upgraded, but even so… As the Supervisory Training Officer, I had been setting up a training program, teaching English to the French, for which I wrote my own texts, and finding teachers for technical subjects. I had

complete freedom and I think I did a pretty good job at it. But when I heard of a vacancy at the civilian personnel office in Paris, I applied and got it. I was about to move to Paris when my father died. We rushed back to the States, though there were no jets as yet and the flight took over 24 hours. My parents were living in Fort Lauderdale, and we spent a month with my mother there. Fortunately, I was able to go back to the job in Paris without a break in service and spent another two years there. I had applications out at the USIA and other agencies, but with a job already in Paris, I knew I was lucky.

But the job wasn't what I'd hoped it would be, and after six months to a year in Paris, it was cut out (RIFed) and I was about to be sent to the headquarters in Orleans to a job which was only a GS7. I was very unhappy about that. But I had joined an Army Reserve unit, the Paris USAR School, and was attending meetings with people working at EUCOM - the US European Command - with headquarters at Camp des Loges, some of whom were intelligence analysts. The EUCOM area was Europe, the Middle East and Africa. So I asked and was told to try the subordinate headquarters in Germany, the Air force in Ramstein, USAFE (United States Air Force in Europe), and in Heidelberg, the Army USAREUR, where they wrote strategic estimates and reports on political developments in the countries in their area.

I went to three offices, and the one I liked best was Ramstein, between Kaiserslautern and Saarbrucken. They gave me a test and offered me a job as a GS-9. I jumped at it. I didn't lose my grade, though I still had a lot of catching-up to do. By then I was 32 or 33 years old, and a GS9 is only the equivalent of a six or seven in the Foreign Service. I loved it. It was great work. I was the only political analyst covering France and its colonies in Africa: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Sub-Saharan Africa, plus the Belgian Congo, at the time of their independence. I covered the Algerian War. I covered the end of the Moroccan Liberation Movement. I also covered the chaotic events in Congo-Leopoldville.

Q: You were doing this from when to when?

MASON: I was doing this from 1959 to 1965. Those were the critical years, during decolonization. In my novel, I have drawn on all of this.

Q: When you were doing these analyses, what did they get into?

MASON: We received articles from the State Department's INR and from other sources, and I would debrief the air attaches as they passed through. We did current intelligence, midterm intelligence, and long term intelligence. We contributed to the National Intelligence Survey, which was the permanent stuff on the geography of a country and such, and especially to the National Intelligence Estimates. I had about 40 countries altogether, because I spoke French. I was not in the Soviet area at all. Other fellows were doing that. Military officers were doing the hardware: the military capabilities of the countries. I didn't have to worry about that. I was in the coup business. I remember in early 1961 I got a phone call about 2:00 A.M. (By this time the headquarters had moved to Wiesbaden) saying, "Get down here, Mohamed V has just died," in Morocco. I rushed down to the office and was told to write an estimate immediately, which I did from my

personal knowledge. I'd had one trip to Rabat, for just a couple of days, and that was the sum total of my experience in Morocco. At the same time, I had been covering Morocco for a year and a half. So I thought I had a pretty good idea of what it was like. It was my first opportunity to write an estimate of my own. But my military bosses (and I think I can tell you this now at a distance of 40 or 45 years) told me, "That Moulay Hassan, he's a playboy. He even slugged Prime Minister Ibrahim once in a cabinet meeting or something. He's not going to last, we give him six months." So I had to agree. Well, Hassan just died last year, after a successful reign of almost 40 years during which he restored order, survived two attempts on his life, and steered Morocco on a pro-Western course as a leader of one of the moderate Arab states.

Q: Yes, but he did have that reputation of being after girls and boys.

MASON: No doubt he did. But that was his personal life. We never saw a picture of his wife or his family. We knew that his sisters, Lalla Aicha and the others were off leading lives of their own. But he was a much stronger figure than his father had been. He really ran the country.

To continue, as pilots, my bosses had to get their flying time in. They would either fly to Wheelus in Libya and bomb at the Al Watiah bombing range, or else to Morocco, anywhere to get the flying time in. I spent four years, 1959-1963, covering those areas and the Congo too, Leopoldville at the time, and our first ambassador there - Timberlake, Clare Timberlake. Followed by Gullion, the Congolese leaders being Tschombé, Gisenga, Kasavubu, and Lumumba, and then Mobutu. And I wrote daily estimates based on reports from our defense attaches and others because we had a four star general in Wiesbaden, who needed to know whether he was going to have to send an airlift down there or not.

Q: Well, we did send one, I think the year after you left. Dragon Rouge, we took Belgian paratroopers in.

MASON: Yes. Later, in 1967, I was working in USIS Paris for Max Kraus, who was the last American out of Stanleyville - Kisangani.

There and in Paris I was getting my Reserve training. Since 1957, I realized that I had only a certain number of years to stay in the service and that if I was to earn my 50 points for each year and end up with 20 good years, I needed to get busy. So I took extension courses in strategic intelligence and Defense Management, given by the Industrial College at Fort McNair. I attended the Paris USAR School and then while I worked in Germany from 1959 to 1963 the Frankfurt USAR School, which had a branch in Wiesbaden. Every summer we went to Oberammergau for training, and in 1968 we went to Fort Leavenworth to finish a three or four year course at the Command and General Staff College conducted in Paris or Frankfurt.

I also took one two-week tour of active duty in Orleans, in the Communications Zone (COMZ) headquarters, in 1961, when the French colonels in Algiers were running their attempted coup d'état. Generals Salan, Jouhaux, Zeller, and Challe tried a coup, and Paris

was waiting for troopers to drop, but thanks to DeGaulle, who knew how to handle it and the loyal draftees, it did not happen. I also had a tour in 1962 at EUCOM headquarters, in J2 division. There my first boss was Colonel Raymond Davis, a Congressional Medal of Honor Winner, who led the Marines out of the Cho-San Reservoir area in North Korea. He became deputy commandant of the Marine Corps and a four star general. I returned there to a permanent job in 1963, four years after moving to Germany, as an analyst at EUCOM headquarters. The work was less interesting. We analysts sat in a large bull pen and were assigned articles. But still, it was not that bad. But there was a problem on clearances in France, because of my French-born wife, even though she'd become an American citizen in 1959, and I had to think of a way out. Since there was a Public Affairs job in Paris, handling all the public affairs for the troops in the Paris area, and since I was a GS-11 by that time, I accepted it. Nevertheless, I was 39 years old as a GS-11, which still isn't a high grade in the Foreign Service. So I kept looking around for a new opportunity. I met the mayors of the towns around Paris, Garches, and St. Cloud and developed contacts in the Paris, St. Germain, and Fontainebleau area. I took my military boss's job as Public Affairs Officer after he left and held it until General de Gaulle asked us to leave at the end of 1966. But again I was in luck. One of my Paris contacts was Howard Simpson, Information Officer at the embassy, and when there was a book fair at the Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture in St.Germain-en-Laye near our headquarters, I asked Howard, who had authored several novels, to come out.

With him was Larry Wylie, the Cultural Affairs Officer at the embassy, a Harvard professor and an expert on France. He'd written a book called *Village in the Vaucluse,* a sociological study about a town not very far from Avignon. Then, there was Olivia de Haviland, who had just published her autobiography called *Every Frenchman Has One*, a lovely title. (She was referring to her husband, Pierre Galant, and his liver trouble.) She proved as charming as she could be. My wife and I took her out and squired her around and she was the star of the book fair. And also, James Jones, author of *From Here to Eternity*, who was living on the Ile-St. Louis, and whom I'd gotten to know after interviewing him. Later, he wrote a novel about the student uprising in 1968, entitled *The Merry Month of May*.

We had those four, and so when a few months later we were told we would be leaving. (I had been offered a job as a GS-12 at the EUCOM Public Affairs Office headquarters in Germany. My German was not that fluent, and though I think I could have made it more fluent, I was not that confident.) So I also asked Howard if there was a job in USIA. He looked around and talked it over with Lee Brady, his Public Affairs Officer, and Lee's deputy Serban Vallimarescu. They made up a team for the oral exam: Vallimarescu, John Reid, who was deputy Cultural Affairs Officer, and Phil McMains, who was the Admin Officer, and they interrogated me for an hour or two. I remember one question they asked me, this being late 1966, "Would you be willing to go to Vietnam?" I gulped and answered, "Well, I'm not anxious to go, because I saw what happened to the French Army in Vietnam and in Algeria, and I don't think we are going to make it if the French couldn't." But if that was it, I couldn't refuse. You have to take the bitter with the sweet. So I gave up the possibility of the job in Stuttgart and was assigned to the Paris embassy under Chip Bohlen, Lee Brady, and Val Vallimarescu, and Howard Simpson.

Q: You came into USIA in when?

MASON: Laterally, on the 12th of March 1967, which was the date of our departure from the Camp des Loges and the end of our military presence in France.

Q: We are now in 1967, you have joined USIA. Your first tour was where?

MASON: In Paris. Paris was where I'd been living anyway for four years in two or three different jobs. So, when the military moved out in March of 1967, I was ready to go right down to the embassy and the job of Deputy Information Officer as a Class V officer in the Limited Reserve. USIA at that time didn't offer either career Foreign Service status or Civil Service status, and so we were attaches only. I had sacrificed, in a sense, my civil service status to do this because, I thought, I was at last getting into the Foreign Service and felt my experience and age qualified me.

USIS was in the Rothschild building on the rue du Faubourg St. Honoré at the time. It is now the ambassador's residence. Howard Simpson stayed for another three months and was replaced by Max Kraus, and we moved into the Hotel Talleyrand, on rue St. Florentin and rue de Rivoli, on the corner opposite the main embassy building. I was there for two years. It was hectic, but it was interesting work. A lot of donkey work, dragging people around - visitors and such. I was frequently called on for that sort of thing, but I was also assigned as the Vietnam Information Officer, never having been to Vietnam, never even having had an orientation at USIA. Apparently, you were expected to know or find out everything about your assignment with no guidance from above. My career had started off in Verdun as a supervisory training officer and we went through many texts and examples of what to do and what not to do to be a good supervisor, how to train and prepare your employees, and I felt that USIA was not doing that. I never did have an assignment at USIA in Washington, until my very last one, 17 years later. Throughout my career with USIA in fact, I know that I was not being adequately prepared for each assignment. That's the first criticism I would have of it.

But I enjoyed seeing the big operators from Washington come through Paris. I took Averell Harriman through the Talleyrand because this had been his headquarters when he headed the Marshall Plan, ICA. His office was a huge ornate corner room occupied at that time by Lee Brady, our Public Affairs Officer (And I'm told it is now sealed off and empty as being too risky in case of an attack. Too bad.). He recorded a talk there for the Voice of America. President Nixon came through in his first visit overseas after his inauguration at the end of February 1969. I was one of the interpreters at the formal dinner at the Elysées Palace, and I was assigned to Mr. Kissinger. I sat behind him and the wife of a French Senator, and listened to the chit chat, which did not interest Mr. Kissinger. But it was an experience to be there at the table and hear General de Gaulle welcome President Nixon and have Nixon get up and give what was really a very, very fine speech. "We come to sit at your feet and learn," was the gist of it, which is not what de Gaulle had been getting from the Johnson Administration, and this, of course, pleased the French no end.

Behind him was General Walters, the Defense Attache, who was his interpreter. General Walters did not take notes. He would wait until an entire paragraph was completed before he would repeat the whole thing perfectly in French, to my great admiration. I worked with General Walters, in the sense that if I got queries from press people about Vietnam, I would send them to him or see what the army attaché or naval attaché or the people in their office could do to help them and brief them. So I was in there trying to defend American policy, which I didn't entirely agree with, but I did the best I could, without even the experience of having been in Vietnam.

Once the Sorbonne organized a debate outside Paris on the subject of Vietnam. The speakers included Olivier Todd, a left wing journalist in France, very much in the news himself and much liked by the students just before the 1968 student uprising at the Sorbonne in May of 1968.

It was just after the Tet Offensive and I was defending American policy and the truth was that we had won the battle militarily but lost it politically. I still maintain that in winning it we wiped out the Vietcong but left the North Vietnamese to fill the vacuum. They were coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and I still wonder if we couldn't have arrived at a negotiated solution with the Vietcong, who were Southerners themselves and as much anti-Northerner as the pro-American Thieu Government. Anyway, that is water over the dam. Back and forth this argument went and tough questions were asked. I don't know how well I did, but one student did come up to me afterwards and say, "You know, sir, back at the Sorbonne, there are quite a few of us who agree with you. But we don't dare say so." So much for freedom of speech at the Sorbonne. Anyway, this is the sort of thing I was thrown into without any experience, training, or orientation.

I did have a background in intelligence, where of course you don't talk about anything outside the office. In the local affairs with the mayors of the Paris arrondissements and of the surrounding communities, it was entirely cultural. It was not a political information program. I learned a great deal from this. Our ambassador was Chip Bohlen for the first year, and then Sargent Shriver. Bohlen was the perfect professional and Shriver was the political innovator who did unconventional things. I remember taking Eunice Shriver to visit a school for handicapped children, since this was one of her main interests, and I interpreted for her there. These were not substantive jobs, in that - well, I did interview journalists who knew a great deal about Vietnam and I reported on what they had said, which got up through channels into various parts of the embassy. So I learned a great deal, especially about Vietnam, before I went there.

Q: I would like though, Ted, if we could go back to Paris. What happened, were you involved in the student protest, the disappearance of De Gaulle? Sort of wondering what was going to happen…

MASON: Yes, we were covering it from day to day. I remember when he went to Germany to Baden-Baden to talk with Massu. We thought, "Uh-oh, this could end with the French army moving in and taking over." At the same time the students had taken over the Sorbonne building and the Odéon Theater. In fact, I went to one of their

get-togethers at the Odéon. It was conducted in a heady atmosphere, with each student romantically imagining himself on the Barricades during a new French Revolution. They were all screaming at cross purposes, as if there had never been any free speech in France before. One was saying "Let's try the Yugoslav way of doing things," and another said, "Let's try something else!" It was what you would expect from students. I remember how de Gaulle waited, very cleverly and very wisely waited them out and finally moved in at three in the morning in various places and took over their strongholds with a minimum of bloodshed. By that time the students had run out of steam. But before then when they were first tearing things apart, they tore down the superstructure of the metro openings, you know, in the Quartier Latin. I remember that I was duty officer that weekend and again, Mrs. Shriver wanted to see it and show it to her kids. I took them around and showed them the damage. With my wife, I had been out there and seen what they were doing from a safe distance. The police were very restrained, there was no breaking of heads. There was no Kent State. And it worked, it really did. Now, Cohn-Bendit is actually back in there as a member of the European parliament.

Q: Known as "Rudy the Red" at one time.

MASON: Yes. He can't decide whether he has French or German nationality.

Q: He's from Alsace perhaps.

MASON: No, I think he is from Germany proper, but his family came to France as refugees in the 1930s. He's in the Green Movement now and before the French elections, a year or two ago, he was seen quite often on television and has become quite respectable. No, all of this was something I followed with great interest because I had been covering French politics as an intelligence analyst for years, you see, and all the colonial troubles.

Q: Was there real apprehension that the French army might move in and if they did what might this mean?

MASON: I think there was. There was a feeling of suspense, but I don't know if it was more so than the feeling in April 1961 when the French Colonels, Salan, Jouhaux, Zeller, and Challe in Algiers set up their little regime. There people were afraid of paratroopers landing south of Paris. That was very touch and go. But it didn't happen, again because de Gaulle was able to rally the contingent, that is to say the draftees in the French army, who would have resisted an order from those colonels to move. I think those two events were of somewhat equal importance. And in between them, of course, there were how many assassination attempts against de Gaulle personally? There was Petit Clamart, and there was the one on the way to Colombey les-Deux-Eglises, and another one down in Toulon and so on. Those were exciting days in Paris, and in both cases I believe direct intervention by the Army would have led to a blood bath and tarnished de Gaulle's reputation. As it was, having extricated France from the Algerian morass, it was a great humiliation for him now to see his work turned against him by students who had not been out of their cribs in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I guess he felt he was on the way out. The question that I always asked was why he dispensed with the services of Pompidou as

prime minister just at that time and brought in Couve de Murville. Was it to let Pompidou keep his hands clean so that he could succeed de Gaulle more easily? Because the elections took place in the June of 1969, and de Gaulle didn't run. He moved back into retirement and Pompidou won. And that is just when I left. So I concluded my service in France with the departure of the General.

At the end of two years in June of 1969 I was brought back to Washington and to the Vietnam Training Center at Arlington Towers, where I attended lectures that lasted two or three months. We had top flight speakers like Herman Kahn of the Hudson Institute, and experts like Chester Bain, who wrote a book on Vietnam. These were some of the people who helped us to flesh the subject out very thoroughly. So I can't say that I wasn't prepared to go to Vietnam and I appreciated that. I asked to be in the press office because of my French, thinking I could deal with the French press better than some of the others. But no, I was assigned as Reports Officer of JUSPAO (Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office). JUSPAO was in the Rex building downtown. I arrived the first of October of 1969 in Saigon.

Q: How would you describe the situation in South Vietnam, at the time that you got there in October of 1969?

MASON: We considered, in spite of what the press was saying, that we had won the Tet Offensive, so what was going on was not an immediate danger to Saigon. I remember that people would climb onto the roofs of their buildings to watch what looked like heat lightning way off in the distance but was in fact artillery fire. I remember that there was one that landed on a tennis court at the Sporting Club.

Q: ...The tennis court. I was a member of the Cercle Sportif.

MASON: I can't stand that kind of heat, lying in the sun and even swimming is no pleasure to me but that was it.

Q: So now what was your job?

MASON: I was reports officer.

Q: Which meant what?

MASON: It was a miserable, frustrating job. On my first day, I showed up for work and was told without explanation to get out the weekly report. I guess it was a Friday or Saturday. I was supposed to work the entire weekend to get this report out. Well, it came back to me a few days later with the comment, "This report requires considerable rewriting" and so on. Of course, I hadn't had any experience in writing reports to Washington, or instruction in how to do so. I took the individual reports, which came from all over South Vietnam, and put them together by subject, I guess, or by military region. And my great complaint was what I imagine took place everywhere in Vietnam, that with an unpopular war and an unpopular President who was trying to justify the war,

no President would want to hear bad news. So any bad news just wasn't reported as far as I could see from the final reports that went forward.

The only classified item in it was the number of leaflets dropped on the trail that week. And what the North Vietnamese did with those leaflets, I can only imagine. Another thing that I noticed was the posters put out by JUSPAO, beautifully done artistic posters showing happy peasants protecting their villages. One had a village silhouette in the background with a soldier from the South Vietnamese army in the foreground protecting the village. But on its tallest building in the distance there was a cross, just two tiny lines making a cross. I said, "Since the South Vietnamese are divided between Buddhists and Christians and the Buddhists greatly resent the Christians, who were converted by the French and whom they consider to be pro-French, pro-American and not good Vietnamese, why do we have to have a cross on this?" I was told to shut up because these were approved by a committee that went over these things very carefully. Well, to me this was a waste of time and money, because without the cross, it could have been a good message, but with the cross, it alienated the Buddhists and reinforced their feeling that the Christians were lackeys of the Americans.

Those are little things, but you could multiply them by as many cases as you could think of.
Then there were delays in getting the reports approved. Since there were three bosses in the front office: Chief - JUSPAO, his deputy, and a third man, I don't have to mention their names, it doesn't matter. They all went over this report before it went out, and it was delayed and delayed. They were swamped with work. They had much, much too much to do, so that by the time the report went out, much of it was obsolete, or if they heard something in the meantime in the field, they'd send it back to me to be checked out. Then I would go back to the person in the field and he would say, "My God! I gave you this report three weeks ago and it hasn't gone out yet? Naturally, things have changed. Why couldn't it have gone out? I'd sent you a new report. Now I have to go over this same report that I wrote before." So there was frustration all up and down the line and we were swamped in paperwork, in Saigon and in the field. I found this a thankless job. I was trained to be a public affairs officer and I am doing nothing but paperwork, sitting in that icebox of a JUSPAO office, and sick with a cold every other day from the air-conditioning. So I asked my boss if I could have a different job for my second year there and do something else and not go back to the States after two years in Vietnam with nothing to show for it but having written reports which were re-written before going out.

They did move me and I am sure they held it against me, but I didn't mind because I was made a PSYOPS - psychological operations - advisor in CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) Advisory Team 44 in Gia Dinh Province (the suburbs of Saigon). Now CORDS under Bill Colby was a real working outfit. Every province had a team, a Province Senior Advisor and specialists from the military and the civilian side. JUSPAO was also military and civilian, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office. But at CORDS, I was the man in charge of public affairs, reporting what I thought was the truth about the rural development program. My boss was one of the finest men I ever met in the Foreign Service, Dave McKillop. He would call me and his Filipino assistant, Ed

Navarro, after our daily staff meeting, which was, I guess, 7:00 A.M. or 7:30, and Dave would sit in a chair between us and we would have a cup of coffee and talk things over. This, to me, was supervision the way it should be. Not the way they do things in my agency, and it increased my respect for the State Department. Of course, I would have preferred to be in the political section of the embassy, but there were no openings, since everyone wanted to be in the political cone.

There I was with Dave McKillop, and he wrote the finest rating I have ever been given. It was just outstanding. I would have gone into combat with him. He was there for my first year. Actually I guess I spent 14 months, so he wasn't there for a full year. He was replaced by Bob Walkinshaw, who was a labor officer, since retired and I enjoyed working with him also. It was one of the best jobs I have had anywhere in my career. I'm happy to have had it because it gave me the possibility of going back to America, having mingled with the people and seen what actually went on in the suburbs of Saigon, down to Can Gio on the South China Sea, all the way down the Saigon River. There were five or six districts. We had district advisors, young officers and we had the Province Senior Advisor nearby and we were in daily contact with him. I saw mistakes being made. I remember once, when they were about to have an election, the supervisor gave a party and invited the various contending Vietnamese parties over to the house for drinks. Naturally, only one or two showed up. We were interfering in their election, and this was the kiss of death. So I learned a lesson there too: what not to do when there are elections about to take place.

I got great satisfaction in Saigon. My wife was able to get a job there since according to the rules at that time, a woman who was able to get a job on her own was welcome to come and live with her husband and they would make it a two year tour instead of an 18 month tour with safe havening in say, Baguio, or Bangkok or Hong Kong or wherever it might be. So, I had my wife with me the whole time and we took short, week-long vacations every three or four months and saw a great deal of Southeast Asia and that made it very tolerable. She was very happy there. She sang with the Saigon Choral Society. They sang *Carmina Burana* and *The Messiah*. She even taught typing to the Air Force. So she was occupied and it was the perfect situation for the two of us, except for the war.

Now you asked me about the feelings and the attitudes and the atmosphere when I arrived in October. I described what it was in October, but then, of course, we had the Cambodian incursion, which cleaned out the whole Third Corps Area. Saigon was in the middle of the Third Corps Area, or third Military Region, and the Vietcong there was defeated I was told the kickoff for the Tet Offensive had taken place in the Hoc Mon district. The surrounding countryside had been saturated with Vietcong, but not after the Cambodian incursion. I don't actually know what damage we did in Cambodia. I have asked people, and I don't know if I have the truth. I have the strong impression that we only bombed the Trail. We didn't bomb cities or towns as such. I hope I'm right. But whatever else it did, it opened the area.

I had a Ford Bronco and a Vietnamese assistant (whom I helped to bring his family to the

Los Angeles area after 1975 and with whom I'm still in contact). We could drive all over the area. I drove with my wife one Sunday up to Tay Ninh on the Cambodian border to see the Cao Dai Temple, and down to Vung Tau (Cap St Jacques) once. By day the roads were open, which made a big difference, and gave us a greater sense of security. I no longer heard the artillery at night that I had heard when I first arrived there, so that when I left, I stopped in Paris in the fall of 1971 to see General Walters who was still there as the Defense Attaché and took a great interest in the war, and reported to him. I told him I felt that unless some outside force came in, at least locally we know that the people are with us and that we will be able to hang on, that Vietnamization will succeed. Well, I was wrong, because Congress didn't vote the funds to keep the South Vietnamese Army properly armed and their morale suffered and it went in a matter of weeks, but long after American forces had left.

Q: Yes, you're talking about 1975.

MASON: Yes, 1975. I don't want to get into criticism there, since I had left in 1971. For about $35 more, we came back through Asia and stopped in as many places as possible and made it a great trip. We had a few days in Kashmir on the Dal Lake and in Beirut, and in Lisbon and across Puerto Rico and Florida, where my mother was living. Then I was assigned to the staff and faculty at the Vietnam Training Center. I was proud of that. It was a good job. I spoke to groups who were going out to Vietnam following us, because they were expected to go out with no let-up in the CORDS program or the other programs within the provinces. We did this until the spring of 1972 when the whole thing - the Vietnam Training Center - just closed down. I remember we had General Haig as a speaker and at just about the time he was there, it was announced that we were closing. So I had to look for another job. At USIA no offer was forthcoming. I was willing to take anything, because I wanted a to know how the Agency functioned. By that time I had spent four years, from 1967 to 1971 (four and a half years really), without an assignment at the Agency. But I also tried the State Department and lo and behold, I found a job in Media Services, part of the Public Affairs section of the State Department, under Paul Auerswald, where I worked with a retired Naval commander named Ed Roeder, who had done a lot of television work for the Pentagon.

We started a program of sending out to the local stations around the country little scripts which outlined American policy with slides. We would take photographs which we would send with a text. If we happened to mention Secretary Kissinger, we would send a slide of Kissinger, so that his face would appear behind the speaker's face at the local station. This was good work because I was able to follow policy - it could have been the Law of the Sea or any number of subjects which local stations out in the Dakotas could use as they please. There were a few that sent them back saying, "We don't want this propaganda, we don't want handouts," but that was their loss because we weren't forcing it down their throats. We were merely saying, "This is American policy." That is the way it was for my two years spent at the Vietnam Training Center and in Public Affairs at the State Department.

Then I discovered to my dismay that the Agency did not consider this mainline work. It was not an assignment with USIA. Well, I had a great deal of trouble getting a statement

of need-in other words that they needed me at the Agency-because I was not doing Agency work. I was working at the State Department. I had a strong feeling that when there is a war-time situation and when that war is a land war, the navy still has to get involved. Every service has to have its share. I felt that USIA was playing this game too. That's why they had JUSPAO, the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, which added layers and layers of people there. I can tell you one thing that caused me to be looked at askance. Our Deputy Director came to town and sat in on one of our staff meetings. He told us that every USIA officer coming up for a new assignment would be sent to Vietnam, if he hadn't already been there, and he would break the assignment of anybody who had an assignment somewhere else and had not been to Vietnam. Well, a high ranking individual came from Washington, USIA whom I'd met before, and he called me in and asked what we'd been told. I told him, and he stared at me and said not another word. That was the end of the interview. So I shouldn't have mentioned something the Agency was doing for us to raise our morale!

I don't think that the people with the inside track in Washington should have gotten the good assignments without having gone to Vietnam. On the other hand, I found that as soon as the Vietnam War was over, 1972 for us, it was a disadvantage career-wise to have been in Vietnam. This is why I had trouble getting a career appointment into the Agency. It took a year before they finally agreed to give me an oral exam. When the exam was finally administered, I passed it with flying colors and got my career status. Almost immediately I got the assignment I had asked for. I'd always wanted go to North Africa. I had covered the North African independence movements, and now I was assigned as Branch Public Affairs officer in Casablanca.

Q: You went there when?

MASON: Casablanca? I went there in June of 1974.

Q: And you were there until when?

MASON: June of 1978. I had two two-year tours. I extended. That was very, very interesting. It was my best tour with USIA because I was my own boss, to the extent that you can be when you are isolated and there is nobody else in the same town. I was the only Branch PAO in Morocco. My assistant was pulled out after about six months and sent to Fez to be a kind of a mini-Public Affairs Officer there. I had no authority over him, but I did have the south of Morocco including Marrakech as well as Casablanca, the real metropolis. It was a great experience for me. I went out and met a lot of groups. I had a good loyal staff, most of the time.

I worked for good people. Bill Brubeck was my Consul General, and I learned there that one of the qualifications for success was to be a good tennis player, because the first thing he asked me was "Do you play tennis?" I had to say "Sorry, no." He was living at the Villa Mirador, where Churchill had been quartered during the Casablanca conference. This magnificent home had a swimming pool, where the rest of us would go on weekends for a swim. I didn't play tennis but I got along with him well anyway; he turned out to be

a good boss. Within a year our lease ran out on the old cultural center, which was located on the rue Pégoud, downtown on a narrow street and in an unattractive building. It did have a small theater, and a huge library-far more books than it needed. The kids would pile in there and reach for books and throw them around, and it was chaotic. But the landlord wanted it back.

And through luck and much effort and a couple of places that didn't work out, we finally found a property on the Place Bel Air, within a block or two of the Consulate General and the American Language Center (which had been the Consulate in the old days, before the 1970s). Our building had been the residence of the Consul General during World War II-a magnificent old, thick walled villa with 12 or 14 foot high ceilings, a marble staircase, big rooms, and a porch off the living/dining room with columns that opened onto a garden. But the building itself was sadly in need of renovation.

We talked to the owner. He was very happy to let us have it and the Agency sent their expert on the conversion of buildings, Theodore Bork. I worked with him very closely. He was a very fine fellow. I liked him and respected his decisions. He had worked on hotels and then he had taken a job with the Agency redoing most of our cultural centers. Over the course of a year, we turned the place into a beautiful operation, with a stage in the garden. We could have musical and stage performances, and we had chairs that we could put out in the grass for hundreds of people. Inside the living room and the dining room were separated by a partition that was not load-bearing, and so we knocked out that partition and made it into what was called an MPR - a multi-purpose room. We put a screen at one end and a projection booth at the other end. It was perfect. We had all the chairs we needed. We had a platform for speakers and musicians. I've got a photo album filed with pictures of all the work done.

My Public Affairs Officer at the time was Jim Tull, who is now retired and living near Mobile, Alabama, another very fine fellow, and a Vietnam Vet. He knew of a piano, which was in the home of one of his officers, and he took it and gave it to me for my cultural center, and I had visiting pianists there playing American music. I had a free hand really. I had, at one time, a well known composer with an Academy Award and a former student of Nadia Boulanger, named Gail Kubik. He was driving through Morocco and offered his services. He had a short film showing some of the work he had done, and how you add music to a soundtrack of purely staged film to lend atmosphere to it. We set him up at the University and they just sat there and loved it. Here was this big man from Hollywood who had come to speak to them. But I found out later that this kind of initiative was not appreciated in Washington, since I was supposed to concentrate on the "opinion makers" and not the students. But this was accomplished without interfering with my regular programs, and I consider students to be the people you want to aim at as future opinion makers. But that is another subject.

Q: Let's talk a little about Morocco. What was the state of American-Moroccan relations at that time?

MASON: Excellent, excellent. The King had survived two assassination attempts you

know. One...

Q: One at a birthday party and one...

MASON: ...the airplane outside of Rabat, that's right. And Oufkir, his closest military advisor, was the man behind it, and Oufkir was of course executed. His family was imprisoned in very, very painful conditions, and they came out finally. But it was a long, long haul there, just as Mehdi Ben Barka's family came out only recently after the death of King Hassan. His son, as a measure of clemency, brought the family out; they too had been cooped up in very small cells. Otherwise the King was very well disposed to us. He talked about democracy. Of course, we knew it was not true democracy, but he did what his father, Mohamed V, had not been able to do. He did away with the anarchy of the party system there-- the Istiqlal and the UNFP, Ben Barka's party. I've forgotten the details of it. So that he was really running things after a while.

Back in the days when I was an intelligence analyst, we gave him six months because he was a playboy and was not getting along with the political leaders. Well, he knew what to do. He put on his white Djellaba, and he mounted his white horse and rode out into the crowd. They dropped to their knees to revere him because he had “baraka” (the blessing, or just plain luck). They had had nothing but autocratic rule; thus, they counted on his beneficence. Besides, as a cherifien (a descendant of the Prophet) he incarnated legitimacy. I hope his son will carry on in his footsteps. The new king was given tough training by his father, but he has had a softer life than his father because Hassan and Mohamed V had been exiled to Madagascar during the independence struggles in the 1950s.

So I very much enjoyed the stay in Morocco, even though it turned sour toward the end, and this I'll have to allude to only in a general way. A surprise inspection was coming up, and this put the Public Affairs Officer, whose name I will not give you, in a bit of a bind, because he had already sent a thick document with colored tabs that looked very, very professional in which he recommended (without consulting me) that upon my departure, they close up Casablanca and move the operation back to Rabat in a revamped USIS operation out of the basement of the embassy. As I read this thing my jaw dropped. He was saying, "We've got a bad landlord here. He's not doing things. He's cheating us, and so on." I got back to him and said, “I wish you had told me about this and said openly to me 'I'm thinking of closing down Casablanca.' Then, I would have had to work with you to justify it, if necessary. But you didn't and I can see mistake after mistake in your proposal. You are saying that our landlord is not trustworthy. You are confusing him with the landlord of the American Language Center, a different landlord entirely." This didn't endear me to him. I’m sure he didn't take kindly to this because he had the habit of bad-mouthing my colleagues in Morocco to me, which is something a supervisor doesn't do.

So sure enough, when I heard the inspection was coming up, I said, "Well, I just can't go along with this, since I had no part in it,” and if the inspectors ask me what I honestly think, I'm going to have to say I don't approve of it. You’ve got to have the man living in

Casablanca. He can't come here with a briefcase every day to see his contacts. He has got to live here among the people day and night and witness what is happening. I said this in the farewell staff meeting with the Ambassador in Rabat, I'm sure that this did me no good in my career. But I did what I had to do, since an inspector asks you for your true feelings on any subject. Furthermore, my staff must have learned of it because it soured the atmosphere at the Center, and they began looking for other jobs. Well, the inspectors agreed with me. The office is still open in Casablanca. I haven't been back there in 20 years, but I'm proud of it and some day I would like to go back and see how it is doing.

In my next assignment, I was to be Country Public Affairs Officer in Madagascar at Antananarivo. You chose one post from each geographical area, and I chose Madagascar because it is at a high elevation and, at least, it shouldn't be too unpleasant a place to live in. But once I got there, I found there was not much going on. It was an unfriendly regime. They had North Koreans flying their MIGs over the city almost every day. But the people were friendly and very good people, all the ones I knew had been converted to Christianity either by the fathers on the coast--the black tribes on the coast were converted by the French fathers - or by the London Missionary Society on the high plateau - the people on the high plateau of Indonesian origin were converted by a mix of Norwegian and Americans. We had American Baptists, too. As I understood it, only the Mormons were looked upon unfavorably by the other sects of Christians, for they came to proselytize instead of evangelize.

I had the impressions that my generation had received in the 1930s and 1940s from literature, as in Somerset Maugham's "Rain," about sexually repressed missionaries and so on, so I looked askance at the work of the missionaries until I went down to Fort Dauphin, at the southern tip of the island and beyond the Tropic of Capricorn to Manambaro, where the Lutherans had built a hospital which looked like a one-story World War II barracks on wooden pylons. They used volunteers, people mostly from the Northwest, Minnesota or westward, Scandinavian or German in origin. These people were very fervent Christians who would take a year or two off from their practices or jobs and come out to work at this hospital or do whatever else was needed.

There was one man who owned a garage in Nebraska and came out to see what could be done about a generator which had been given to the hospital by a rich lady. It was a generator for an enormous operation and it used much more fuel than they could possibly afford to burn for their small operation. So, they found this garage owner, and he was able to reduce it to a small putt-putt generator, which was exactly what they needed. It was a great service. There was a doctor I met who said he loved it because his practice at home restricted him to only certain operations. Whereas here, he removed a woman's spleen in the morning and operated on somebody's skull in the afternoon and did a variety of other operations almost every day.

They didn't have to feed the families. The families would camp under the building, in the shade, and feed their own sick member, while he was in the hospital. And they cured people. When I arrived they had reduced the French presence drastically, and the French-staffed hospitals were closing down. We had a case in which one of our trucks

was sideswiped on the highway by a big Malagasy truck, and the young economics officer was killed while the defense attaché's hip was broken. I saw him years afterwards and he had a shoe with a brace on it, since one leg was several inches shorter than the other. He was still on active duty at DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency). They didn't have the means. It was no longer the modern hospital it had been before. So, he was evacuated by air as soon as possible.

We were told to be very careful about getting an assignment in Madagascar, because if you have a heart attack or a burst appendix, you won't be able to get to Nairobi in time. They would do the best they could for you, but that's all. That's what living in Madagascar was like in Antananarivo. My wife and I lived in a beautiful house with no children. We had a cook, a gardener, and a swimming pool which didn't function. We also had a maid, who did housework, and this was more than we needed. My wife had her piano and a temporary job as the chargé's secretary.

Q: What was the government like?
MASON: The Ratsiraka government was Marxist. I was told of a gift from the Soviets to the government in the form of a serum for polio, I think it was. Now, polio serum has to be kept cool. The government was quiet about this because they were keeping it only for their own party members, not for the general public. You would see kids downtown with sticks for legs, dragging themselves around in the street. But that didn't count for the ruling party. They took the serum and put it in the attic of the Presidential Palace, where the temperature must have been almost 100 degrees, so it spoiled all the serum. That's the sort of thing: incompetence, mixed with ideological stupidity. This sort of thing happened only too frequently.

I should say that in 1972, the pro-French President, Tsiranana, was overthrown and the Hotel de Ville, in downtown Antananarivo, was burnt down leaving only a shell. It was there the whole time that I was there. There was no attempt to rebuild it. Then there had been another coup in the mid-1970s, 1976 I guess it was, which brought Ratsiraka to power. I arrived in 1978, and he was sitting hard on the people. He's back in power now, but I'm told he has seen the light and is welcoming aid from the West. By the way, I'm still in touch with my chief assistant there and have a framed "Certificate of Appreciation and Commendation" signed by the entire staff.

Q: How were you able to operate?

MASON: Not very well. We would have shows. We would have films. The people, again, were a very religious people, very pious. There again I learned something. When Pope John Paul II made his first trip to the United States, I was able as Public Affairs Officer to invite the Cardinal to my house and see the film of the Pope's trip to the United States, which was quite impressive. He was very gracious and benign about it, and we had a nice friendly discussion. But afterwards a group of nuns asked me about the American nuns in the film and repeated what the film had said, that some of them wished they could be priests. Specifically, there was one red-headed nun in Philadelphia, who had to sit in the basement while the priests were sitting in the nave where they could see the Pope. She

was outraged at that-perhaps rightly, perhaps wrongly, I don't know. I tried to be truthful about controversial subjects in the States without saying that this was they way things should be in Madagascar. I simply explained that we have a woman's movement in the United States, and women are demanding equal status with men, and it is not for me to say whether this can take place within the Church or not.

Then on other occasions, I'd invite people to the house for movies, and once we showed *San Francisco*, with Jeanette MacDonald and Clark Gable and Spencer Tracy. They thought that was wonderful. That was just the kind of movie they loved.

Q: Great Earthquake.

MASON: Great Earthquake, but everything comes out well in the end. They all sing *Nearer My God to Thee* at the end. But then we had *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with Vivian Leigh distraught and alcoholic and then being raped by Marlon Brando. Afterward one woman asked me, "Is this really what American women are like" and I said, "Oh, no, no! This is a very, very unusual case. Nothing like this happens in the general population." Now *Streetcar* is a great play. I have great respect for it, especially in its sociological aspects, the decline of the Southern aristocracy, and the rise of the immigrant population, represented by Brando/Kowalski. This was a change in the power structure in the United States being documented in human terms, and I think Williams did a beautiful job of it. It's his best play from that point of view. But it was not something I should have shown to an audience which loved *San Francisco.*

This takes me back to the early days in Casablanca when we showed *A Farewell to Arms* with Rock Hudson and Jennifer Jones, and it was interesting to note that the Moroccan boys were outraged because he deserted. "This man was a deserter! He had a job to do and he didn't do it." They were taught that you don't desert. "Well, he's not a deserter," I said, "because the American army wasn't there. This was the Italian army and he was just an ambulance driver." I guess I got around it that way, but you can see the mind set of various peoples. It depends on where you are and how well you know those peoples. This has been my complaint with the Agency, with over centralization in Washington, with "opinion makers" as we call them. *We* can be the opinion makers, if we get the kids at the right age and show them what America is really like. But we weren't supposed to go after kids. No, we were supposed to go after the people who were already in power and argue with them and convert them and bring them over to our point of view. This really depends on where you are working.

Q: Of course it does.

MASON: And a public affairs officer who gets to know a population as I tried to get to know the Moroccans on the one hand and the Malagasy on the other has to do it a different way.

Q: Before we leave Madagascar, who was your ambassador there?

MASON: First I had Bob Barrett, who was the permanent chargé d'affaires. We didn't have an ambassador for the first year. The second year it was Fernando Rondon, a Hispanic who had been ambassador to Ecuador and Honduras. He had had a previous assignment in Madagascar. One of his children was born in Madagascar so he was very welcome there. His French was good and he was a fine man, but he wasn't a close friend. Bob and Mavis Barrett are close friends. Bob didn't get his ambassadorship until after serving as DCM in Beirut, and then he was made ambassador in Djibouti, where he stayed for two tours. I got along beautifully with Bob and admired him as an officer. And with Rondon? We got along well, but I was only with him for a very few months. He had to wait to present his Letters of Accreditation, so of course couldn't participate in public affairs for several weeks.

Q: Was the government there trying to throw up roadblocks and hurt the relationship or were we generally ignored or how did it work?

MASON: As far as I could figure out, we were ignored. The opposition were encouraged to embarrass us. There was an article about what Castro was doing in Cuba, and a USIA film about the Mariel Boat Lift in 1980. When they saw the film, my chief assistants came up to me and said, "Please don't show this film here in Madagascar!" And you could see from some of the faces on that film that this was not the cream of Cuban society. I didn't show the film, but it never should have been sent to me in the first place. Then I let an article go which was critical of Cuba, and the Cuban ambassador complained. Again, I had never been briefed on the so-called third party rule. I should have known, but never even had an orientation with USIA. That's the way they trained people.

I had gotten my promotion in Casablanca, by the way, through Jim Tull, who said I was the best Center Director he'd had in 20 years in the business because I was able to move my center from the old premises to the new premises, while still continuing to work with no hiatus. "While any other branch Public Affairs Officer would have closed down everything for a period of weeks, if not months," he went on. Well, I didn't have to close down, and I don't think that was such a great accomplishment. I am surprised that others had had to. Another thing I discovered when I got to Casablanca was that the flag we were still using in 1954 in that old cultural center was a 48 star flag, 15 years after Alaska and Hawaii had achieved statehood! So I had to ask the Agency to send us a new one.

Q: Anyway, back in Madagascar, did things move at all or was this just an unfriendly regime?

MASON: It was not entirely unfriendly. The number two man at the Foreign Ministry was Rasafseheno, a fine gentleman. He was just as friendly with us as he could have been, even though his boss I guess was not. He invited me once to the Ministry, greeted me on the steps outside and saw me off the same way. Unfortunately, he was sent to the U.S. as ambassador in the early 1980s and died during a bypass operation at George Washington University Hospital His wife was there, and it was a sad moment. He was such a nice fellow. He would be admired by any Malagasy. They are a kind and gentle people.

By the way, it was in Madagascar that I wrote the first draft of my novel, Hostage to Fortune.

Q: You came back in what? Was it 1981?

MASON: Yes, 1981.

Q: And then what?

MASON: By that time, I had known for six months that I would go to Rome as Deputy Cultural Affairs Officer. I had some trepidation about that. I had never been assigned as a Cultural Affairs Officer anywhere, nor had I ever had a Washington tour with USIA. I was still making mistakes about which part of the Agency did what, I had never had the basic orientation that I should have had. Nevertheless, foolishly I considered it a "stretch" assignment, thinking." I must have done something right to be given a job where my talents can be put to the best use and help me to learn something." It was more than a disappointment. In Rome, I was expected to jump into the job and perform professionally without a day of on-the-job training. I was given no help, and because of disagreements, I left after nine months and returned to Washington and the television service. Thus began my first Washington tour as part of the television service, which was in the Patrick Henry Building on Seventh Street. This was good training, and being a lifelong writer and having been in the State Department in media services, it was a job I enjoyed. I was assigned to get coverage and VCRs for the desk officers of various countries in the Middle East and Africa. I was ready to retire and might even have retired if I had finished my tour in Rome. But this was better.

In Washington, we moved into an apartment at Columbia Plaza, where we still live, 20 years later. After two and a half years at that job, I reached exactly 30 years of service, from the first of March 1955 to the first of March 1985. I told them I planned to retire. A year later, reaching age 60, my army reserve retirement came into force, and I got all the privileges of a lieutenant colonel who had had a career in the army. So since then, call me a double dipper if you want, I have both. As a civilian I worked in factories and other jobs, enough to have earned minimum Social Security. My wife also had worked as an ambassador's assistant or secretary, filling-in in Madagascar. She had also worked at TWA in Paris as a French employee before marrying me, as well as jobs in Saigon and in Germany, which meant that because of an agreement between France and the United States, wives and others who have some social security time coming to them in the United States and in France, or some other country, can combine those to get a full or at least the minimum pension level. She was able to do that in both countries. She had enough time, by combining them, so that she had more than she needed in one country and as much as she needed in the other.

So we have made out very well, and I have returned to my writing. As you know, I have written a novel about the Foreign Service, Hostage to Fortune, which draws on a lot of things that I knew but refers to no individual I've known. I say this sincerely. It is not just a remark. I am not getting back at anybody that I didn't like, but I am trying to bring out

the aspects that I most appreciate about the Foreign Service and to show the consequences of breaking certain rules, whether to the guilty person or to an innocent person, even putting lives in danger. And by the way, I'm signing copies at military PXs (Post Exchanges) in the Washington area, and it is doing very well. It is now in a second edition and has sold over 850 copies, this time with "blurbs" from several senior Foreign Service officers, including John Waller and Barrett McGurn, both of them authors in their own right.

Q: Once back on the television service, did you find that you were able to bring sort of a sense of the field to the television service, in other words, to be aware of things that probably would not play too well overseas?

MASON: Not really. I was merely the liaison officer between the Middle East and African desk officers and the TV Service. It was the desk which ordered the product it wanted for that country, and I was there to facilitate the production. Of course, it was strictly the American view on everything, whether you were dealing with the Grenada invasion or Panama or whatever. We were just putting out the word as it came out of Washington. What emerged was Worldnet, a television hook-up for questions and answers visually between the Secretary of State or other high official and the press corps in a given country, so that the journalists there could see them answering their question. It is an excellent idea as far as it goes, although I had nothing to do with the conception of the idea.

Q: Well, Ted, I think this is a good place to stop.

MASON: In summary, I am satisfied with a career which did not meet all my expectations. I gave it my best, and I learned which were my strong points and which were my weak ones. We've been active in retirement here. I sat on promotion panels in the early years and have volunteered at the State Department Book Room and at the Book Fair for over 15 years. I am a lifelong lover of classical music, and my wife is a pianist, a member of several musical organizations here, and endows an annual concert at the Phillips Collection in perpetuity. We are volunteers at the Washington Opera. We've funded scholarships in my dad's name both at Taft School and at Yale, and I've given talks in local libraries on embassy security and the Foreign Service in general in an effort to sell my book. We also visit Europe twice a year on military aircraft as retirees. And by the way, I am readying a collection of my best stories for publication, I hope, in 2004.

So we're proud to have served, and we hope to go on doing so as long as we can.

Q: Great!

End of interview