

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

EARL PACKER

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Initial interview date: October 27, 1988
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INTERVIEW

Q: Earl, tell me the date of your birth.

PACKER: November 19, 1894.

Q: So that makes you almost, as of today, 94 years old. Tell me, Earl, how did a young fellow born in Utah wind up in the Foreign Service?

PACKER: Well, it's a great story. I was born in a middle class family, and we didn't have too much money. I was the youngest of five sons, and after completing high school in Ogden I had a variety of jobs, which lasted until I got the results of a civil service examination for a clerical job in one of the government departments in Washington. And that resulted in my going to Washington in 1915, and taking a job there in the Bureau of Insular Affairs, in the War Department. It was in a clerical capacity.

Well, I'd been with them approximately a year, until there came, to the State Department, a telegram from Ambassador Francis, in Petrograd, asking for a couple of male stenographic clerks. The appointment clerk in the State Department came to the chief clerk of the Bureau of Insular Affairs and said, "Do you have anybody who would like to go to Petrograd?"

A friend and I talked the thing over, and we put our bid in, and shortly we were on our way to Petrograd. And we got there in time to be present at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, in 1917--November 7, Western style calendar.

Q: Excuse me, Earl. When you first went there, wasn't it still called St. Petersburg?

PACKER: No, I think not. I think they had already changed it to Petrograd.

Q: I see.

PACKER: Well, in a short time the embassy decided to leave Petrograd and go east, and settled in a little provincial capital called Vologda. In the meantime, there were changes in the staff of the embassy proper, and a military mission was created; the head of which was General Judson. He was a colonel, but he was quickly promoted to a B.G. (Brigadier General).

Q: Why did we have a military mission?

PACKER: We had come into the war, and it was considered desirable--from a military point of view--to have this mission created. It was called The American Military Mission to Russia. The job of being a clerk in the military mission came up, and it led--in due course--to my being commissioned as a first lieutenant of infantry, United States National Army (USNA).

From Vologda, as things progressed badly for Russia--on the western front--the decision of the allies was that intervention should occur, with a view to preventing the deterioration of Russia, as an ally of the Western powers, against Germany. A military expedition was sent into Archangel, and the embassy moved from Vologda to Archangel.

Then, of course, the development of the war on the western front eventually led to the peace, and the withdrawal of American forces from Russia. There was also some sort of intervention in South Russia, the details of which I don't remember. And at Vladivostok, as well as at Murmansk.

Q: Now, the U.S. was not fighting against Germany in Russia, was it? What was the purpose of the mission?

PACKER: The purpose of the mission--looking at it from the point of view of Washington--could only have been to somehow keep Russia active as long as possible in the war. But the military mission actually wasn't--in my opinion--a great success, because the Russian armed forces were not able to prevent the creation of a Soviet government, which put the Kerensky government out of commission. I would say it was a rather unexpected development, from the point of view of the American organization in Petrograd--and later in Vologda; likewise in North Russia, in Archangel.

Q: Did you go to Archangel, or did you stay?

PACKER: In the military mission itself there was the general, two colonels, two captains--one of whom was a National Army officer. He was of American-Russian extraction; his father was in business, and he was in business with his father until this opportunity came to get a commission in the National Army, and become a member of the military mission.

Q: Well, you were there--in Russia--at the time the Revolution was going on. Wasn't living difficult for you?

PACKER: Yes and no. We had no family there. Well, I think Prince . . . I don't remember when he got married. We somehow found quarters--a house; and some of us lived in the house. Some of us were able to get living quarters with a Russian family. And we ran a mess at the military mission, for our own personnel. And we had Russian help there--in the mission--to look after the purchase of food, the preparation of food, the serving of food, and so forth.

Q: Okay, let's try another approach. What were your biggest problems, Earl, during that period? Was it being out of touch with the United States?

PACKER: Well, we could buy stuff on the local market, which the Russian people on the staff took care of. And the actual serving of food was arranged. We had Prince--because he was absolutely perfect in his Russian. His mother was Russian, his father was American. He had a good deal to say about how the mission's Russian staff worked.

Colonel Stewart was the officer in charge of the military expedition to Russia. And Stewart, and our Colonel Ruggels--who was a regular Army officer--was in close touch with the military expedition. And there was, of course, a possibility of telegraphic correspondence, and written correspondence, sent through couriers set up by the embassy,

to enable messages to go for information purposes, to Washington via use of commercial telegraph services.

Q: So you did have constant communication possibilities?

PACKER: Yes, they were quite handy. And then, of course, the diplomatic side was handled by Ambassador Francis and his staff. He had two or three secretaries--first secretary, second, and so forth.

Q: Earl, you were carried then as an assistant military attaché?

PACKER: I was made an assistant to the military attaché. As I recall, for some technical reason they had to put the 'to' in there because . . . probably it related to appropriations.

Q: But actually you were a lieutenant, at that time?

PACKER: First lieutenant of infantry, USNA.

Q: And that was attached to the embassy at Petrograd.

PACKER: Initially in Petrograd, and then went to Vologda, and then to Archangel. Then when the war was over, why, we were all withdrawn.

Q: And you went then to Washington?

PACKER: Then I went back to Washington. I was demobilized. Then I was offered a job in the State Department, with. . . I don't know what it was called; I don't remember. The biographic sketch may show what my title was.

Q: It just shows that you were appointed as a Foreign Service officer and a vice-consul in 1920.

PACKER: When I got settled on this job in the State Department, I resumed my studies at George Washington. In 1921 I got my AB. In the meantime, I had taken the consular examination. I think there are some mistakes in that State Department Register record, but my recollections are not sufficiently firm to make any changes, really.

Q: Well, obviously because of your experience in Russia, you were assigned to the Division of Russian Affairs.

PACKER: Yes, it seems to me that initially we were an office in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs. And then the Russian division was created. I became, in due course, the assistant chief of the Division of Russian Affairs. Many years later the Division of Eastern European Affairs was created in the Department; and it seems to me I had my

initial assignment up to the Baltic States in that period--before the Division of Eastern European Affairs was created.

Q: That's what the biographic register shows, in fact. But it was 1922 when you were posted to Riga.

PACKER: That is correct. But you see, at that time we hadn't recognized the Baltic States as independent, so they had the . . . some special title there.

Q: Office of American Commissioner, I think.

PACKER: Yes. A fellow named John A. Gade was the commissioner.

Q: But you arrived, in Riga, sent there by the State Department?

PACKER: Then I was sent up to Tallinn, to take charge of the consulate up there; the regular man was off on leave.

Q: How did you get along in Tallinn? Was it difficult for you there?

PACKER: No, I found there was a functioning office, with a Russian girl clerk. And there was an American clerk. I was the only person--at that time--with officer status, in Tallinn. And I found the Estonians very pleasant people to work with; until a new full consul was sent out to take charge of the office, and I was ordered back to Riga.

Q: Were you doing consular work in Riga, too? Or was it a different kind of work in Riga?

PACKER: Well, my peculiar experience in the Service was that I often handled consular--nominal--functions; but I performed, not only occasional consular work, but in a diplomatic capacity I was something else again. And then they eventually got around to recognition, and created legations in all three Baltic capitals.

Q: That was in 1922, wasn't it?

PACKER: Well, I came back to Washington in 1925. I don't remember exactly when the Division of Eastern European Affairs was created; but I became the assistant chief of the division. And the chief of the division was Bob Kelley, who had been in the Army during the war. And he had served up in Latvia, in the legation.

Q: We were talking about your return to Washington in 1925, and your position in the Division of Eastern European Affairs. Tell me, were you involved with the policies that were developing towards--not only the Baltic Republics--but also toward Russia?

PACKER: The policy towards Russia, which was no formal relations with the Bolshevik government. That was, of course, bedrock policy; no indication of a desire to change within the administration. And of course, there were occasionally members of some organizations who thought they knew better how to run our relations with Russia--than the State Department, or the White House. But they didn't cut much ice with the officials who were handling things in the government.

Q: How did you deal with those who were pressuring to change the policy?

PACKER: We would announce what the policy was; maybe in a press conference, or in a communication. It might involve a letter from somebody in the Department--maybe the Secretary, even--to some organization, or to congressmen--testimony up on the Hill. I think that, personally, people in the Department were very pleased, and elsewhere in the government. There was occasionally some senator, or some congressman, who favored establishing relations with the Bolshevik government. But I think the people in the Department, and in the White House, were quite determined not to deal with the Soviet government, officially.

Q: Do you think that was a correct policy?

PACKER: Oh, I think so; and I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't be better off if we had such a policy in effect now! Of course, it's impossible to go back to that state--in the present political world. But how can the State Department best serve the interests of the American people--and the country--by dealing with the Soviet government. And of course, the existence of the U.N. has greatly changed the whole international situation. It wouldn't be feasible not to carry on relations with the Russians; but it would solve a lot of problems if we could do that.

Q: I think you are right; I don't think we can go back. Let's go back in your career, though. Sometime while you were in Washington, by going to night school--and taking law classes at the law school of George Washington University--you completed your law studies, and got your bachelor of law degree. Tell me, did you use it in any way?

PACKER: I don't see that it helped. I've often wondered if career-wise I wouldn't have been wiser not to take law. But I was toying with the idea that I might leave the Service, and go into business or something.

Q: You were admitted to the bar?

PACKER: I was about to say, that I sometimes wondered if I wouldn't have been better off if I'd taken a master's degree--and then a doctor's degree. But at the time, I made the decision without any particular consultation. I suppose I did discuss the matter with some friends. But I somehow decided that the law was the more sensible thing for me to pursue.

Q: Well, as a lawyer myself, I quite agree with you; it's, at least intellectually, very satisfying. Earl, you were in Washington for about 11 years, between 1925 and 1936. Then in 1936 you went back to Riga.

PACKER: That's right. The Riga office was looked upon as a research organization. And owing to the difficulties in Moscow--housing, and personnel that are taken care of in normal capitals--they simply didn't exist in Moscow. And the function of the legation in Riga--Russian-wise--was primarily research on subjects that were agreed upon between the embassy and ourselves; or perhaps by direction from the Department as to something they would like.

You see, we had a staff of translators, and local employees--as well as officers of the Service--who had some knowledge of Russian. I became the head--in my capacity in the Riga office--I became the head of the Russian research section. Baltic problems were handled with the local governments.

The minister to Latvia, of course, was also the minister to Estonia. And he used to go up to Tallinn occasionally. Then I became the chargé d'affaires in Latvia.

Q: But the post was essentially a research post?

PACKER: Only as concerned Russia.

Q: Because Latvia had not yet been incorporated.

PACKER: Well, we had some very competent, local people who were, of course, anti-Bolshevik. We got the Soviet newspapers through a courier--newspapers and other publications--from Moscow. We had a courier service worked out, between the legation and the embassy in Moscow. They took care of handling these publications, which were then available to our staff in Riga, for research purposes.

Q: I see. When you went to Riga, were you already married?

PACKER: I was married in '29, so when I went to Riga in '36 my wife went along. And she accompanied me to all my subsequent posts.

Q: So this time--going back to Riga--you needed to set up a household.

PACKER: Yes, we did. We were able to get a very decent apartment. And we got a cook, and a maid. We ran our own household, as did other people on the staff of the legation.

Q: Right. Earl, let me ask you this: the recognition of the Soviet Union government--by the United States--could you sense in Latvia--or did this come up--any disappointment on the part of the local staff in the Riga legation, over the fact that the United States had recognized the Soviet Union?

PACKER: I'm trying to remember when recognition actually occurred.

Q: I think it was 1933, wasn't it?

PACKER: Yes, I think it was in '33. So by the time I went up there--in '36 . . . Well, yes, of course the very fact of recognition of the Soviet government brought the establishment of a mission in Moscow, for the first time. I can't recall anything particular there.

Q: My question really is, did you sense--in Riga--any disappointment in the action by the United States, in recognizing the Soviet Union? Did the Latvians feel that they may have been better off?

PACKER: I think they took it as a normal thing. You see, we were slower than the British and the French. I don't know; I don't recall conversations on the subject. But my assumption would be that they rather welcomed it as it would probably result in a greater security for themselves as independent states.

Now, of course, the present situation is--I should think--a terrible headache for Gorbachev; with what's happening in the Baltic states, and out in Central Asia.

Q: Well, Earl, did you have any particular achievement of your own--during that time in Riga? You were there for four years, until 1940. Did you feel that you accomplished anything significant, personally, in that time?

PACKER: I don't know that I had any special accomplishment there. I had a very pleasant social life, within the society as it existed--diplomatic, and private. I don't consider that I did any great job there.

Q: Okay. Now why did you transfer to Budapest, in 1940? What was the background of that? The war had already started in Europe.

PACKER: Well, there was the incorporation as a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement. There was an annexation by Moscow, of the three Baltic states; so all of the foreign diplomatic and consular people were expelled. Why they picked me to go to Budapest, I have no idea; except I'd had considerable experience in the Eastern European picture. Maybe they thought I was as good a guy as they could pick to go to Budapest, to be a secretary of legation.

Q: But you didn't stay in Budapest very long, did you?

PACKER: No, not long. Then I was sent to Dresden; and that lasted a short time.

Q: Because of the entry of the United States into the war.

PACKER: And then, of course, our offices in Germany were closed. Then I went to Dublin--God knows why.

Q: The repatriation of the American diplomatic and consular officers must have been a very exciting moment for you and your wife?

PACKER: Well, yes, of course it was a period of great problems; sometimes with regard to getting one's things packed for shipment to some distant--or not too distant--destination. There were great, great problems. You'd have to decide whether to sell stuff on the local market. You'd call some dealer in and ask for a bid on the stuff you didn't want to send to the next post. Of course, all of the stuff you see here--and we've got several rooms back in there, also--was stuff we picked up.

This tray we picked up in Algiers, when we were over there from Tunis--on a get-acquainted trip.

Q: How did you travel, physically, from Dresden? Were you escorted, or did you have to go to Switzerland and then go to Dublin? Or could you travel directly to Dublin?

PACKER: I think ordinary transportation--railway and steamer.

Q: But did the Germans escort you?

PACKER: I don't know. I suppose we went to London, but I don't remember.

Q: Yes.

PACKER: My recollection of a lot of this stuff isn't as sharp as it would have been had you interviewed me at the time.

Q: Well, the interview program didn't exist then.

PACKER: That's taken care of in the paper very well, but it doesn't cover this business of the past. And I'm sure other officers will have the same difficulty.

Q: Well, there aren't many that are still--at your age--that are still able to function as well as you do, Earl.

From Dresden--during the war--you were sent to Dublin, Ireland--a neutral country. Ireland was neutral during World War II. But you only stayed there for two years.

PACKER: I wasn't very happy in my relations with the minister, who was a relative of FDR

Q: What was his name?

PACKER: I was very glad when a transfer came.

Q: What kind of difficulties, Earl? Do you want to talk about them?

PACKER: Well, for one thing non-inclusion of my wife and myself in functions to which normally a chief of mission invited members of his staff. They rather disregarded us there. And it was hurtful to my own feelings of what the relations of the secretary of legation should be to the chief of mission. This disregard of our existence was hurtful to my functioning. I didn't care. And of course, Mrs. Gray quite disregarded the existence of my wife, Iris--which is not normal.

Q: What was the name?

PACKER: Gray. [David Gray, 1940-47]

Q: They were related to Franklin Roosevelt?

PACKER: He was purely political, of course, as a relative of FDR

Q: What was your function? Was it political reporting?

PACKER: Yes, political reporting. I'm sure the absence of myself and my wife at some of these functions that took place . . . We happened to have very good relations with the French there. The French minister's wife and Iris were good friends. We got along pretty well in that respect, but it was the entertainment at the legation itself that was hurtful to my contacts, and to my functioning, actually. Because I'm sure our failure to be invited to some of these things must have been discussed by our colleagues in the diplomatic corps.

Q: If I recall correctly, at that time the Irish were being very obstinate about helping--certainly not the British. How were they towards the Americans?

PACKER: Relations with the British, in Dublin, were quite normal and friendly.

Q: The Irish. You were in neutral Dublin. We were allied with Britain. We were fighting the war. The Irish--although they might have sympathized with the fight against the Germans--I understand that the British tried to get the Irish to throw out some German and Japanese diplomats; but the Irish wouldn't do it.

PACKER: I don't recall that. Whether the minister covered that in his reports to the Department, or not, I don't recall.

Q: At least you were in a country that--being neutral--did not have rationing, and did not have restrictions on food and so forth.

PACKER: We got our stuff from the local market. I don't recall any problem.

Q: You were fortunate in that regard.

PACKER: I guess, in that respect, we were just the same as the local inhabitants.

Q: Right. After you were two years in Dublin, your next post was another neutral country. You went to Turkey, right?

PACKER: I never knew why the Department decided on that assignment. I was not consulted. I didn't go home on leave, and I was not consulted if I would like to go to Turkey. Normally, when you get back to Washington on leave, you talk to people who are handling affairs with the country where you're stationed. And they ask if you'd be interested in a choice of one of three or four different posts. But it seems to me that very often the presence of a Foreign Service officer on leave of absence--back in Washington--you don't always get the type of treatment you think you should get from Personnel.

Q: Well, when you went to Ankara, Turkey, was your function again political reporting?

PACKER: I'm trying to remember who was ambassador. [Laurence A. Steinhardt, 1942-45]

Q: We had relations with Turkey. We had begun lend-lease supplies to Turkey, in 1942. And we were trying to get--at least some of the allied powers--were trying to get the Turks to come into the war. Do you recall that? They finally did, but not until January, 1945.

PACKER: I can't recall who my chief was, in Ankara.

Q: That's 45 years ago.

PACKER: He would not feel complimented, if he's still alive.

Q: You were in Ankara at the time the war came to an end. And you left Ankara in 1946. Did you go back to the Department then?

PACKER: I don't think so. I think we went from there to Rangoon.

Q: You went right from Ankara to Rangoon?

PACKER: The assignment to Rangoon was very unexpected. I had never contemplated having a post in the Far East. I found it an interesting post. It was still a member of the British empire, and they hadn't yet established an American diplomatic mission in Rangoon. So as the consul general I was the top American representative in the country; and I found work with the British and the Burmese very pleasant and very interesting.

Q: Earl, when we stopped the last time we were talking about your assignment to Rangoon, where you went in 1946. You were consul general, and the British were still the sovereign state in Burma. And you were, therefore, in touch with the Burmese authorities, as well as with the British. You mentioned that you enjoyed working with the British and the Burmese people. At that time, Burma was preparing for its independence from Britain. I believe they established the Union of Burma--the republic--in 1948. So you were there at that time. It must have been very exciting to see from the political point of view.

PACKER: It was. They had a splendid governor--a Governor Rance, and his lady. We were on very good terms with them. And then, in addition, they had assigned there a consul general. It was a peculiar situation.

After Rangoon came Tunis. There the British consul general--whose wife was an American--was so kind. I had done some preliminary sounding-out about the possibility of getting a shipment of Chinese rosewood sent from Hong Kong to Tunis; if they had the proper workmen in Tunis to do the job. And the result is, they copied these chairs from a chair loaned to me by the British consul general.

Q: But a moment more for Burma, where I guess you could get anything done. I was in India--up in the northeast corner, near Burma--during World War II. I left there in 1946; I was in the Army. But I remember--and since, from my reading--that there was a lot of communist insurgency within the borders of Burma. And there was also a lot of tribal conflict. There were the Karens, among others. Do you remember much about dealing with that problem, as an American?

PACKER: No, I don't remember. The number of tribes in the country was astounding; I met a number of leaders. And they spoke English--in different degrees of fluency. But I haven't a clear, definite comment on that area.

Q: Did you meet U Nu?

PACKER: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you have anything much to do with him?

PACKER: No, not a great deal.

Q: What was your impression of the man?

PACKER: Well, I had a very favorable impression. I thought he was a good man to be influential in the country.

Q: General Stilwell had already left Burma, by the time you got there, I suppose?

PACKER: He was not there.

Q: Anything you'd like to comment about your experiences in Rangoon, as far as the political side was concerned? Were you doing political reporting from Rangoon?

PACKER: The fact is, that is such a remote area, and such a remote period--40 years ago--that I haven't any clear statement to make, that I think would be helpful.

Q: You stayed in Rangoon, apparently, only for about one year. Then you were transferred to Tunis.

PACKER: I was longer than a year there.

Q: Well, it could have been almost two years. Now, I hope that in 1947--when the war was already over--when you were posted from Rangoon to Tunis, that you finally got some home leave.

PACKER: No, I didn't get any home leave in there.

Q: My goodness, you had been out for ten years!

PACKER: We went by way of Singapore.

Q: Took a boat to North Africa?

PACKER: And had our stuff all packed, and put aboard. I don't know the details of it.

Q: But you never got sent back to Washington at that time?

PACKER: No, I didn't get back to Washington till I retired.

Q: You were posted to Riga in 1936, and here we are now 1947 and you've never been back to the United States. Didn't you feel a little bit put out?

PACKER: No, we made a trip home--by way of the Trans-Siberian RR. At Chita one line goes on to Vladivostok, and the other goes down to Peking. I don't recall what influenced our decision to go by way of Peking, but I think it must have been the opportunity to see a little bit of China--which we had never seen any of before.

Q: Earl, this was before the war then?

PACKER: This was '40.

Q: 1940, I see. So you did get back to the States. This was when you were going from Budapest to Dresden?

PACKER: I have no recollection of coming home until 1940, when we made this Trans-Siberian trip. The next time was when I retired in '45.

Q: Okay, so you did get back to the States in 1940. That's a big relief, because it would seem odd to me if you had been sent directly to Tunis, from Rangoon--after having been sent to Rangoon from Turkey.

PACKER: I don't know how the people in the Department move the chess pieces.

Q: I think wearing blindfolds, mostly.

PACKER: Well, I was delighted to see a new part of the world. That was one of the things the Service had to offer, in the way of an attraction--for all of us.

Q: That's right.

PACKER: We all had a hankering for a change of climate, a change of post.

Q: Okay, Earl. Let's go on now. When you went by ship to Tunis, you arrived there in 1947. Tunis, of course, in a way was similar to Burma, because Tunisia had been under French control. And there were, certainly, moves towards a greater degree of freedom from French control--in Tunisia. Now I realize it was still under control, but when you got there in 1947 there was a lot of agitation against France; to bring an end to the French protectorate that had existed from the 19th century. There were particular parties--of Tunisians: the Destour party, and the Neo-Destour party. They struggled against the French, without, fortunately, the type of war that we had in Algeria.

You were there at that time; it must have been, politically, very interesting?

PACKER: Well, yes it was, but I'm afraid I can't recall anything of special interest.

Q: If I gave you the name Habib Bourguiba, you would remember that certainly.

PACKER: Yes.

Q: Was he active while you were there?

PACKER: Yes, he was. I can't recall any specific incident with him, actually.

Q: You were the chargé, at that time?

PACKER: Well, I was consul general. I didn't have a diplomatic rank in Tunis; there was no American legation there.

Q: In Rangoon?

PACKER: I had, very often, a consular rank; but I couldn't always distinguish between my diplomatic activities and my consular activities. I became counselor of embassy in Rangoon before leaving.

Q: That's why they eventually unified both the diplomatic and the consular service, because the two are bound to overlap; as long as you're not simply issuing visas, or protecting Americans abroad, or issuing passports. Obviously, the contacts that you make in consular work are the same as most of the ones you make in diplomatic work. So the two were finally unified, as you know.

So, do you remember, Earl, much about the French? Were they being colonialist-minded towards the Tunisians?

PACKER: Well, I think on the whole they were rather sympathetic to . . . I can't say that would apply to all the French officials there, but certainly some of them were sympathetic to the aspirations of the Tunisians.

Q: Good.

PACKER: It wasn't a difficult situation to report on; there was plenty of stuff to report on, the details of which I . . . I have never looked up what the Department published on my reporting there.

Q: But you were doing political reporting?

PACKER: Yes, I covered that situation as best I could, at the time. Of course, it was not up to the point of independence.

Q: They didn't get their independence, really, until 1956. It was six years after you left there.

How big was the post? How many officers did you have?

PACKER: In the consulate? At the moment I can't remember the name of a subordinate.

Q: At least you don't have to remember the name of your boss; you were the boss!

PACKER: The subordinates--when they read this, and realize I couldn't name them, they'll be quite offended.

Q: No they won't. They will be aware--when they read it--that this was now 38 years ago.

PACKER: Well, it might depend a bit on the maturity with which they read.

Q: Now tell me about your retirement. You did retire from Tunis?

PACKER: Yes.

Q: Did you retire because of age?

PACKER: No, I retired because I felt I must have reached the height in the Service which I was destined to attain. And I'd had enough experience--seeing other people who didn't get farther along. I would have accepted with pleasure an ambassadorship, had it been offered to me. But it wasn't, so Iris and I talked it over. I went in to her one day, and said, "Would you be happy to retire from the Service?"

And she was delighted. The wives carry a terrific burden, from the point of view of contacts, and entertaining.

Q: Yes, I can certainly testify to that, in my own case, too. Things have changed somewhat, these days. There no longer is a space on the efficiency report to record the wife's entertaining ability, which went down the drain with the liberation of the female in the United States.

So you actually separated--you retired voluntarily. By this time you were--if I recall--56 years old. That meant that you would retire, voluntarily, on a somewhat reduced annuity. Age 60 was mandatory.

PACKER: I don't remember what my initial annuity was, but it's gone up considerably, to a figure that's helpful.

Q: With the cost of living allowance.

PACKER: In fact, it's almost necessary; I don't know what I would do, actually, if Congress should fail to appropriate money for retired officers..

Q: Well, I don't think that's likely to happen; there would be a tremendous revolution in this country if that sort of thing were allowed to happen.

[Tape interrupted]

Q: Earl, did you say you feel Tunisia was a useful base to visit other countries in the Maghreb?

PACKER: Algeria and Morocco, which we were, of course, entirely ignorant about.

Q: Yes. First of all, you had no jurisdiction outside of Tunisia.

PACKER: There was the independence movement in each of those countries, too. And the French were hard-put to--I don't know enough about internal politics in France to know to what extent the aspirations of the North Africans for Independence influenced the political developments in France. I just don't know; it's a useful field to explore.

Q: Yes. However, your functions were limited to Tunisia; you had no consular functions in Morocco, or in Algeria?

PACKER: No, they had independent offices, just as my own office in Tunisia.

Q: Right. How did you come back to the United States in 1950? Did you take a ship?

PACKER: I don't know. My off-hand guess is we probably went up to Paris, and then Bordeaux or some place; I just don't recall.

Q: Okay. I think we've covered . . .

PACKER: I've probably got some travel vouchers that I haven't got around to destroying yet.

Q: That's probably true of all of us. When you went back to Washington, you just proceeded with the separation papers, and so forth. You didn't have any assignment in Washington?

PACKER: I don't know; I don't recall that I was interviewed. I suppose I was interviewed by the North African desk man, in the Western European [Division]. I don't have any recollection of being questioned by anybody. As a matter-of-fact, they probably weren't very much interested. I don't recall any useful--from my point of view--useful questioning by Departmental officers.

Q: Okay. So then you retired and lived in Washington for a while, and then moved to New York. I think we've probably covered that.

I'd like to go back--if you don't mind--quickly over the various posts that you served in; to ask you about leading figures that you might have known in the course of your work. For example, you mentioned that you were aware of Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia--to start with the most recent post. Did you have any contact with him personally?

PACKER: I don't recall.

Q: How about U Nu in Burma?

PACKER: I don't know whether Bourguiba is still alive.

Q: No, he's dead. How about in Turkey; did you know Ismet Inonu?

PACKER: No.

Q: What about when you were in Dublin; I'm sure you had occasion--even though your chief was not very nice to you--to see Eamon DeValera, the Prime Minister at that time.

PACKER: Who?

Q: Eamon DeValera, the Prime Minister. And Hyde was the President of Ireland, at that time. Do you recall ever meeting either of them?

PACKER: No, it doesn't ring a bell.

Q: What about when you were in Dresden, just before the U.S. came into the war? Of course, the capital was Berlin, and Hitler was in Berlin. Did he ever come to Dresden while you were there?

PACKER: Not to my recollection. I was there a short time, of course. And when the necessity arose to get out, we were very much interested in doing so.

Q: Well, you were interested in safe conduct, I'm sure. Were there any other Nazi leaders that you ran across in the course of your stay in Germany? Or for that matter, in Budapest?

PACKER: I don't recall.

Q: Okay, Earl, that's all right. Let me go back to your days in Riga, between 1936 and 1940. I understand that the main figure in Latvia, at that time, was a man named Karlis Ulmanis.

PACKER: Yes, Karlis Ulmanis; and he had a lot of contacts with the States. I think he had spent some time in the States, before independence. The foreign minister was a chap named Munters, who was a very unusual person; very likeable, and a remarkable linguist. He spoke several languages; he spoke English extremely well. And he was very close to Ulmanis.

Q: Ulmanis was a very powerful figure; I understand he was a virtual dictator?

PACKER: Pretty nearly that, yes. I don't recall having any occasion to discuss matters with him. We had a minister there. I was the first secretary; and we had a minister there-- Jack Wiley. He carried on the top level talks with Ulmanis, and with Munters, too, naturally.

Q: His name was Jack Wiley, did you say?

PACKER: John C. Wiley.

Q: He was a career officer?

PACKER: A career Foreign Service officer, yes.

Q: I'm going to go back to your initial exposure to the Foreign Service, in Russia. When did you actually get to Russia? Was it in 1917?

PACKER: I got to Petrograd early January, in '17. The big day, of course--for the Revolution--was when the Soviets took over from the provisional government. There had been a recognition by the U.S. and the other allies, of the provisional government--that had taken over when the Tsar was finished.

Q: This was the Kerensky . . . You mean after the Tsar abdicated, then we had this provisional government under Prince Lvov--wasn't it? And Kerensky?

PACKER: Yes, well, both. Of course, Kerensky was second or third in the sequence, before November 7th--which was yesterday.

Q: Before Lenin. Now, there were a lot of important people; the names I will just say to you, and ask you if you had any contact at all. Let's start with the Tsar. Did you ever meet Tsar Nicholas?

PACKER: No, never did.

Q: Did you hear much about Rasputin?

PACKER: I never saw him, no. We were aware of his existence.

Q: And his influence.

PACKER: A very sinister figure.

Q: Apparently, yes. What about another big name; how about Lenin? Did you ever see him?

PACKER: I never saw him; I have no recollection of ever having seen him.

Q: How about Trotsky?

PACKER: Trotsky, no. I might have seen him in some parade or something, as a sideline viewer. But I have no recollection.

Q: Of course, part of the group--the Bolshevik group--was Joseph Stalin.

PACKER: No. Of course, he didn't come into power until long after my immediate contact with the Russian soil had ended.

Q: What about--in those days--the famous head of the Cheka, Dzerzhinsky? Did you ever hear of him?

PACKER: No, I never saw him.

Q: Okay, well, I think we've covered that. You started to say during the pause, that one of the reasons you were prepared to retire early--from Tunis--was because you had been contacted by someone in the Brookings Institute.

PACKER: Well, Leo Pasvolsky--and his wife Christine--and Iris and myself, were a very happy quartet in the days before I considered getting out. I had a long assignment to the Department, where I traded back and forth--in my official title, under which I was paid--Foreign Service appropriation, or State Department appropriation. And that depended on the length of time that I could be assigned; I've forgotten what the prescription really was.

But we were very friendly, and one time Leo asked me if I'd be interested in coming over to Brookings. At that time, I was not; I thought I would stay in the Service, and go ahead. So when I decided to retire, I got in touch with Leo. And he said to come in and see him. So when I got to Washington, after leaving Tunis, I went in to see him. And I was given a job there, which I had expected to be the case.

Well, it was not very long--a number of years.

Q: I think you told me five.

PACKER: He died, and the head of Brookings was not much interested in foreign affairs, and the foreign affairs work petered out. It was at that time I lost my job at Brookings. I was very foolish, that I didn't request a contract. That applies to you, too. I don't know whether you've got a contract or not; but if you didn't, it would be wise to get one if you could.

Q: Well, I'm retired, also, from the UN; and my teaching I do on a semester basis. And I do have a contract for that. So don't worry, I'm taken care of in that regard.

PACKER: Well, a similar situation arose when I was offered a job up here [in New York] with the Free Europe Committee, while in Washington--just after losing my job at Brookings. And Bernie Yarrow was in charge of that FEC--as we called them. I was

offered this job up here, and again I failed to profit by my experience with Brookings. I didn't get a contract. I didn't stay very long with the Free Europe Committee, until I was dropped.

Q: Well, Earl I think you've had a very full life, even if you did not have contracts; your life has been very full and rich here in New York, through the years. You've lived in New York now for more than 32 years.

PACKER: We've lived 32 years, right here in this spot.

Q: I hope this apartment is rent-controlled, or at least rent-stabilized.

PACKER: Well, I just got a pretty good increase in the rent here, due to legislation that was passed. When I came here--my recollection is--I paid \$240 a month; and now my rent has just gone to \$912.

Q: My, well, over 32 years I guess the dollar has depreciated at least by that much.

Earl, let me take this moment to mention that, during your period in New York you were instrumental in getting together this group of former Foreign Service officers living in the New York area. And arranging monthly luncheons--except during the summer--in the Delegates' Dining Room at the United Nations headquarters building. Could you say when you started that group? How many years ago was it?

PACKER: I don't know; I ran the thing. There was no election. I've forgotten. It must have been 10 years or so.

Q: It's easily ten years, because you were meeting when I came back from Vienna for the U.N. And I was working in the Secretariat when I learned about the monthly luncheons. So it was somewhere before '78. Maybe just about 10 years ago, now.

PACKER: We were a very small group initially, and then we gradually increased as people learned about it--and came to New York City. I carried on until I got tired of running it; and I maneuvered Jim [Green] into the job.

Q: He might say you snookered him into the job!

PACKER: He's done a very good job, I must say.

Q: Right. Now Earl, I would like to go back to some of the points that we covered on the first tape, just to get some clarifications of names and things of that nature.

Going back to Petrograd, and the military mission: you mentioned the name of an officer--a colonel, I think--in your group, who was bilingual in Russian and English. He had a

Russian mother, and an American father. I didn't get his name. You mentioned a fellow named Prince. Is that the guy?

PACKER: Eugene Prince. His father was in business, and he was in business with his father--importing. I don't know the circumstances of how he happened to be selected for a job. He became a captain, and he later became a lieutenant colonel--I think.

Q: What was his first name?

PACKER: Eugene. He's dead.

Q: Yes.

PACKER: Now, there was an officer named Francis Riggs--from the Riggs family in Washington. And he was a graduate of West Point, if I recall correctly. And he was the military attaché. Then due to developments in the war, and the creation of a military mission--with a B.G. [Brigadier General] in charge, Judson--Riggs descended the ranks and became an assistant military attaché. He became a major, I think. He spoke Russian very well.

Q: Riggs did? As well as Prince?

PACKER: Yes. Of course, he wasn't as fluent as Prince--whose Russian was as good as his English.

Q: How about yourself, Earl? Did you pick up Russian?

PACKER: I spoke Russian fairly well, at one time. I haven't had any training in it, and the words have slipped away.

Q: Let's go to the period in Riga. There was this American commission at Riga, and you mentioned somebody who was in charge of that. That was John Gade? Who was the head of the American Commission at Riga?

PACKER: That was before we had a legation.

Q: It would have been 1922.

PACKER: Well, there was a career officer whose name is on the tip of my tongue.

Q: Well, never mind. It's pretty far back. Going back to your period in the Department, when you were in Russian Affairs--and Eastern European Affairs. We talked a little bit about the U.S. policy of non-recognition. In my teaching, in the field of international law--as well as my research in the field--I find that the question of recognition of governments is a very disputed one.

The modern theory is, that you shouldn't use non-recognition as a sign of disapproval of a particular regime. That you do business with any government, whether you particularly like its policies or not; depending on whether it serves your own national interests.

Now, I think it's safe to say that the main political reason the U.S. refused to do business with the new regime in the Soviet Union was because of the fear of communist revolution elsewhere in the world--particularly in our own country. But also, the irritation and anger at the nationalization programs which took place under the Soviet Union. Because there were all kinds of American creditors, and property owners, that were affected by the Soviet nationalization decrees.

Incidentally, I checked the date of the [Litvinov] assignment, and it was in November of 1933. I know that you agreed with the policy of non-recognition. In the light of hindsight today, do you think that we might have been somewhat better off if we had done as the British and the French did and recognized the Soviet Union government prior to 1933?

PACKER: Well, the policy of non-recognition certainly had the personal approval of Bob Kelley--my chief--and of me. Both of us had had some experience in Russia, and knew the ultimate aim of the Soviet leaders was to establish a Soviet government in the U.S. We were very sympathetic to not having good relations with such an organization. And we're still struggling with the Gorbachev group; what is his intention? What does perestroika mean?

Q: Well, whatever it means, we have come a long way since 1917--and the Russian Revolution. And we've come a long way in our own relationships with the Soviets. So in the light of hindsight, you still think that the policy of non-recognition was beneficial to the United States?

PACKER: Well, yes--in that period--I would think so. Of course, it was largely FDR that was responsible for the change in policy.

Q: That's probably true, because it happened early in his first administration--and his advisors, I assume. Well, that covers that clarification.

Now, this is going to test your memory about the travel arrangements--when you were transferred out of Germany, from Dresden to Dublin. We talked about how you could get there. And I think you said that you went by way of London. But how, during a World War--where the British were the enemies of the Germans--how did you get from Dresden to London, and on to Dublin? You must have had to go through Switzerland, didn't you?

PACKER: I don't remember that we had any particular difficulty. The Germans were willing to let us go, of course. They didn't want us around. As a matter-of-fact, I don't recall any difficulty getting train accommodations.

Q: Well, there wouldn't have been any trains running between Germany--through France.

PACKER: We went to the border--wherever it was. I don't recall.

Q: That would have been in 1942.

PACKER: I can't recall when we were expelled from Dresden; it was really an expulsion business.

Q: Because of the declaration of war. Both nations declared war on each other, so you had to leave--you didn't have a choice. And Tom Bailey was in Berlin, at that time. He was repatriated on the S.S. "Gripsholm." But he came back to the States. You remember, perhaps, Tom Bailey; I don't know if you remember him. He was in Berlin at the outbreak of the war.

PACKER: It doesn't ring a bell.

Q: E. Tomlin Bailey. You mentioned the minister in Dublin.

PACKER: David Gray.

Q: How is he related to FDR?

PACKER: Whether it was the wife, or whether it was direct I don't recall.

Q: It sounds like it could have been through his wife. She was equally obnoxious, I gathered from you.

PACKER: That could easily be established by a little research. At the time of Gray's appointment as minister to Dublin, there must have been something in the Washington papers, and the New York Times--discussion of that relationship.

Q: I think that completes my questions, Earl, on your career. But let me get back to the question of what attracted you about the Service? Particularly when you were in Washington with a law degree, and a new wife, and perhaps tempted to leave the Department and go into private business? What motivated you to stay on in the Service?

PACKER: Well, you see, I suppose my connection with the Foreign Service was established by the arrival in the Bureau of Insular Affairs--in the War Department--where I was a clerk of Miles Shand--that there were two vacancies in the embassy in Petrograd. Did anybody in the Bureau of Insular Affairs want to go to Petrograd? I was taking night work at G.W. And a friend in the Bureau, and I, raised our hands and said that was for us. That was the introduction of E.L.P. to the Foreign Service, which didn't exist as an entity at the time.

When I went to Russia, I was commissioned a first lieutenant and made an assistant to the military attaché, and a member of the military mission. And when the intervention in North Russia ended, and the war was over, and the U.S. troops were withdrawn, I came back to the States and was demobilized. About the same time a lot of other people were being demobilized, and I was offered a job in the State Department, which I took. Then I continued with that, in the Division of Russian Affairs; and later that was expanded to the Division of Eastern European Affairs.

I continued my work at G.W. and got my AB in '21, and stayed on until '22, when I went to Riga for my first assignment. And by that time, I was a career officer. So I had had enough taste of the Foreign Service from my previous experience in Russia to think that was a good field for my career.

Q: Well, that's fine, Earl. I think you've covered adequately your entrance into, and continuance in the Foreign Service. And I think the country, in general, owes you a debt of gratitude for not having taken off to go back to Ogden, Utah.

PACKER: It never occurred to me to go back to Ogden to live. It may have been a mistake, career-wise, but I don't know what I would have done in Utah. If I had gotten my law degree, I might have joined some firm out there; I don't know.

Q: I think we've come to the conclusion of our interview, and I want to thank you very much, on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies.

End of interview