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

HOWARD E. SOLLENBERGER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited due to the death of Mr. Sollenberger]

Q: This is an interview with Howard E. Sollenberger. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Could you tell me when and where you were born?

SOLLENBERGER: North Manchester, Indiana, a little town in northern Indiana.

Q: When?

SOLLENBERGER: 1917, April 28th.

Q: So you've already passed your 80th birthday.

SOLLENBERGER: I've passed my 80th birthday.

Q: Could you tell me a bit about your parents?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes. They were both from a rural area in southern Ohio. Grandfathers on both sides were farmers, and ministers in the local church, Church of the Brethren, which is the religious background in which I come, mixed with the Quakers and Mennonites.

Q: That's a very strong, solid background, heavily rooted in the farming area. What was it like growing up as a young lad in North Manchester?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, I didn't grow up in North Manchester. I was born there, I grew up in China. My parents were missionaries to North China.

Q: How old were you when you went out to China?

SOLLENBERGER: Two years old. I don't remember [much of those early days]. I came back to North Manchester later.

Q: What spurred your parents to go as missionaries to China?

SOLLENBERGER: I've often wondered that myself. They went to China in 1919, and in those days that was not [unlike] going to the moon.

Q: No, but damn close.

SOLLENBERGER: Damn close to it, you're right. There seemed to have been a movement at that time of American church people interested in spreading [the word] and saving the world. They were a part of that movement. According to my father, the impetus came from my mother, and he followed her rather than she followed him.

Q: Where did they go?

SOLLENBERGER: They went to north China, Shaanxi Province, Taihang mountain area which is really a rural and very poor area. My father, when they first started, spent most of his time in road construction. There was a major famine in the area at that time and, with the International Red Cross, [he] had undertaken a work for food project and my father was assigned a section of road that he was to supervise the building of for which relief food was handed out.

Q: What was your mother doing?

SOLLENBERGER: Basically raising a family. At that time I had an older sister, but both parents went out as missionaries. Part of her function was to try to contact the local women in the area, and to do something with them which ultimately would lead to their salvation.

Q: I can see coming out of Indiana, not much Chinese is spoken there. How did they prepare themselves? I assume you'd get this from stories when you were older. How did they prepare themselves and how did they communicate?

SOLLENBERGER: I've been really amazed that the organization of the church that sent missionaries overseas had the foresight to understand that language and some knowledge of the culture was important. The first year that they were in China, they went to the College of Chinese Studies in Beijing to learn the language. They were ahead of the Foreign Service in those days.

Q: Was there a Foreign Service Chinese school at that time?

SOLLENBERGER: No, not at that time. That came on later.

Q: What was it like growing up as a young lad in northern China?

SOLLENBERGER: For a long time I resented it. The expectation was that I would come back, my home was in the United States, I was an American citizen, I would go to college in the United States. And it seemed that growing up in China did not particularly prepare me for the culture shock you ran into when you came back to the United States. But there were lots of interesting things that happened.

Q: Could you talk about what you remember? Did you have Chinese friends, that sort of thing?

SOLLENBERGER: I did have Chinese friends. Being in quite a rural, mountainous area, the contact with Chinese was probably greater than for those that grew up in places like Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, [the major urban centers]. So, I did have that contact, and I've always been amazed at how free my parents were in letting me move around in that area. The earliest memory that I have is going with my father when he was supervising road construction. I was left behind in a room while he was out doing something, and I'd fallen asleep. When I woke up, there was a strange man with a beard, something like you have. He turned out to be a White Russian engineer that the Red Cross had hired for the purpose of road construction, a civil engineer. I, of course, was young enough at that point to not only be worried, but to start yelling for my parents. At which point he brought out a nice big red apple, which was very nice.

There were other missionary children in the area. I had contact with them. We went through the usual childhood experiences of learning how to get along with other kids, and in this case to get along in a different culture. We had Chinese servants, and from the beginning I found learning Chinese easier than my parents did. So in some circumstances, I had to be the interpreter for them.

Q: There is a long oral history of John Stewart Service who grew up in some of the same circumstances, but he was saying how his mother really kept him away from Chinese. She was worried about catching disease, so he was really not as fluent in Chinese as he later became because of this separation which often happens with both Foreign Service and missionary families. But I take it this was not so with you.

SOLLENBERGER: It was a little different in our situation. In fact, I'm surprised as I look back on this. For one thing, you could understand the nervousness of parents with little kids. I think a recent study of missionaries and their families overseas indicates that the fatality rate among missionaries is higher than with any other group of people. Largely from disease, but not entirely, because in those days as you know they didn't have all the wonder drugs, etc., that we have right now. I can remember within our small mission group a number of the people that didn't make it. And yet my parents seemed to realize that we were kids, we were in this [strange] culture, and that we ought to have some contact with it. And we did. As a matter of fact, my parents did put me for a short period of time in a traditional Chinese school, which was run by mission people. I was [put with] other Chinese kids, I was the little foreign devil, and had to defend myself on several

occasions.

Q: What Chinese were you learning?

SOLLENBERGER: It was Mandarin, northern Chinese but with a Shaanxi dialect which is rather strong and well understood.

Q: In later life did you have to unlearn that dialect?

SOLLENBERGER: I've never fully unlearned it. As a matter of fact just within the last month I returned from a sentimental journey to China, which took me back to the same area where I grew up. And I had a chance to not only hear but to try to practice, and I discovered that my Chinese has become a mixture of the standard Beijing variety, but all too frequently with the tones of the Shaanxi dialect which raises some eyebrows. But when I talked with the people in Shaanxi, they thought I spoke Chinese better than they did because I spoke the higher social level [vocabulary] that obviously had been picked up while I was serving in Beijing.

Q: You got out there in 1919 and were there during the '20s. I'm not familiar with Chinese history at that point except to know that there was a lot of turmoil and warlordism. Did that impact at all on you all?

SOLLENBERGER: It did, but Shaanxi Province was then under the governorship of Yan Xishan, who was referred to frequently as a model governor. But nonetheless he was a warlord, independent, printed his own currency, collected his own taxes, built a narrow gauge railway into his capital so that these outside trains that were on a different width of track could not freely move into his province. But things were relatively under control, although Shaanxi Province has always been considered a strategic province to the defense of the capital, Beijing and the north China plain. So that on several occasions, we ran into military operations in the area that, of course, to a child were exciting.

Q: Were there any incidents of things that you recall during that time?

SOLLENBERGER: I should perhaps mention here that foreigners in China at that time had extraterritorial privileges, much like diplomatic privileges, where foreigners were basically a law to themselves. They were not subject to domestic law and control. It didn't take the kids long to realize this, and sometimes would take advantage of it. There are several things as I look back on, I'm ashamed of now, but it shows that kids will be kids wherever they are. I went to boarding school for five years, eighth grade through high school at Tongzhou, which is a suburb of Beijing now. [Editor's note: for another account of Tongzhou School, from a student who also later joined the Foreign Service, see Charles T. Cross, Born a Foreigner: A Memoir of the American Presence in Asia, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999] We would have to go back and forth from home during the summer vacation, and sometimes for Christmas. I remember one Christmas trip that we made on the train, there were several of us missionary kids, we'd purchased some of these concussion firecracker, things that you throw down on a hard surface and they

explode. Being poor, although we didn't know we were poor at the time - missionary kids - we didn't have much money, we traveled third class. And in this particular incident there was an old Chinese gentleman that was stretched out on a bench across from two of us who were there, and we had these little concussion bombs. He was asleep. We also had a lot of chewing gum which apparently, as I heard the story, came to China from Wrigley's chewing gum, who when they heard about the severe famine in north China decided it would be a wonderful thing if they could get the Chinese hooked on chewing gum. At that time they were talking about 300 million [people in northern China].

Q: We still talk in the same terms. There's always those million, or whatever number, potential Chinese customers out there.

SOLLENBERGER: Well, the Chinese didn't take to chewing gum at that time, but the missionary kids got all the chewing gum their parents would let them chew. We took some of this chewing gum and stuck these concussion crackers on the soles of the old gentleman's feet while he was asleep. And you can imagine what happened when he woke up. And yet a trick like this, I'm ashamed of right now in terms of what I did and the reaction [we stimulated in the] other Chinese in the train, [because we foreign kids did] something of this sort.

On another occasion, we went through the train with punches and punched everybody's ticket ahead of the conductor and got them all mixed up for him. And yet he could do nothing about it, because we were foreign kids. So we had experiences that I'm sometimes ashamed of as I look back on it.

Q: I think we all do it. What about Chinese when you were in the school outside Beijing, were you still getting Chinese, or was this pretty much a traditional American education?

SOLLENBERGER: A traditional American education to prepare us for college. We did have a course, but it was Chinese as a foreign language. They did think that we ought to be learning about Chinese, but there were no Chinese students in the boarding school for foreigners. There were several Russian but it was basically a segregated educational experience.

Q: Did you experience, and you only realized it later, that there was almost segregation between the foreign students, the missionaries, and the Chinese in general... How did your family feel about this separation?

SOLLENBERGER: There was definitely segregation. The missionaries at that time, and to some extent this was because of the Chinese insistence on it, built little separate compounds. They built American-style structures, that's the only kind of structure they understood and knew. It was difficult, particularly for the women in these rural area to establish any sort of close relationship with [Chinese] women. Partly this was because of the role and status of women at that particular time. I remember one of the missionary women, who was there before we were, talking about the way in which she was finally able to establish contact with Chinese women. And that was through the death of one of

her babies. At that point the Chinese women expressed sympathy and came to her to express this. And she often said it was through the death of one of her children that she was finally able to make contact with the Chinese women.

This was, in a sense, driven home to me later on when I was back as an adult and was able on several occasions to see the mission establishments through the Chinese eyes as something that was clearly foreign, clearly from the outside. Something that from the Chinese point of view had a lot of money behind it. Also, foreigners who had special privileges, or appeared to have special privileges in China, before whom the Chinese had to, an expression they use, is to kowtow, which means to lower your head and not look at the other person in the eyes. So we had that separation, but my father was always uneasy, mother also was always uneasy with that sort of relationship and did what they could under the circumstances, as I look back on it now, to bridge that, not only for themselves but for [us] kids.

Q: While you at boarding school were there any winds of change coming around like the Kuomintang or anything like that? Were you getting any reflections...

SOLLENBERGER: ...of what was going on in China? Oh, a good deal of that. As a matter of fact there were several occasions where there were military threats to the area. The major one being from the Japanese in 1935 as they made a feint towards north China. They didn't actually invade until '37 but large troop movements in the area, Tongzhou was considered the east gate to Beijing so there were concentrations of troops there. That created a good deal of excitement, and also created some interesting school experiences.

Q: What were they?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, the major one had to do with a group of boys, there were five of us that roomed together in the same room. With troops [arriving], we wanted to go down to the railroad station and look at this. We were under strict orders not to do so. The headmaster of the school was a Danish gentleman who believed in the old discipline of the Danish navy, he'd been in the Danish navy, and applied that liberally to the students. On this particular occasion, after being denied the privilege of going down to the railway station, we decided we'd go into the city. The gates were locked to the city at that time and we had to climb over the city wall, which we did, [we were young] and had scouted out the area well before hand. And found getting into town rather interesting under these circumstances. We did it three times. And one of the roommates had a girlfriend, she found out about it through him. The matron found out about it through the girlfriend, or through gossip in the girl's dorm, and the headmaster found out about it. The result was that, since we'd gone in three times, we had to be punished three times. His pattern was, you'd be invited into [his] interchamber, he had a drawer in the dresser, the lower drawer, and he had a variety of instruments there, bamboo canes, hair brushes, straps, and generally you were given the option of choosing the one that you wanted. But after three nights of this we began to get a little sore on the behind, took pillows to school with us to sit on, and the parents finally decided that was a little too much. The gentleman did not stay with the school. But that's school life for you.

Q: Eventually you ended up in the United States, didn't you, for schooling?

SOLLENBERGER: That's right.

Q: When was that?

SOLLENBERGER: That would have been '35.

Q: So this is in the midst of the Depression. Where did you go?

SOLLENBERGER: I went back to North Manchester. I had free tuition there. It was a church college.

Q: What was the name of the college?

SOLLENBERGER: Manchester College.

Q: You were at Manchester College from '35 to '38.

SOLLENBERGER: [Yes], at which time I dropped out. And the reason for dropping out basically was that it seemed to me that the kids in college at that time were much too focused on their own problems, and were not aware that the world was on fire. From my point of view the world was on fire. In '38 the Japanese had invaded north China and the word that I got back from north China was that [the Japanese] had [implemented a] scorched earth [policy] in much of the area where I grew up. And, of course, things had happened in north Africa and began to happened in Europe. I just felt it didn't make sense to sit in school at that particular time.

Q: You're about 21 at this time.

SOLLENBERGER: So I tried to find a way to get back to China to see what I could do to help.

Q: While you were at Manchester College what were you studying?

SOLLENBERGER: History and political science. I was fortunate in my education to be with Andrew Cordier, who was the history professor at that time. He later became the Under Secretary for the United Nations, and [acting] president of Columbia University (1969-1970), [and dean of faculty at Columbia's School of International Affairs]. I was his assistant for a couple of years.

Q: That's really amazing to find that in a small school.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. My education was really from him, as I look back on it. I found a way to get back to China in relief work for both the Church of the Brethren and

the Quakers, sort of a joint emergency project. I wanted to go back to an area that I knew, and [I made it]. I spent from the end of '38 to 1940 in emergency relief work.

Q: Were your parents still in China during this period?

SOLLENBERGER: My father was there part of the time. My mother was not, her health was such that she remained in the United States.

Q: You got back in 1938. Where did you go and can you describe how you saw the situation where you were at that time?

SOLLENBERGER: I went back to the Taihang mountain area. I went to the city where I had spent the years when I was in high school, that was the home base. The area had already been invaded once by the Japanese who had gone through in an effort to weed out, or to destroy the guerrilla base. Of particular interest in that area was the fact that this was area that was under the control, at that time, of the Eighth Route Army, the communist Eighth Route Army. It was not too long after their long march, and they had moved across into Shaanxi, and set up a military base in the Taihang mountain area, and were attempting to operate against the Japanese. The city that I'd set up base in was not destroyed by the [Japanese] scorched earth [policy]. But the villages around and all the way back up to the northern area, Yangchuan, had been pretty well wiped out. The refugees when I got there, the end of '38, were drifting back into the cities. But the problem there was an emergency problem in how to deal with their homes in the rural areas. The Eighth Route Army at that time was not engaging very often with the Japanese, they were being very selective. But they had had several significant engagements in areas not far from where we were. In one of these, [the Japanese] suffered rather severely when they were waylaid in a mountain pass by the Eighth Route Army, and they retaliated by literally destroying two county seats, two walled cities. [it was] in this area we concentrated on trying to do something with the refugees, a drop in the bucket considering the problem.

Q: How were you treated, both by the Japanese and by the Chinese communists, during this period? Here you were where the line was moving back and forth?

SOLLENBERGER: It was not only the communists. Yan Xishan was still in the province as the military warlord. He had a deputy who was in charge of southeast Shaanxi which is where we were operating. We had contact with him. We had to because he had authority over all of the magistrates in the area, and relations with him and with [him and] the local governments was very good. I mean, they saw rather quickly that there was an advantage in having some foreign assistance in dealing with the problems that they had. As it turned out the deputy governor, Bo Yibo, was really an under cover communist at the time, and at the appropriate moment in 1939 he turned over, and turned over with the provincial troops that were under his command, turned over to the communists. He was later rewarded, became, I think, Minister of Finance under the communist regime, and is now probably the oldest senior communist still living in the Beijing area. I had direct contact with him because of the work that I was doing at that time. To begin with, [we had] only

minor contact with the Eighth Route Army. I did have to get permission passes from them, [but] there were no problems in getting those. They again, I guess, saw the value of [our work], and at that time they were treating the local people with kid gloves. They realized they couldn't survive in the mountains without at least the tacit approval, if not the help, of the local population. And by contrast the way in which they were treating the people at that time was so much better than the way in which the government troops were treating the people, that they pretty well got the cooperation that they were looking for.

Q: Did you run into the Japanese at all?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes. While I was out on one of my relief trips in the mountains taking care of refugees, the city where I was stationed was occupied. I eventually had to go back into the city. They were obviously not pleased, made it clear that if I was going to stay in the area, I had to stay in the city. But basically they would prefer [that] I should leave. And it eventually became clear that I should leave, so I left, but came back again through the back door, going back into free China, trekking up through the Taihang mountains from the Yellow River, back to near the city that was still under occupation by the Japanese.

At that time I had some interesting contact with the communist army. On one occasion trying to get through the Japanese lines, I ran into a group of students that were coming from [the] Beijing-Tianjin area coming back to the mountains in Shaanxi to get into a school. And the communists were running some open air schools literally on the mountain side, in the little villages. It was interesting that they gave a high priority to education. There were about 300 students of them, as the students were coming through the Japanese lines from the other side, they had alerted the Japanese somehow, and all hell broke loose. It was obvious that I couldn't go through at that particular point. But we met some of the students as they came through. Their Chinese guides had gotten scared and run off and left them. They were in a strange area and didn't know where they were at night. I knew the area and knew it fairly well, I trekked over it, had hunted there as a kid. So I started back with them and we ran into some of the Eighth Route Army people who were coming down to see what the chaos was, and they took over and took me and the students back to headquarters. It turned out to be the central headquarters of the Eighth Route Army General Peng Dehuai, who was then the commander of the Eighth Route. I spent three days at headquarters basically getting acquainted, and they getting acquainted with me and finding out what I was doing. Among other things I spent one evening playing chess with the general, Chinese chess which I had learned as a kid, and since I could speak Chinese it was interesting to be able to sit down with him, doing something from his culture. As it turned out I could do almost as well as he could, and speak Chinese. Among other things I wanted to get from him his story of the Long March. How he became and why he became a communist. What his view of the world was at that particular point. It was a rare opportunity.

Q: One hears about the discipline of the Chinese communist troops. Did you find this?

SOLLENBERGER: Very much so.

Q: ...as contrasted to the government type.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. When I came back from the back door on that trip, I had to come through an area that was under Nationalist control, where the Nationalists had placed one of their most dependable generals and military units, a pretty large one, north of the Yellow River, both to block the communists from expanding south, but also to deal with the Japanese. As it turned out, this was 1939, this was the beginning of the breakdown of the United Front that [the Nationalists and Communists] had worked out to fight the Japanese. There was, in fact, going on minor scrimmages there on a three-way front, Japanese versus communist, the Nationalist versus Japanese and communist. A very mixed up situation. I ran into that.

Q: What exactly were you doing, and where was your support coming from?

SOLLENBERGER: The support was basically in money. The supplies had to be somehow [transported into] the area. At the beginning, with money, you could buy grain millet which was the stable in that area. And you could distribute it either through work projects, or directly. And because of the emergency nature much of it had to be direct. Clothing was another problem. [During] wintertime, [when it was] cold in the mountain area, the Chinese wore padded garments. The normal commerce did not bring either cotton or clothe in. One of the things that we did was to send refugees from the mountain area into the north China plain with currency to buy both millet and cotton, and to bring it back. The cotton could be used in home industry, women knew how to spin, weave, make clothe. The arrangement there was that by issuing a certain amount of cotton, say to a woman and her daughters-in-law, whoever were about, that by turning this into clothe they would get a certain percentage of this, and the rest of it would come back to us which we would hand out to people who needed it. Part of it was a psychological thing of getting the people back into their villages, even to build lean-to for temporary shelter from the ruins that the Japanese had left. You could do that by issuing grain back then. In other words, it's not hopeless, cooperatively you could get together and do something. But again, it was so frustrating because you'd get it done and the Japanese would come through again. I spent two years, probably the most interesting, and in some respects the best two years of my life.

Q: Here you were trying to build up villages while the Japanese were trying to destroy them. I would have thought they would have taken a very dim view of what you were doing.

SOLLENBERGER: They did. That's why I left.

Q: They didn't arrest you at that point.

SOLLENBERGER: No, they didn't arrest me. Well, let's back up a little bit. There were risks involved there. We were well aware of these. In another town along the railway which was 100 miles from here, three of the missionaries of this domination, Church of

the Brethren, disappeared during the Japanese occupation, and all the evidence pointed towards the Japanese. We were all aware of this, and that we had to be cautious. We wanted to be cautious also because we didn't want the Chinese that were associated with us to be punished by the Japanese. So, it became clear that I couldn't deal with the refugees in the mountains, I couldn't go back and forth in other words, or I would have been arrested. I decided to leave but to come in by the back door.

On my recent trip back to China I went to the same town, the same city, and I met with an elderly woman who after we had left, probably a couple years after we had left, both her husband, her husband's brother and a third person had been, for some reason, selected by the Japanese to be examples of what happens to people that they suspected of whatever. Whether it was being suspected of communist affiliation, or because of their contact with the foreigners. But these three people had been publicly bayoneted in a demonstration to the populous, a public demonstration of what happens. That sort of thing happened. I've also felt very guilty and I expressed my feeling about that. When I met with them this time, with some of the children, it was interesting that they said it probably would have happened anyhow, and they seemed to hold no feeling or grudge about it. In fact, we were welcomed, we were warmly welcomed by them. One thing the children wanted to know what [was the wartime] situation [like]. The old lady wouldn't talk about it, and had never told them.

Q: How did money get to you?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, two ways. One way was to take a trip out to Beijing and Tianjin and bring it back. The other way when I came in the back door, arrangements had been made to the Quakers in Shanghai to send money to Xian, to a mission group in Xian, where I picked it up and then carried it into the area.

Q: What about the other people you were working with? Were there other groups, or was this pretty much an American missionary group?

This was strictly American. My father and two other missionaries were also involved in doing relief work, but they were basically there as missionaries. I was there strictly on a relief assignment. When I came back through the back door I brought with me a young Quaker, Lewy-Whitaker, then teaching in the Peking American school and when he learned what I was doing and decided that would be more interesting and joined me. He did not make it. When we were crossing the Yellow River coming in, both of us had contracted typhus. We recovered from that and then made the effort again and I made it back up [to where I was before]. But later he, because of the weakness I guess from typhus, he got typhoid fever, and died in Chendu.

Q: How about the Catholic missionaries, and other groups?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, there were a few that were there. But so far as I know, in the area where I was working, we were the only [foreign] group. [You know that the missionary groups] had divided up [China into exclusive] territories.

Q: By the time you came back was Kuomintang the government at that time?

SOLLENBERGER: There was a new government. In 1940 was the government and I think everybody recognized that it was the end of the Nationalist and probably Chiang Kai-shek. That they could effectively mount any sort of resistance against the Japanese on a nationwide basis. I think that's basically why when he was kidnaped in Xian.

Q: By the young marshall, Jiang Xueliang.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. Apparently was one of his, or at least allied with him and I believe he was released and according to the information that I had, at least because of the communist insistence that he be released, and their willingness to join the United Front providing he would stop the civil war and focus on fighting Japan. At least that's the story I got from Marshal Peng Dehuai.

Q: You left in 1940, how did that come about?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, one, I wasn't well, and two, it became apparent [that] what I had been doing in that area, I could no longer do. So I'd spent two years and decided that I should come back and complete my education.

Q: How did you get back?

SOLLENBERGER: Evacuation boat at that time out of Shanghai, that took me down through Australia, New Zealand, and back home. There appeared to be enough nervousness at that point about what was happening in the Pacific, even though we were not yet at war with Japan.

Q: As you came back to the United States in 1940, were you seeing the Japanese as a very real enemy to the United States?

SOLLENBERGER: I would, very definitely.

Q: Had you by any chance run across anybody in the American Foreign Service?

SOLLENBERGER: I did when I got back to Chungking on my way out. I stopped in at the embassy. It was at that time located there, and gave them a report on what was happening up in Shaanxi with the so-called United Front. They had heard rumors of that, but had no direct reports from observers [actually in] the area.

Q: Did you get any feel from the embassy at that time, what was the interest?

SOLLENBERGER: Only in a marginal sort of way. I did get the feeling that there was some exasperation in the way in which the Chinese were, [meaning the Generalissimo], in conducting the war, and was not getting the cooperation that they had hoped. And

there was interest also in whether the communist would be a reliable temporary ally in dealing with the Japanese, and what the prospects were [the KMT-CCP] getting together. I could not be very encouraging about that from what I'd seen. It wasn't going to work for reasons on both sides.

Q: Do you have any recollection of who talked to you particularly?

SOLLENBERGER: One of the people I talked to was Drummond. There were a couple of people that I talked with, but I've forgotten.

Q: Where did you go when you took this circuitous route down to Shanghai to Australia, to New Zealand, and back to the States? Where did you go?

SOLLENBERGER: You mean when I came back?

Q: Yes.

SOLLENBERGER: I came back to Manchester to see if they would reinvent me to finish my education, undergraduate education. At that point I felt rather, what's the word I'm trying to think of...rather frustrated, at the slowness of the educational process. I tried to work out a deal with my professors whereby if I could pass their final examinations, I wouldn't have to sit through all the classes, I could compress within one semester a year's work. I felt I could do it. Cordier said okay, but some of the other professors felt this would be setting a precedent that they could not live with. But I did manage to finish up [in 1941].

Q: This is a great time to be a young single man graduating from college. What happened to you?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, the draft came along, and with the background that I had with the Brethren, Mennonites, Quakers, the three historic [peace churches], my feeling at that time was that I could not participate in warfare, and this was sort of re-established by what I had observed going on as a result of war in northern Shaanxi. So I took an alternative, I complied with the draft, and was assigned to alternative service under the draft. I was four years in alternative service in projects in the United States, [Puerto Rico, and] South Africa.

Q: When you say alternative work, what did this consist of?

SOLLENBERGER: Almost anything you can think of, depending on what you could agree on as meaningful. It involved conservation work on the farms, environmental cleanup projects, it involved establishing a rural hospital in Puerto Rico. It involved working in hospital wards. And the reason for South Africa on this was that I was determined to try to get back to China to work in that situation. I was trying to join the Friends Ambulance Unit, it was a British operation, operating in China and got as far as South Africa. There were six of us at that time en route [to China] with the war [still] on.

[Our route was to go around the Cape to India and up the Burma Road into China.] We got as far as South Africa and an Act of Congress turned us back and I spent about six months in South Africa.

Q: What was the Act of Congress?

SOLLENBERGER: Basically, that people not in military uniform could not go overseas. That was the result basically.

Q: What was the situation that you saw in South Africa? This would be '43 or '44. It was not an official policy.

SOLLENBERGER: [Yes, in 1943, we saw apartheid even though it wasn't an official policy.] I volunteered while I was there waiting for transportation, first to go over to China, and then coming back and had to return. I volunteered to work in a hospital basically set up for the blacks in Durban. So I had a direct experience with observing the practical [application of] apartheid.

Q: Was the hand of the British administration pretty heavy there?

SOLLENBERGER: No. It seemed to me [that one saw] the hand of the local administration in Johannesburg, [rather than policy fro London].

Q: How was that? Could you have social contact with the blacks, or was this pretty much...

SOLLENBERGER: Well, I had a good deal of contact with them in the hospital, and only on one occasion did I have social contact outside. That was through a special incident, I guess. They assigned me to the emergency room, and one day a Zulu warrior came in, and his ear was almost cut off. He'd been in a fight; it was dangling down. And the European doctor who was in charge, said, take it off. And I said, isn't it possible that this could be put on? Yes, he said, it is but this is a black and minus an ear is not worth the bother, just cut it off, it's much easier that way. I said, would you mind if I tried to put it on? He said, go ahead. I very carefully stitched his ear back on. He came back several times to get it dressed, etc., and it stuck. But he then invited me to his home and his wife gave me some beads. So I had that one memorable social contact. But otherwise it was just [seeing people in] one of the wards, and a few of the Africans and some of the Asians, the Indian doctors were in the hospital.

Q: You got back when, about 1944 to the United States?

SOLLENBERGER: I left the alternative service, civilian public service, and was immediately recruited by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, UNRRA. They were in the process here in Washington of getting people ready to go overseas. The focus had shifted to the Far East, and China, and they somehow learned that I had a good deal of background in China in relief work, and had done some training

people to do relief work. So I was recruited [and came to] Washington, College Park actually, and was in charge of training people to go to China with UNRRA, an international mixed group.

Q: When was this?

SOLLENBERGER: This was '45.

Q: So this really started you off in your career of training people.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right.

Q: What type of training were you giving?

SOLLENBERGER: It was very brief. We tried to give them a little language, enough to deal with the social situation, the courtesies. There was great pressure at that time to get people out, as soon as possible. Gave them something in the way of history, background, and culture. And then on the nature of the projects that they would likely be working in. When that was winding down another project came up, and this was again initiated by the Church of the Brethren that I'd been associated with. This was through a negotiation they had had with the Chinese as to what they might do in terms of relief work back in China because of their historic interest and background [to] understand China. And what they came up with was what turned out to be the forerunner of the Peace Corps. One of the things that was needed was to as quickly as possible return to cultivation of land that had gone out of cultivation as a result of the war. The major area was the area that had been flooded by the Yellow River when Chiang Kai-shek blew up the dikes to stop the Japanese advance. [It was successful], but it washed out several million acres of the best agriculture, [which was now overgrown] with stubble and brush. [The objective was] to as quickly as possible get [area] this back into production. The idea here was to use heavy equipment. The Chinese were not familiar at all with [mechanization], meaning sending some operators. The Brethren said, we [are a rural group and] can recruit fifty young men who can understand the operation and maintenance of heavy equipment, farm equipment. UNRRA said we could put this under the wing of UNRRA, and you can work with the Chinese counterpart of UNRRA which was SINRRA, the Chinese National Relief. And because of my background and I was being freed up at that point, UNRRA said you go out and be our liaison with this unit. I agreed and the Brethren said, you'll simultaneously be the director of the unit. I said, okay. That was another interesting year that I spent in China.

Q: This would be what?

SOLLENBERGER: '46-'47.

Q: How did you get there, and where did you go?

SOLLENBERGER: We flew from California. At that time the UNRRA people had a

special contract, and I guess with the cooperation of some officially associated with the military unit, and military troop transports, we flew to Shanghai, with many stops along the way. At that time I was married, and had a young son, and dependents were not allowed to go at that point, so I went alone. They came about six months later. We were stationed in Shanghai as the headquarters. From there on [we] struggle [with] the bureaucracies of UNRRA, bureaucracies of the Chinese, and the renewed civil war, trying to carry out [our] project.

Q: You got there in '46. Where was your group concentrated?

SOLLENBERGER: The headquarters was in Shanghai. We had to bring them into Shanghai, and then disburse from Shanghai. The area that we were most interested in was the Yellow River area, where we thought we could do a concentrated job, a quick job, and move out. The idea at that point was not to try to introduce mechanized farming in China. Some of the major tractor manufacturers donated 2,000 tractors to our project. They probably had in mind eventually maybe...

Q: For all those millions and millions of customers.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. As it turned out for political reasons the Nationalist government, SINRRA, wanted to satisfy demands [for] little projects all over China. [Well], we couldn't operate without their cooperation in China, [so] basically [our] group's [efforts] had to be dispersed which was the first mistake that was made. Although we did get the major operation started in the flooded area, and we got it started in time so that when the dikes were repaired and the river was put back in its course, the area was safe to operate in. We were there with tractors and training and so forth. But by that time the civil war had resumed in the area. [Our] units that were operating in the area were sometimes captured by the communists, and sometimes by the Nationalists. In a few cases they were required to haul military equipment, and we decided because of our [neutral] position, we would pull out. We couldn't operate in a situation of that sort.

Just to jump ahead very briefly. My last trip out I went back to Xian to see the terra cotta army. While I was waiting, in the area with the visitors outside, there was a woman and her young daughter sitting there and I sat down beside them. We got into conversation. Her husband and their older son were continuing walking around the area. I was sitting down because I was tired of walking, and we got into a conversation and it turned out that she came from near this flooded area, a city that I had been in and knew about. She said, after we'd talked a little bit, "You know, my grandfather told us about these foreigners that came in with iron cows, [which is what they called the tractors], in the flooded area [to prepare the land. They were very uncertain about what this was all about, and were wondering whether this another type of Japanese invasion, or just what it was. But they were persuaded to go back," and that he, in fact, had benefitted from this tractor operation, and had gone back into the area to resume his farming. At that point, the daughter, [who was] in the third grade, came around her mother and gave me a little gift, a jade locket. I said, "I can't accept this. Why are you giving it to me?" "Because of what you did to help my grandfather."

It's interesting how some of these things come back, and under circumstances one would never never expect. But I think probably the interesting thing about this project was that in a fairly direct way, it became the forerunner of the Peace Corps. Here was a group of people working under an international organization, [a] government type of organization with volunteers [working] for subsistence, [an] agreement [which] was very similar to what the Peace Corps is now. You get your subsistence and your travel, your medical, and things of this sort but basically no remuneration. So when the Peace Corps idea began to blossom, I got involved with it as a consultant.

Q: How did the young men work? What was your impression of the effect on the young men of doing this type of work?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, last December we had a reunion, the 50th year reunion. Fifteen of the group got together down in Texas and we reviewed what had happened. How it affected the lives of the people. So far as these were concerned, there was a direct relationship between the experience they had, [even though] there were many frustrations and complications, and what they chose to do later on in life, almost inclusively did service type of work in their communities. And many of them as a result of this had gone on. One of them particularly had seen the health problems and decided he wanted to be a doctor. He became a doctor. Interestingly he wanted to pursue the [holistic] approach on which he had gotten from the Chinese - their approach to medicine.

Q: So we're talking about 1947 when you had to pull out. What did you do then?

SOLLENBERGER: I was approached, I think from the consulate in Shanghai. They were looking for somebody to head up a post-war Chinese language training program for young Foreign Service officers in Beijing and would I be interested. They obviously had some knowledge about what I'd been doing in the intervening years. So I went out to take a look at it. Beijing seemed very attractive as a place. My wife at that time was with me in Shanghai. She agreed [to go to] Beijing. [During the fall] of '47, [we] went up to Beijing, [where I] directed a program for young officers specializing in Chinese.

Q: I was thinking this might be a good place to stop. We'll pick it up next time, we've got you in 1947 starting a language school up in Beijing.

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This is December 17, 1997. Howard, let's start with the setting of the language school - what was it called in those days? Beijing or?

SOLLENBERGER: In 1947 we called it Peking, or in Chinese Beiping, because the Chinese capital was at Nanking. I guess before we get to the school here, I was invited to come up [late] in 1947 by Tony Freeman who was then I think he was the acting CG, Consul General, in Beijing at the time, or maybe he was the consul general. He had been a language officer, perhaps one of the better ones in terms of his facility with the

language. He had been instrumental back here in Washington, as I understood it, in talking with the people at the Foreign Service Institute about setting up a field school for advance training in Chinese. Training in Chinese in the Foreign Service had been suspended during the war. [There was the pre-service group]; Tony had been a member of that. He had more or less learned on his own and did very well at it, but he had the feeling that it ought to be an organized program, particularly for adult students who came in, and in the beginning didn't know their way around at all in terms of how to approach the language, or what we saw the priorities were in terms of the different skills that were necessary.

I had an interview with Tony, and a little later when I got back to Shanghai I received an invitation to join the staff, to go down to the consul general's office in Shanghai, and be sworn in, which I did, and found myself to be a member of the Department of State, having never set foot in the Department of State up until that particular time. Not knowing who my bosses were back in Washington. I did not actually open the school. This was done by another person who didn't stay with the program, he was [there only] briefly. But there were some preliminary things that were done, taken care of before I arrived. But my responsibility, as defined to me by Tony Freeman, was to run the school, and design a program training the future Foreign Service Chinese language officer corps. I took that as a responsibility throughout my entire career.

Q: Could you give me sort of your approach? This is a very important step. Chinese is, I won't say unique, but it has ideograms and it has the language. In most other languages you kind of learn the language anyway you can get it. You did not come to the language really from the academic side, but really from personal experience.

SOLLENBERGER: Personal experience and some experience in training, but at a much lower level than was required by the Foreign Service.

Q: You and Tony Freeman, you had to have almost a philosophy and approach. I'd like you to talk about what it was.

SOLLENBERGER: Well, basically, starting off with the assumption that language is what is spoken. That's what we concentrated on during the first part of the program. There's general agreement on that. And only after you are able to comprehend what is spoken to you and are able to respond to that, we felt only at that point it would be judicious to introduce the characters. We had to decide what characters to learn out of the 50-some thousand that are available. What would be useful to the Foreign Service within the limits of the training period, to be learned within the limits of the training period, and then to gradually build up from that.

The second part of the philosophy, I think, on the training was that it needed to be job oriented. We needed to find out what these officers would likely be doing when they went into assignments as Chinese language officers. And then you begin to prepare them for that. Among other things, we found that the duties that would be required involved reading the Chinese newspapers, at least being able to scan it. You probably couldn't

depend on most of them for good translations of that, but at least enough to read to find out whether it was worth turning it over to Chinese translators to be translated in full into English, or whomever needed to review it. The second part of this was documentary Chinese. Documentary styles, as you probably know, have changed and were in the process of changing from the old very formalistic styles that were used, to new formalistic styles that were being introduced and were a much more informal approach basically. And that required specialized vocabulary, and specialized phraseology to be used under appropriate circumstances.

The third thing was to act as interpreters where necessary, and to be participants in negotiations. And this required a vocabulary in economic fields, military fields, and events in the political field, and to some extent in the cultural field.

Q: Were you at that time also looking at the communist phraseology?

SOLLENBERGER: At the beginning we were not.

Q: I was just wondering in the political field there was something which one would have to deal with and what the outcome was, and they have their own special phrases.

SOLLENBERGER: As the program developed later on, and as it became clear that the communist were in the process of taking over China, that was introduced. For one thing we needed to listen to the communist radio, and to know what they were talking about which we had as part of the program. Another aspect of the philosophy was that language is really a cultural subject, and it cannot be divorced from culture or the area studies side of it. This had not been emphasized in previous training. It was something that I felt very strongly about myself. Anyone who was going to be a specialist in Chinese would likely spend a number of years either working in or on Chinese affairs needed to have a pretty good background in Chinese geography, history, culture, religions. And the question was how to get that in. We started off by renaming the school, Chinese Language and Area Studies. We gave ourselves a mandate, in other words trying to introduce this into the program.

Q: In a way you were blessed by the fact, this is 1997, we're celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Foreign Service Institute, so you didn't have an institutional bureaucracy in Washington which was just forming at that time, sitting on you, did you?

SOLLENBERGER: Not at all, in fact, I felt rather uneasy about not having met my boss back here who happened to be Henry Lee Smith.

Q: Oh, yes, "Hocksie" Lee Smith.

SOLLENBERGER: "Hocksie" Smith, the head of the language school, and with whom Tony Freeman had discussed what should be done in Beijing. So I got indirectly, from Tony, as to what the philosophy of training back here was.

Q: The traditional learning process in the United States was, you sat with a book, and you learn vocabulary. I went through this in Latin and French, Spanish. You sort of learned the vocabulary, and you read and you read and don't talk it, or very little. That was pre-war. Were you picking up the wartime experience of military teaching?

SOLLENBERGER: Very much so. And the reason for that was that Henry Lee Smith was one of the instrumental people in getting the military program going during the war, and in developing textbooks that would approach language learning from the oral side of learning. I learned a little bit from that from the texts that were used, basically military text at that time, borrowing from some of the material that the missionaries had used, and at that time there was a college of Chinese studies in Beijing, the director whom I knew well, and I was able to meet with him and borrow and use some of the materials that they had. Henry [Finn], the then director of the College of Chinese Studies. My approach was to find out what situations our people would be in, and to develop oral dialogues based on those situations, and to learn the vocabulary that was necessary for those. These ranged all the way from the very simple social meetings, to hiring a [pedi]cab, to getting a train ticket, whatever, hotel reservations, all the way from that on up to the meetings that might be anticipated with officials in the government at different levels.

Q: You had not serve in the government, so whom were you tapping into to find out what would be the sort of getting around the city.

SOLLENBERGER: I was tapping into former language officers. I had gotten a good deal of this from Tony Freeman to begin with. There were several others that were around, Edward Rice was one, at my age names slip, but there were several that we contacted, plus we formally sent messages to the embassy in Nanking and various consulates that were still open in China at that time, asking them questions about usage of officers that would be coming in and how they would be used and what their functions would be, etc. We tried to build dialogues around that. [As to] hiring Chinese staff, [we hired] some old scholars who knew the tradition of China and the classical forms of the language, and [hired] some relatively young people. Had one person who spent part time with us who was a Chinese-English major at Beijing University who spent part of his time with us. We had good help and good assistance in that.

By the time I got to Beijing to start things off, Mr. Oliver Clubb, had arrived and was the new Consul General. I remember my first meeting with him. He was very uncertain as to which direction I should go, but what relationships would be having never served in such a situation before. Mr. Clubb was very approachable and [made it clear] from the beginning that this is your job, you do it, and if you have problems come to me, otherwise I'll keep hands off. That was reassuring because Clubb was a language officer himself, and by reputation was a very precise and well organized, and very focused sort of person. But we hit it off well, had a good relationship during my stay there. The major problem that I had with Mr. Clubb, he was so organized. He was so precise in his timing, [that] he had a schedule that was really based on minutes. And part of that schedule was getting in a half hour of physical exercise early in the morning, and his preference was tennis. And I was the chosen person to get up and play tennis with him in the morning, which was good

for me also.

Q: On the area studies side, what resources did you tap for that?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, first of all, required reading. So we developed, with the help of various scholars that were coming through, a reading list. Asked the Foreign Service Institute back here to provide us some funds to buy the books, or better yet, buy them and mail they out to us. At that time it was hard to get material out there. And then to draw on local resources. Beijing was a cultural center, a center of universities, Yenjing University, Beida, Qinghua, so there were a number of people we could call on. People really well versed in their own fields. And then there were a number of Fulbright scholars. I shouldn't say a number, there were several Fulbright scholars who were out there studying in special fields, and we were able to invite them in and to call on them. For current affairs, current events and things of this sort, correspondents liked to come to Beijing and they would usually stop by and we were able to tap some of them.

Q: Were you at that point concerned about, what in modern terms we call political correctness? For example, thinking of the book Red Star Over China by Edgar Snow, and there were some other books on China that looked somewhat favorably, if not quite favorably, on the communist side. Was this a problem?

SOLLENBERGER: It was not a problem. What we could get our hands on we used.

Q: Were there any particular books, we're obviously talking about something 50 years ago, that were particularly good for what you wanted to know?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, for basic history at that particular point, and some cultural contact, [there was] Goodrich that we turned to. But on the geography, Pearl Buck's husband, had done a good deal of work on Chinese geography.

Q: I was wondering, you talked about correspondents, particularly in this early time. The people who come to my mind are Theodore White, Edgar Snow, and is it Agnes Smedley? And there must have been others. I mean were they involved in what you were doing?

SOLLENBERGER: Teddy White was. But Agnes Smedley, no. Edgar Snow, no. Although we had Snow's book, Red Star Over China which was there. We were paying attention to what was going on. To some extent also because my own personal experience and background in China, both with the tractor unit, which had been just before this assignment, where we had run into problems with the communists. And in trying to maintain a neutral position [for] UNRRA in the work that we were doing. So I had come into contact with them, and also because I'd had contact with some of the communist leaders in '38 and '39. So I was well aware of what was going on there, and the people that were focused on them.

Q: How did your school differ from the old Chinese Language School. I think of General Stilwell, Ridgway, and other military. But I suppose with the Foreign Service prior to

that. Was there a difference?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, there was a difference and it became quite clear what the difference was. When I took over the job in Beijing there was already an army language school in operation. I've forgotten how many, but there were I guess 20 or 30 people enrolled in that school. My first question really was, why do we need two government schools? Some of the things we have in common. There are some technical things that the military people would need to learn that we don't need to pay much attention to. But there's a lot of overlap and it just seemed to me...but... I was told to stay away. They were determined to have their own and to maintain a separation. I pursued it several times while I was there with the director of the army program in terms of at least when I invited in some distinguished speaker that I could also invite his people and we tried to schedule things in such a way that we could join forces on that, and certainly not duplicate. And I had contacts that they did not have.

Q: At that point, we're talking about 1947... I'm a graduate of the Army Language School in Monterey in 1950, and frankly the way I was taught there, took Russian, hasn't really differed from both languages I've taken at the Foreign Service Institute. So you're all working out of the same well, weren't you?

SOLLENBERGER: That's right, we were.

Q: This might be a point to ask about Henry Lee Smith, because he was really the person who developed the system, wasn't he? Or at least in part.

SOLLENBERGER: He was certainly one of the king pins in developing the army language system. There were half a dozen, Milt Cowin, I've forgotten the man who did the Chinese.

Q: What was his background? What did you know about him?

SOLLENBERGER: I knew practically nothing about him until I came back to the United States. But his background was in linguistics, historical and descriptive linguistics, and his approach to language training was based on linguistic analysis, and highly focused on the oral spoken language. He was a gregarious person. Had had a radio program at one point, Where Are You From, which at one time was well known. If he couldn't guess where you came from within a certain radius, you would get a free refrigerator or something like that. In those days that was the technique that he used. This was relatively easy to do once you knew the landmarks for this.

Q: And regional accents were still regional accents, too.

SOLLENBERGER: I think the strong point for Henry Lee Smith was that he had a lot of contacts in the linguistic community, and was able to attract to the Institute a number of young promising linguists who were able to build on the system that had gone into the military training program, and to adopt and apply this to this Foreign Service. And at the

same time to move ahead in really relating language to culture. In doing this, he also recruited a number of anthropologists. And we can talk about that later when we get to the Foreign Service Institute itself.

Q: We'll stick to China. In 1947 when you arrived, what was the political situation in that part of China when you first arrived?

SOLLENBERGER: The civil war was a continuing problem at that point. General George Marshall's efforts to arrive at a shared power agreement, something of that sort, did not work. And it became pretty clear that the struggle was going to continue. The communists had acquired a good deal of strength during the period of the Japanese occupation, and immediately thereafter. They were held back to some extent in Manchuria. They probably expected to get more assistance from the Soviet Union in terms of being able to take over the Japanese equipment that was left there when the Japanese surrendered. But the Russians took everything they wanted first, [and the communists got] what was left over. They also took a lot of the factory heavy equipment, industrial equipment out of Manchuria, and moved it into the Soviet Union. That probably held up the communist advance somewhat, we don't know how much, but somewhat. Even when I was there in '47, at least as I look back on it now, it was pretty clear to me and to those I was dealing with, and to Mr. Clubb, that the communists would probably at least take over north China. There was talk at that time that might be a period, maybe an extended period, of a divided China north of the Yangtze River, and south of the Yangtze River. And that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek probably had enough strength south of the river. The frustrating problem that we were dealing with at that time was that Chiang seemed unwilling to put the resources necessary into defending Manchuria. And if Manchuria went, and we were watching to see what would happen, or if Manchuria went, it was pretty clear both in terms of the way history repeats itself and plays out, that north China would soon follow. And that's what happened.

Q: What about the students who came there? The first crew. Can you tell some of their background and as you were feeling your way around to developing this program?

SOLLENBERGER: There were several there when I arrived. One of the things I learned pretty early in the game was, we're going to get students with a wide range of backgrounds, and we'd have to accommodate that which probably meant much more individual programming in training than any sort of group training. Ralph Clough was one of the students, and he had spent some time at the...was it Yale in China?

Q: I think it was Yale in China.

SOLLENBERGER: Jerry Stricker was another one. Oscar Armstrong who had some background, having lived in China. It ranged all the way from people who had some experience, some background, and a start in the language already, to those that were complete novices that didn't have any background. One of the things that I tried to work out through correspondence with Henry Lee Smith in Washington was that we try to use the language school [in Beijing] strictly for advanced training, and that certain

background could probably be provided for them back here in the States, or at universities, etc., who were using the modern system of teaching. And would come out to us only when they could really make maximum use of living and studying in the culture itself. We weren't in business long enough to get any real system going on that.

Q: Were you feeling any of the winds of what later became known as McCarthyism there? John Stewart Service is having his problems and this is mainly sourced to former Ambassador Pat Hurley who had very strong feelings. I think in diplomatic terms most of Foreign Service people would describe Hurley as a prime horse's ass. But at the same time he was politically powerful. Were you feeling any of that?

SOLLENBERGER: Not directly, no. Well aware of it, and well aware of some of the problems that the Chinese language people had gotten into on that. Particularly where there was a feeling of criticism of Chiang Kai-shek. And Theodore White, of course, had his say on that and we got his views on that. We also had the views of some of the Foreign Service people that were coming through.

Q: I realize we're really talking about a rather short time before the place fell apart, but were you able to tap into people who were coming from the United States to tell about China and the political repercussions?

SOLLENBERGER: Very little. We got a little bit of that...I used Clubb also who had arrived just about the same time that I did, in terms of what was going on back here in the State Department. I also arranged for him to have briefings with the students as a group periodically to bring them up to date on the information that he was getting through the channels that are open only to the head person there. And he was very good at that, and took an interest in the students, and I think kept them pretty well abreast of what was going on.

Q: What was the plan for housing and getting the students coming in to get absorbed into the community? How did that work?

SOLLENBERGER: We had to take the housing that was available. We took advantage of property that I guess had been acquired during the period when Beiping was the...when we had a legation there, and Sanguangao, which had been probably a part of the old Han Institute, the Chinese Board of Examiners in the old days, studying classical Chinese, bordering on that. There were some Chinese style houses that were available there, and we put our students there first and by preference, because they were a little bit separated from the consulate general, from its main compound. We held our classes there also. It was also easier in a place like that for Chinese who wanted to come in freely to come in. They weren't faced with going past someone guarding the gate so to speak. Later on when things became tense we had to move out of that area, and we moved into what had been the old marine barracks which was converted into office space. I was given space on the ground floor. The Army Language School had the top floors.

The other thing that I did was to have field trips much as you do in the schools here, you

take the kids out to museums. So we organized a number of field trips that would take us out to look at things. Plus, and somewhat to my later regret, I argued and got funds to send [our students] on field trips outside of Beijing for two reasons. One, to get a little experience with dialects that were spoken in Beijing itself. The second reason for this was, and this was a personal view that I had, that the Department and our official establishments in China, were too much focused on the urban areas when the majority of the Chinese population lived outside, were rural. And that we needed to know a little bit more about what was going on in the rural countryside. And the only way to get that is to send them out. So we sent them out early on, sent them out with an instructor, so they would have a companion. Later on, go out by yourself and see if you can make your way. Some of them took some very interesting trips. Later on, after the communists took over, I was to learn that they were well aware of this, and considered that I was running a spy ring in Beijing, and that one of the evidence for that was that I was sending these people out all over China, obviously to gather information.

Q: Which, of course was what...

SOLLENBERGER: ...which is what I was doing.

Q: Well, I mean, this is what the Foreign Service does.

SOLLENBERGER: That caused me some problems later on.

Q: Before we come to that, was there any debate, concern...could you talk a bit about the thoughts you had, and Clubb and others...is it Chubb or Clubb?

SOLLENBERGER: Clubb, Oliver Edmond Clubb.

Q: ...about Mandarin versus Cantonese. I mean the languages of China.

SOLLENBERGER: There was no question at that particular point as to what we would focus on in the north. For two reasons, one, Mandarin is by far the language that is used by most of the population. At least 70-80 percent of the population could manage at that time to function in the various dialects of Mandarin. Cantonese, a different language basically related, Fukienese, a different language, but related. Hakka, a different language, but related. The minority languages, the mountain people, the Turkic people, the Tibetans, Mongols, etc., were at best 10 percent of the population, and were not of particular interest in terms of political, economic focus. So concentration, no question, was on Mandarin Chinese.

Q: Was there any problems from the fact that the majority of Chinese in the United States spoke, I believe, am I correct in saying they came from the area around Canton?

SOLLENBERGER: No. Later on, when we were pushed out of China, or left China, we did begin to focus on some of the other languages, Fukienese because of Taiwan. We never did get into Hakka. But Cantonese, yes, we wanted to train some people in both

Mandarin and Cantonese, and Taiwanese. But that was later, that was at a later date.

Q: Could you describe events, and how they impacted on your operation?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, it's hard to know where to begin. It became pretty clear, we'd move when it fell.

Q: Which is when, in '48?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, and when Angus Ward was forced to leave, in other words he was held under less than free conditions while he was there, and was really pushed out. He came through Beijing and we had a chance to meet and talk with him. But it was pretty clear from what was happening in Manchuria, and the fact that Chiang was not willing to commit enough troops. He probably didn't have enough confidence in doing that, he was harboring his strength for events later on. But it became pretty clear at that point that we were a target, and we would probably go down. How that would happen we weren't sure. There was a pretty strong feeling, and Clubb had this, as well as the committee of the diplomats who were in Beijing, and the major countries all left people there to keep a finger in the pie, and then to report on what was going on. And Clubb would meet regularly with them. There was a committee that would meet and they were trying to coordinate their reaction to this about whether when to leave, or not to leave. There was a movement underway, and I think the British probably took the lead in this, and that was to get the city declared an open city so in the event the communist came, it would not be destroyed, [because Beiping was] important internationally as a cultural center. Important to China. I know that Club felt that in a way that was, yes, go ahead with that, but he didn't think the communists would really attack the city. His feeling, I think, was that the traditional Chinese military approach to things would be such that the communist would move in, close off the city, would isolate it, and that a deal would be made with the General defending the city, and that it would be turned over without any major attack on the city.

We began to organize ourselves, obviously in '48, for an eventuality of whatever might come. I was assigned the job of laying in stores and supplies in case we ran short of food, and if there was a siege of the city that went on for a long period of time, there might be a problem, also in charge of medical problems or services. One of the people did help with the evacuation of people that might be leaving because I could handle the Chinese language. We received information from the Department that dependents could be sent home. Among the students, most of us decided not to keep our wives there, and in one or two cases I believe, they decided they would send their families home. I decided to keep mine in Beijing. Again, feeling that the risks were probably minimal, there would be a lot of inconvenience. The personal risks would be rather minimal. And I didn't expect there would be a direct attack on the city.

The other thing was, my wife was pregnant, and we were expecting another child and we didn't want to be separated at that particular time. But the program went ahead, on schedule, without very much interruption. To the extent that we could we continued field

trips in areas that were still open to us. In one particular case, without mentioning a name, one of our students who had been a former Marine, this is when we were under siege, decided he wanted to go out and see how close the communists actually were. He borrowed a Jeep from the [motor] pool, and headed off towards the east, towards the city at Tongzhou. He was advised by the Nationalists that were at the gate of Peking at that time, not to go any further. They didn't know where the communists were, but we don't have any more troops out there, it's a no-man's land. But he decided he would go anyhow, he hadn't gone very far and he saw there was nobody in the field that he could see. He decided that he better turn around and come back. He got turned around, but as he started back, there was fire from some of the farm houses on both sides directed at him and his Jeep. A couple tires were knocked out, the radiator was punctured, a bullet through the windshield. He couldn't turn the thing off, it got too hot. He came to my office, white and shaken up. He had found out where the communists were. We had those kind of discipline problems.

Q: During this time, what was the feeling towards the communists among...I mean, your personal feelings. You'd had dealings with them, but there was this situation in Mukden where Angus Ward was our Consul General and his staff were kept basically as prisoners.

SOLLENBERGER: ...they were under house arrest.

Q: Yes, and it was not an easy house arrest at all. We have a long interview with Elden Erickson, who was there as a staff, sort of like a secretary, to Angus Ward. What was the general feeling, and your feeling about almost can we do business with the communists. After all, it hadn't been that long that we'd been allied with the Soviet Union.

SOLLENBERGER: There seemed to be a general feeling...well, first of all we had a pretty realistic view of the communists just by virtue of the experience that Angus Ward had had, and from reports that we were getting pretty regularly from Chinese who had contacts through family and so on out in the areas that were controlled by the communists. I personally had had some experience in trying to get a tractor operation started in the Yellow River, and knew the problems that were involved in that. I had also, even early on in the ‘30s, had run into several situations that made it clear to me that the communists, on one hand, could wear silk gloves for a while, and on the other hand, could be extremely ruthless. I'd actually seen and experienced both sides of that. Clubb, himself, was really a scholar, and was really the right person there at the right time. He knew the Soviet Union, he had served in the Soviet Union, his Chinese was good, and his contacts were good. He was realistic, and knew how to deal with them. I think he hoped that we could stay on because he felt it important that we maintain contact with them, that we don't completely lose contact with the communists. He needed to know what was going on in China, and the best way for that would be to maintain some contact there, whether informal or official, dependent on how things would develop. I believe this was the general view of the other representatives from other countries in Beijing at the time also. In fact, the reason for leaving us there, it was clear that Beijing would go, was with I think, the hope that some arrangement could be worked out whereby we could maintain

some relations with the [incoming communists] however informal. That was the way we proceeded. Clubb, as I recall, really based his reporting, and his approach to this on that assumption, and was led in several instances I believe to believe that it might be possible that the communists might not want to put all of their eggs in a Soviet basket. That they might be realistic enough to know that in terms of economic development, assistance and so on, that they would have to turn some place else than to the Soviet Union, that had been through a devastating war period, and who else was there, the United States. But he was a realist, and [knew] there were a lot of problems.

Q: Were you involved thinking about transferring the school, or did anyone think about transferring the school to Nanking, or southern China?

SOLLENBERGER: No.

Q: So how did this play out?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, we stayed on. The communist laid siege in the city, and on several occasions fired shells into the city, but carefully avoiding the old legation area, and carefully avoiding the Forbidden City and cultural places of that sort, which was encouraging to us. But Clubb maintained close contact with the defending General, Fe Zhouyi, and I remember he was probably under siege. He came to dinner at Clubb's house, I was present at the dinner also, was able to talk with his wife. He gave no indication at that point as to what was going to happen insofar as we were concerned, at least verbally he was going to defend the city. But it was pretty clear from other signs that that was not the case. He had already made a deal to turn the city over, in return for which he would be given a position in the new government.

The actual takeover was quiet. We were told to stay in our compounds. Several of us did try to get out on the streets a little bit to see what was going on, and were not bothered. One of our students was taking movies of the liberation parade and they confiscated his equipment and film. But initially there seemed to be no problems. The city was quiet and the staff would still come to work. We kept the school going. So the predictions that we had that they would exercise their initial control with kid gloves on seemed well founded.

Q: Were you by any chance, prior to this, had you dusted off the books about the Boxer Rebellion, and the siege of Peking?

SOLLENBERGER: Oh, yes. We were all well aware of that, and were prepared. But the turnover was really quite peaceful.

Q: Did this do anything to the curriculum of the school?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, several things. One, it became harder for us to get people in on the area studies side. We obviously couldn't get the communists, they would not recognize us at all. More of my time was spent on helping Clubb with some of his problems. There were still a lot of Americans that were in the area, and some of them

wanted to leave. There were property problems, there were all kinds of problems helping American citizens, and the students decided to stay on and see what was going to happen. The communists refused to recognize Clubb's official position. As far as they were concerned he was a foreign citizen staying on in Beijing, stay on as long as you mind your business, so to speak. But it presented a problem to him. When things came up that needed to be represented to the local authorities, which was then the communists. He did not want to sort of compromise his position by going himself, so he would use me or a couple of the students to do this for him. It became sort of a game that we played with the Alien Affairs Office, which was our contact.

We would go in with a problem, so and so wants to leave, or has a property that has been occupied, this was American property. First of all, you'd be met by a low level clerk, or officer whatever it was, who would want to know what business you had, and who you wanted to see. We don't know whom we should see, but here's the problem, can you tell us whom we should see. So we would orally tell them what the problem was. Then routinely you would say, well, this was in writing and we knew this and we had it in writing, here it is. They would look it over, oh, this is signed by Mr. Clubb, U.S. Consul General. We can't accept this, we don't recognize his position. So you'd say, you know what the problem is now. Well, would you cross off his name? I'd say, I can't do that, he's my boss and from our point of view he is the American representative here, and that's his title. So, you know what the thing is, I'll just take this letter back. Oh, no, you can't take it back, you've already given it to us. So we'll cross it off. You want to cross it off, all right, then that's still what he is. Then we'd ask is there a chance that we can see somebody and talk about this issue who has some authority. Well, we'll let you know what the outcome is. This was at least a weekly affair.

Q: Would the problems sometimes be solved?

SOLLENBERGER: Sometimes it would be. Sometimes the solution would not come back to us. It would be dealt directly to the situation or the person involved.

Q: Looking at this back from the perspective, what was the American rationale, and what was the Chinese communist rationale for this non-recognition, recognition, and all that?

SOLLENBERGER: It's hard to say what the communist rationale was. My own interpretation of this was that they were uncertain when they first came in, as to whether they wanted to keep ties open or not. They could easily have made life difficult for us as they did in the south. The fact that they didn't initially do this seemed to be a very clear indication that at least within the hierarchy of the decision makers, that they were uncertain as to which direction to go.

I think the reason why they didn't want to recognize the official position of this was that they didn't want to have direct talks, negotiations, with the foreigners at that particular point. Part of it was also they wanted to wait until their position in China was clearer. Until they had achieved military control over all major parts of the country. Then their dealing with the foreigners, the outsiders would be different than when they were only

partially in control. But I think there was a delay for that reason. From our point of view there was nothing we could do about it. But there was the incident that caused us to leave.

Let me build up to that. It was clear that they were moving towards the establishment of a government as soon as they were in control of China as a whole. They would formally announce an established government and the seat would be in Beijing. This was the accomplished on the first of October 1949. An interesting personal incident that was involved with this. When we established official contact with the Chinese after Nixon's visit...

Q: This is in '72.

SOLLENBERGER: ...and to set up liaison offices rather than formal embassies. Han Xu was sent by the Chinese government to Washington to open their liaison office. The Ambassador came later, and Han Xu himself was later appointed as Ambassador. But shortly after he arrived the word came to me from the East Asian desk that it would be nice if we could find a reason to invite him to come to the Institute to show courtesy by recognizing that he was here. So I invited him and he came with several of his staff people. We were in the building in Rosslyn [Virginia] at that point. When he came upstairs in the elevator, following the Chinese pattern I went out to the elevator to greet him. They'd had let me know that he was coming up. He strode over to me, put out his hand, and his English is fairly good, he said, "Mr. Sollenberger, I believe we've met before." I said, "That's possible. I don't know. I was in Peking in such and such a time." He said, "I was the young officer at that time that handed to you at the entrance of the U.S. Consulate General, the declaration of the establishment of the People's Republic of China." I said, "I remember, but I'm afraid I don't recognize you at that particular point."

Back in Beijing in '49, increasingly we were having difficulty as the time went on. The Chinese feeling that they could come into the compound. And this began to cause me to wonder how much longer we could keep this thing going because we needed our instructors, and up to that point they were willing to come in. They hadn't faced any personal pressure or problems. There was another incident that occurred. The gate keeper one night came to the house that I was living in, banging on the door. He said, you've got to come out to the gate, there's a platoon of the Liberation Army out there demanding entrance. I said, all right, but we'd better let Mr. Clubb know about this also. So there had to be time out. I'll go out and see what the problem is. They were out there, and there was a good deal of tension. They were demanding to come in, and I couldn't quite figure out why they wanted to come in. They were trying to explain that they thought that we had done something to the guards that had been stationed in front of the consulate compound. Of course, we'd done nothing at all of that sort. And they wanted to come in and search. Well, Clubb joined us at that particular point, and we're talking back and forth. We finally agreed that we'd let them in, but we would accompany them, not into the buildings, but to the compound. We hadn't gotten very far, following the compound wall, where we found several rifles that had been thrown over the wall. What had happened, obviously, was that their guards had gone AWOL. They thought that we had something to do with that. As a matter of fact, we did. My son, he was then four years old, had a

little Jeep and he would regularly go out to the...

Q: This is a peddle car.

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, a peddle car. He would regularly go out to the gate that led into the compound, and while the guards were under strict orders not to fraternize with us, a kid was something else. He established pretty good relations with them. I used to send tea out with him, and Life magazines to look at, and he would report back...I ask him what sort of questions they asked him. Well, they wanted to know whether we beat our servants or not. And what kind of food did you eat? In other words, there were all sorts of questions about our relationship with the Chinese. Apparently they thought we were ogres of some sort. I've always credited him with causing the first defection. One of the guards that was there at this particular time this happened had the same Chinese surname, that I have. So he was "da Su," and my son was "xiao Su." They got on pretty friendly terms on the basis of it, having the same surnames.

Q: One of the ways the Chinese communist, when they first took over used were very heavy handed in Mukden, but did but later in Shanghai, and I guess elsewhere, to put pressure on us were claims that we either had caned the Chinese, or we'd mistreated the Chinese. This became sort of the lever which was used a lot. Did that hit you?

SOLLENBERGER: That hit me, yes. Towards the end, various pressure was being put on the Chinese tutoring staff from the outside. They wouldn't talk about it. They wouldn't talk much about it. But when it became clear that after the decision that we move out, made clear that we were leaving, that they had to stay and make their peace. The instructors got together accused me of withholding part of their salaries. And probably several other things having to do with the students' trips.

Q: Was this cooked up do you think, by the Chinese authorities?

SOLLENBERGER: It was cooked up. Well, it was cooked up by the Chinese authorities and it was an embarrassment to some of the instructors. They said, we know you haven't done this. You're leaving. We're going to have to stay, and going to have to face it. I had already sent the message back through Clubb, and he certainly supported it, that we ought to be very liberal in severance pay for these people. I was at that time recommending...I've forgotten whether it was six months, a half a year, severance on that service they had rendered, whatever excuse they wanted to use to do this. And the answer came back, no. It was eventually negotiated that they would get, I think, three months. In the meantime they'd taken this to the authorities and I was summoned to the People's Court to explain and fortunately the records that are kept are very detailed in matters of this sort. There was a three man arbitration panel. After laying out the evidence on this for them, and being questioned by them on a number of different things, not on the students' field trips, not on spy charges. This was strictly on the way in which we had dealt with the people we had employed. They finally told the instructors, you better take what you can get, and that settled it, and I had no trouble getting my exit permit.

Q: Which is interesting because in other cases sometimes the demands, I mean from what I've gotten from other people, the demands of the Chinese employees were one, excessive, two, not really of their own volition. The Chinese communist courts sort of backed them up in order to cause real trouble. It sounds like there wasn't an unified...

SOLLENBERGER: This is not the case where we were. We got by fairly peacefully. It was only later, as I was leaving, that a piece came out in the Chinese press that I was leaving and called me the head of spy ring.

Q: When this happened, what was the situation in China overall?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, by this time the People's Republic had been established, there was a government in Beijing. They were in effective control over most of China. In other words, there was really no major resistance.

Q: And Chiang had gone to Formosa or to Taiwan?

SOLLENBERGER: The incident that caused us to leave, maybe you have this from other sources, the incident that caused us to close down and to leave was when they announced that they were going to take over the old Marine barracks, which was part of the mission, located in the legation quarter. The American point of view, and our point of view, was that these facilities were acquired by treaty rights, and we stood by that interpretation. They said there was a difference between the old legation quarter itself and the Marine barracks, and anyway we don't recognize these treaties anymore, and we're going to come in and take it over.

Q: This is where the school was.

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, at this time. Clubb obviously was in touch with Washington back here and how do we deal with that. And we decided we would stay put as long as we could, and see if they would back down, and it became apparent the day before, and they announced that they would take over, that they were not going to back down. So everybody turned to, and vacated the old Marine barracks building. Files had already been burned, and furniture and stuff like that was hauled over to the legation compound and was stacked up out there, and they came in and occupied the premises. But we had apparently made it clear to them that if they did this, any chance of recognition, or contact, would be erased as a result of this act on their part. It was from our point of view an illegal act in opposition to our treaty rights. So from that point on we began a gradual withdrawal and that incident was the sort of thing that brought the Chinese staff into play. They were concerned about what was going to happen to them, and we were concerned about what would happen to them. We'd had enough stories about the Chinese from indirect sources about what was happening to people who had close contacts and worked for Americans.

Q: What was happening, what you were getting?

SOLLENBERGER: First of all, they would put the people through a brain washing process, and sometimes with torture, and sometimes were persuaded. There didn't seem to be a consistent pattern, and to some extent on who was in charge at a particular place at a particular time as to what the pattern would be. We had one person of the staff caught up in this, he'd gone to see about his family and had been picked up and was held for several months and ___, but came back and we got his story. We had a pretty good idea as to what might happen, and what could happen to the Chinese ___.

Q: As all this was going on, the fall of Nanking and others, did the schools continue?

SOLLENBERGER: The school continued right up until the end of the year. The schedule was disrupted somewhat from time to time, partly because some of the instructors were having difficulty in getting in. But we kept some classes going right up to the end of the year.

Q: The end of 1949.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. Then we closed down, and it was a matter of getting ourselves organized.

Q: Let's get to how you got organized and out. How did you? Was there any problem?

SOLLENBERGER: We had to get permission to leave the city, and you had to have a physical examinations to get out. There was some concern as to whether they would use that rule to hinder us or not. Our son developed pneumonia at the time that we were supposed to leave, and had gotten permission to leave, so we wanted to extend our stay a little bit until he got over it. There was also the problem of getting your household things out. The State Department had authorized an earlier shipment of effects if we wanted to do that before the communists came in. We took advantage of that to some extent, but we still had things that we wanted to ship out. It was uncertain as to what we would have to go through, whether they would take all the stuff apart and go through it and see what we were taking out, and just how they would deal with it, departed by way of Tianjin.

One humorous incident. I had some traveler's checks and they wanted to know if I had any currency, you can't take these out, you can't take foreign currency out. Phil Manhart was then consul in Tianjin and he was there helping me get out. So I said to Phil, “You keep these and see if you can find a way to get them out to me.” They saw me hand them to Phil. I didn't hear anything about these traveler’s checks for a year or so, until American Express said, “Your checks have been cashed in Hong Kong.” I said, “That's news to me. I've already reported that I couldn't bring them out. I had to leave them there with Phil.” A couple of years later I got a letter and a check from David Barrett, an assistant military attaché, with a big apology saying that Manhart had entrusted him with bringing the checks out, but he ran into a desperate situation and had to cash them. In the meantime, so many things had happened that he had sort of forgotten about this and suddenly realized what he had done, here's the check to cover everything.

In Tianjin, the Chinese inspectors only opened one box. I had everything very carefully listed. They opened one box and closed it up before we left, and we got out without any problem although there was uncertainty throughout as to whether there would be problems, blocks put in our way. They could have said, your physical exam shows such and such, we'll have to keep you here until you get over that, there were all kinds of excuses to keep us there. But they seemed to be at that particular point prepared and willing and maybe even happy to see us out.

Q: How did the timing work? Here you were in 1949 declared to be the capital of China. We'd had an embassy in Nanking. Then that fell to the communists. And then I think people moved to Shanghai, and then that went. What had happened at the time you were being expelled, what about our people in southern China?

SOLLENBERGER: I think the decision had been made back here in Washington at that point that we would withdraw, and that meant everybody. It was a matter of scheduling and timing in order to get everybody out of China. I don't know the details and never looked specifically into this in terms of the record as to what the Department's statement to the Chinese was. Judging from the results, it became perfectly clear to us in the field that we'd issued an ultimatum saying, if you take this step the chances of any relationships with you are being destroyed by you, and we'll pull out. At least that was the effect of the thing, and I presume that that's actually what happened.

Q: What was the feeling that you were getting from the officers who were talking to, Clubb and others, about this policy? I mean, here was a sort of a new nation, and in the normal course of things, we'd say, okay, there's been a civil war and these guys have won, and with a little huff and puff, you'd say, okay, let's recognize it and get on with our business. Was there any feeling at that time, or were you so far removed that you didn't get it, about there were a lot of domestic politics within the United States, or was this just because the Chinese communists were being so beastly.

SOLLENBERGER: We knew that there was a political problem back home with regard to China. The fact that we were being accused of losing China, and not supporting Chiang Kai-shek. The feeling on the spot, as I best recall it, and in talking with Clubb about this, was that we couldn't really ignore...at that time they were still talking about five hundred, six hundred million people, and the government had taken control of that area, and we needed to have a listening base at least in China, and Beijing was the place to have it. We'd been left there with the prospects that this might happen and it had gone sour, we were pulling out. The communists were asking for recognition, but Clubb's position on this, and I think he was right on this, and as it turned out he was right, was that while we might go ahead and decide to recognize them, they might not be willing or able to reciprocate, and that would put us in a difficult position. The British seemed to be more inclined to go ahead and accept the fact that China had been taken over by the communists, and recognized the argument that, because we have to do business, we have to know what's going on. They did extend diplomatic recognition, and as Clubb had sort of predicted, the communists were very slow, with all sorts of obstacles in the way of recognition. I think the French were that way also, and the Dutch.

Q: You know, there was such a to-do later about France recognizing communist China. They didn't recognize until the '60s, I think, under de Gaulle. But the British didn't get anything out of it this the whole time, I mean, it was still ended up the United States versus China. I mean, this was the big game and the rest of them were were kind of there but almost invisible.

SOLLENBERGER: A trend that we began to pick up even before we left were some reports that all was not well between the communists and the Russians.

Q: That was then in the Soviet Union.

SOLLENBERGER: How serious that was, nobody quite knew. But it did become apparent from a geographic point of view, the way in which the Chinese Communists had been sort of short-changed in their takeover of Manchuria, and in the way in which the Russians had been dealing with the Chinese on this. That some of the old feelings of the Chinese, toward the northern barbarians, seemed to be emerging. How serious that would become nobody at that point quite knew.

Q: What about your young Turks, your students? How were they doing?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, presumably they were studying. [Laughter] One of the problems, after the communist takeover of the city was that they weren't as free to move about, and certainly not to go out of the city. You had to get permission, and they were not likely to get permission to do that. The foreign community was sort of thrown in on itself, and there was a lot of social activity, invitations, etc., to the point where I had to send a letter out to the other official establishments and other countries out there, requesting them to please limit their invitations to our students to weekends. That they had homework to do, and it wasn't that they didn't want to be social, that they would probably rather do that than study. But please understand this, of course the students were not exactly pleased with that.

Q: So you played the role of the heavy hand.

SOLLENBERGER: They got along well. We could still go out and have Chinese meals together.

Q: Well, of course, if you've got to be trapped in a city, and Beijing is not the worst place to be trapped in. While we're still dealing with this period, were there other language schools? I'm thinking of the French, the Germans, the British had something there, were they using sharing of techniques, how did this work?

SOLLENBERGER: The British had their facilities in Hong Kong, so any training they were doing was confined there. We knew that, but there was really no contact. The question came up at one point about some Australian students maybe joining us. They later joined us in Taiwan at the school there. The College of Chinese Studies stayed open

as long as they could, and there were some foreigners that were put in the College of Chinese Studies. The French, I don't know.

Q: Well, Howard, this might be a good place to stop. We've got you up to going back to Washington. You went to Washington in 1950?

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Today is the 6th of January 1998. You're back in Washington. Did you come back to a job? Or were you sort of at loose ends?

SOLLENBERGER: A little bit of both, I guess. But just by way of a general comment, I had never set foot in the Department of State before I joined, because I was recruited in China, and was there until I came back. But I had a general sense of pride, of being a part of the Department, at that time because of the legacy of George Marshall, and Dean Acheson. Of course, he was still Secretary of State at that particular point. But the thing that shocked me when I got back was to find the low esteem in which training was held within the Department, and the newly formed Institute seemed to be a stepchild.

Q: This, of course, has always been a problem with the Department of State. Sticking to 1950, because I like to catch this at the time, how did you find out how training ranked? What were you gathering?

SOLLENBERGER: Of course, the first thing I did when I got back was to call on my boss, Dr. Henry Lee Smith. He was running the language school in the new Institute. It was then located in premises on C Street.

Q: Yes, about where the diplomatic entrance is now.

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, that same entrance. It didn't take very long to look around, and see what was actually taking place; how people were selected for training, and the seriousness with which training was considered. Actually, very little time was allowed for language training at that point. There was a junior officer course, and as part of that, as I recall, they had an hour or two hours a day of language training for a short period of time that they were there, hopefully in the language of the country to which they're going. I think that they involved at that time in about 30 different foreign languages, but these were frequently taught by people who had no background in those languages. They were professional linguists. And an effort was made, wherever it was justified in terms of the number of students, to have a native speaker of the language there to be a model for the students to follow, which was the pattern that had been established by Dr. Smith.

It didn't take long also to pick up the grumblings within the then Institute as to the difficulty of getting the necessary resources. Just looking at the facilities, they were certainly not appropriate for a training institution. They were in a converted apartment building. My office turned out to be on the 9th floor, in what had been a bedroom with a bathroom attached which was very nice. They gave me a place to put my files, things that

had been accumulated on the China program. And Dr. Smith suggested they would like to have me stay on at the Institute. I wasn't sure whether that was the right thing for me to do or not. I thought I needed something a little more active in relation to China, which is where I had had my experience. I looked at USIA [U.S. Agency for International Development], and I looked at AID [Agency for International Development], and they were not interested in my qualifications at that particular point. AID was looking for technical people with technical skills, and USIA was then only hiring people with media experience and background, which I had not had. So I decided the Institute was probably the place to stay for a while.

Q: What was the state of Chinese language training in 1950?

SOLLENBERGER: There were no people going to China at that point, because our ties there had been cut off. There was a question as to whether we should continue the long term specialized training in China. As that turned out that became really one of the things that I probably fought the hardest for, and maybe had some influence on, in maintaining at least the minimal amount of training on the assumption that sooner or later we were going to have to deal with China, we couldn't ignore what was then considered 500 million people, regardless of who was in charge. And that if we ignored China, then we would be suffering the same sort of gap that they were complaining about because they hadn't given training during the war period, and found a gap of officers at appropriate grade levels. Of course, nobody knew when or how soon, and what the circumstances relations would be to re-establish. It wasn't clear at that time as to what the role of Taiwan was going play in this, although that became clear very shortly.

Q: Had you looked at the army language school at Monterey or any of the military places as far as a job goes?

SOLLENBERGER: No, I hadn't. My experience with the army training program as it was run in Beijing at the same time I was there indicated that's not a place I'd be very happy in.

Q: When you got to the State Department and you decided to sign on...this was about when?

SOLLENBERGER: May of ‘50.

Q: Because essentially against that on June 25, 1950 interests in the Far East began to heat up again. How did the advent of the Korean war...I mean, you didn't have time to almost find your way to the bathroom before the Korean war started. Did that have any affect on what you were doing?

SOLLENBERGER: Initially, not very much. It took a little time for it to sink in, and, of course, when the Chinese got into the conflict...

Q: We're talking about around November or December of 1950.

SOLLENBERGER: When the Chinese decided to come in, then there was some interest in training, and also utilizing the language officers who had already received training. They stationed them in the key positions around China: Japan, Southeast Asia, certainly in Hong Kong.

Q: At this time I've interviewed people who were language officers in Burma, Indonesia, Thailand, China-watching jobs. Would this pep up the program at all?

SOLLENBERGER: It would, except for the strictures within the Department itself of personnel system. The answer we were constantly getting was, if we don't have positions, assignments, there's no point in continuing training. Particularly when the Department, and particularly the Institute, was short of funds, personnel was short, the personnel system felt it was in a tight, tight situation. The Department generally would have been willing to let training slide for a while. I kept insisting that something had to be done, even though they didn't have immediate slots, there would be plenty of opportunity as things went on to utilize these people even in places like London, and different European capitals where there was some contact and interest in China, and what was going to happen in China.

Q: There's nothing worse in sort of the new boy on the block, and don't know anyone who may have had clout, prestige or anything to build on, and yet you hit at an extremely crucial time. How did you operate?

SOLLENBERGER: In September 1951, I was given the title of Assistant Professor of Chinese Studies, and was given an administrative job, sort of the executive officer of the language school. I think Dr. Smith seemed reasonably impressed with the way in which I had brought the facility, the school in Peking, and I must have some administrative skills to do that. So that was the job that was given to me. Also the job of looking after the overseas language programs which they were trying to the institute, to get people if they couldn't study the languages in Washington before they left, to study in the field, or if they did study here, to provide continuing training when they got to the post. And I was given responsibility for looking after that.

Q: Were you involved in setting up, or the development of, Arabic, Japanese training. Actually there was even a French school in Nice.

SOLLENBERGER: That was considerably later. I was involved and given responsibility for these establishments. The only other one at that particular point was in Beirut. But there were plans to move ahead on Japan, and traditionally there had been a school in Japan. So I was involved in getting that started, finding a location in Yokohama.

Q: There was, particularly at this point, the prestige of the Russian language officers, Bohlen and Kennan, and others. Did you try to use that as a model for saying this is what we have for China...

SOLLENBERGER: We looked at a variety of different approaches for China. Eventually on the Chinese side we looked at Hong Kong as a possible place to train, there were facilities there, and some very successful models. The British were there training in Hong Kong. We looked at Singapore as a possibility, some place where the students might have a chance to utilize the language outside the classroom. First of all, the few students that were given to us, aside from the universities, get university training here...

Q: You were mentioning Yale had a good course.

SOLLENBERGER: Cornell had a training program also, and actually the person who had written the Army ASTP [Army Specialized Training Program] text on Chinese was at Cornell, so that was an option also.

Q: Was there any problem about using university training for Foreign Service Chinese studies...I've heard at other times and other languages the university programs were designed to train scholars to do research, and were not really very practical for Foreign Service. Was this a problem?

SOLLENBERGER: This was definitely a problem, and that's why we chose the Yale which is where the Air Force program had been set up which was based on the Army system, and Cornell. As I recall also we looked at some of the California schools, Berkeley principally as a possible place. I was interested particularly not only in giving language, but in giving a few officers a good solid background in area studies, the cultural, historical, economic, political dimensions of the Chinese culture which historically had been dynamic, and from my point of view I thought in the future was going to be and that we should have people who fully understood this as well as people who could speak the language.

Q: Was it a hard sell? I mean you were talking about the language, but also about what we would call area training. Again, I find the Department of State seems to be an historical organization.

SOLLENBERGER: It was difficult to sell that. We had a window of opportunity to get that started in the Department of State when the National Defense Education Act was established. Of course, that was tied to Sputnik, it came a little bit later.

Q: That was around '56, '57.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right, and there an interagency committee was set up to focus on different parts of the National Defense Education Act. Title IV was the one that we were the most interested in, or I was, because this was the part that dealt with language and area studies. And the effort to beef this up in universities, which we were all for, but also to see within the government what resources the country had, there was a survey that was required of all of the agencies of the government. They were supposed to identify the language skills and the area skills, background, of people who may within the various government agencies, particularly those who had to do with foreign affairs. Of course,

they had no standards for doing this. What sort of a standard would they use. If you used the university standards of A-B grade for second year, or third year, or fourth year, that didn't tell you what they could really do with the language. They certainly had nothing that was useful so far as identifying area expertise. That task fell to the Foreign Service Institute, and this is one of the things that was handed to me by Dr. Smith, who said, see what you can work out.

Q: This had to be the latter part of the '50s.

SOLLENBERGER: That came along a little bit later.

Q: Let's talk here about the language thing. Was there much support from what passed as the China desk, as far as language training?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, there was support, but at that time there was some strain, I think, between the operating bureaus who were constantly pressing Personnel for staff. And the question of releasing people, personnel would go to the bureaus and say, fine training, who are you going to release for training, because that's going to leave one less hand that you have on the job here, for assignment elsewhere. So there was tension there as well as between the Institute and the personnel system. But there was support because Clubb was there and he understood the necessity for this. Tony Freeman who had helped set up the program was around, and he supported it. And the students that we had trained in Beijing, some of them were being assigned to jobs on the desk and in the bureau at that particular time. So there was support, but there was no consistent pressure to continue training.

Q: How did you see Henry Lee Smith operating within the the Departmental environment?

SOLLENBERGER: He was an academic. He was frustrated. I think one of the reasons why he turned some of the administrative operations over to me was that he wanted to be free to do some of the research that he was interested in doing on language and culture. And they were working at that time, the professional linguists, on an analysis of language that they thought was a step up from the systems that they'd used before. In a way the Institute was leading the way in linguistic analysis at that particular time.

Not only was Dr. Henry Lee Smith there, but George Traeger, who is a well known linguist was also on the staff, and they brought in some anthropologists who were interested in the linguistic area studies side. Edward T. Hall, who later became famous for the best seller book that he wrote on silent language. Gerard, an anthropologist, Bert Whistle, the kinesologist who was interested in the way in which body language was used. This all was a part of an effort on the part of the Institute to find new ways, better ways of teaching. But also to keep in with the academic community.

Q: What was the state, as you sampled it at this early '50s, of the field of linguistics? Now it's a big business, but what was it like then?

SOLLENBERGER: It was rather small. It was rather difficult to find qualified linguists. They hadn't been trained during the war. There were people who had learned the languages, but not done professional training in linguistics. The fact that Henry Lee Smith and George Traeger being at the Institute was an attractive thing. And their approach to recruitment I had to admire, that was that they were trying to hire linguists on the basis of coming for just a limited period of time to the Institute, but with the objective of returning to the academic community for two reasons. One, to build back into the academic community a more practical approach to their language instruction programs. And the other one was, that the government didn't offer that much future for linguists in terms of promotions in government employment, and that linguists would probably generally become frustrated with the bureaucratic problems. I remember Dr. Smith talking to me at one point, he said, your job here in terms of administration is to make it possible for professional people to do their work with limited interference from the bureaucratic system. So anyway you can relieve them of the pressures of the bureaucracy would be helpful. That's good advice up to a certain point, but anybody who works in the government sooner or later has to realize that the matter of getting the resources to do what you want to do, has to be taken into consideration. Otherwise, you can't do your job.

Q: What were you finding about your results? You were seeing the product of the American school system - elementary, high school, college, of people coming into the Foreign Service. And with the exception of those who happened to have lived overseas, and maybe acquired it with their parents or something, what was the language capability among the new Foreign Service officers?

SOLLENBERGER: From the point of view of practical use as required in foreign affairs business, it was hopeless, very poor. The recruitment of people from the army who had been through the army language training program, there were a few of those that were coming into the Foreign Service. There were a few from missionary background who had grown up overseas who came in with the language. But by and large the recruitment for the Foreign Service at that particular point did not place any premium on knowing a language, so they were not getting the people who were qualified. And the argument at that time was that if we recruited for language skills, we're going to get people who are basically not very well suited for the Foreign Service because the people that are specializing, majoring in foreign languages, are people that are focused on that one academic thing, and we need broader people, we need to get people who have a broad background in the Foreign Service. And it just wasn't bringing in people who had the skills.

Q: I took the Foreign Service exam in '53 which was pretty much the recruiting thing then. You took the exam, and you took the language exam in one of five different languages, but you didn't have to pass it. That was just something they'd say well, you've got to get yourself qualified once you're in. You couldn't get promoted. But basically I could see what they were after.

SOLLENBERGER: Even in getting promoted, it wasn't an important factor at that

particular time. What the Department wanted, I think, by giving that exam was to try to find a few people who had the language and could be assigned to the then important posts where it would be useful. Training became the subject of a study of the Department's personnel system towards a stronger Foreign Service...

Q: You're showing me a booklet, it was published when?

SOLLENBERGER: This was published in May of '54. It was the so-called Wriston Report. This is the report really that began to turn things around for the Institute. But part of the problem, as it developed that required something to be done on this, came a little before that. This was the beginning of the problem of McCarthy.

Q: We're talking about the Senator.

SOLLENBERGER: Senator Joseph McCarthy and his looking for card-carrying communists in the Department of State. And, of course, this had an effect on the Chinese program also because people were increasingly reluctant - officers - to get into a field if they were going to become targets of an investigation. For the Institute this was probably the most trying period in its history. It came very close, I would say, to putting the Institute out of business. That's because when they started investigating the Department of State, the first team that they sent in was sent to the Foreign Service Institute. I think they suspected they would find the long-hairs there and they seemed particularly suspicious of the anthropologists, people dealing with the behavior of foreign peoples. But it reached the point in the Foreign Service Institute...I can't really remember whether there were 9 or 13 investigators, and the Institute wasn't that large at that point, that took up residence and were at the Institute for the better part of three months.

Q: Good God!

SOLLENBERGER: Just an illustration if I can give this, I think it would give you bit of the atmosphere that we went through at that time. I got a long distance call in my office, a call that my secretary should not have put through to me, but she did, so I answered it. I later saw the person, he said, “What was wrong? You didn't sound very communicative during the call that I made to you.” I said, “Here's the situation.” There were three investigators in my office at that time. One of them was going through the files in the bathroom where I had the Chinese material that had been sent back from Beijing, much of it in Chinese. And, of course, he was very curious about what these things were. You're welcome to have somebody translate them for you if you want them. And I went there and went through them, identified what the different files were, etc. The other person was going through the books in the bookcase that I had, and these were books on China, and linguistics, language training, etc. And he was picking up the books by the covers and shaking them to see if there was anything hidden in the pages of the book. And the third one was sitting at my desk here. While I was trying to take care of these three people, he was also interrogating me on my experience in China, and particularly on the contacts that I had had with the communists back in 1938-'39-'40, and about Mr. Clubb. That was the situation.

Q: How many investigators were there at one time?

SOLLENBERGER: Nine or thirteen. They had an office, they were set up there, they were interrogating all the staff.

Q: To whom were they reporting? This was not the House... the Congress...

SOLLENBERGER: They sent someone to the Department who...

Q: This was part of Truman's Loyalty Board. Scott McLeod came in a little later. Scott McLeod was charged with consular and security affairs, so it may have been that.

SOLLENBERGER: They were also very suspicious of the instructors who were foreigners, not even American citizens many of them. At one point they started to call the tutors over to the Department of State for interrogation. And it was never clear as to whether they were using lie detector tests on them, or whether they were simply recording, but they were at least recording the interviews that they had. They started off at the beginning of the alphabet, and Burmese came up pretty early in that. When the Burmese instructor was called over, who was a well known Burmese in his own country, and his wife worked at the Burmese embassy in Washington, a quiet but very independent person. When they started to interrogate him and ask him, according to his report back to us, how much he had paid Dr. Smith, or me, for the job that he had there. A number of questions of that sort that didn't seem appropriate at all. He got up and walked out, and they didn't know what to do about that. They weren't expecting this. He came back and of course reported to us on what had taken place, and said that if this is continuing, I'm quitting. Well, this was a crisis for us because there were other instructors that were lined up to go over. We were able, through Dr. Smith, to get in touch with Walter Bedell Smith...

Q: Who at that time was number two in the State Department.

SOLLENBERGER: Dr. Smith had been a classmate. He called him up and explained what had happened, and from that point on it was stopped. They did not call any of the instructors over again. Within the group that I was familiar with, and I was closest to the linguists, and the staff at the language school, I think probably 90% of us, almost all of us, would have resigned at that point, if we could have resigned. We didn't dare resign because that would have been a sign that they were right, the rats are running. They thus must be the culprits.

Q: What was your impression of the investigation?

SOLLENBERGER: They didn't really know what they were looking for. They didn't know how to go about it. They were following the lead of someone else who was pulling the strings. Apparently they somehow learned that Dr. Smith had pulled the cord, so to speak, on the instructors. I gather they were out to get him, and also to get the

anthropologists. Whether they were after me, I don't know. Anyhow, we survived that but that leads up basically to the problem at that time. It was one of the things that led up to the establishment of the Wriston committee, because it was affecting the whole personnel operation in the Department of State.

Q: In the first place I'd like to ask one more question about the people doing the investigation. Did you have a feeling, there's a certain amount of "us and them" atmosphere, and the State Department had the reputation of being elitist. Did you have the feeling these were...I hate to use the term in a pejorative sense, but sort of anti-intellectuals, and that sort of thing?

SOLLENBERGER: I would say that most of them were. There were a few who were not. There was one who had a Ph.D. who was an academic himself, who tended to be apologetic. Of course, we wondered why he was doing it in the first place, but he tended to be a little apologetic about it. But generally they did not have the background to do this. And there was an anti-intellectual overtone to the investigation, which may have been why they came to the Foreign Service Institute as the first place they were going to zero in on.

Q: It's a horrifying state of affairs at that time. I mean, that you were trapped, you couldn't resign because if you did it would look like you had something to hide.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right.

Q: What were you getting from Dr. Smith, and also were there corridor meetings among the FSI people talking about, what the hell is this, or how do we answer this.

SOLLENBERGER: It became a real morale factor, and Smith really would talk--there were not very many of us--it was a small staff at that point. So we were all involved in it. It was really from these meetings that we sort of came to the conclusion we'd like to be out of this. We'd like to quit, but we couldn't.

Q: Well then, with the Wriston report...because the Wriston report had a profound affect on the whole State Department. The part that most people remember was the amalgamation of the civil service with the Foreign Service. But you're really looking at a different part of this, aren't you?

SOLLENBERGER: I'm looking at a different part of this. I'm looking at the part that had to do with the personnel system, the utilization of personnel, and the training side. A part of the report that became fairly well...it was very important to us, was the section that was entitled The Committee That Never Met. The Foreign Service Act of '46 had set up sort of an ideal pattern for the Foreign Service Institute, and it would be modeled somewhat after the Army War College, was to have status corresponding to that. The Army War College, the Commandant in charge of the Army War College reported directly to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the recommendation was that the director of the Foreign Service Institute should be an academic of distinction, and should report to the highest

levels of the Department of State, should not be relegated as a minor personnel function. At the time that they came in the morale within the Institute was very low. Wriston was very interested in the Institute.

Again, there was a connection between Smith and Wriston that I think brought this about. I think probably Wriston had been influential in persuading Smith to come to the Institute in the first place. And, of course, having been through the problem with the Committee of Active Resources, lack of facilities, etc. I'm sure that Smith gave him an earful. The Committee came to the Institute, was briefed at the Institute on the status of things and the report was a blistering attack on what had not taken place. The Committee had been set up on paper, had never met, and the excuse the Department gave for this was that they could never get all the people together at the same time. The fact was they didn't want the Committee in the first place. But the Committee was to be made up of people assigned by the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, each with the Department of State having some academic input, etc. And the names that had been proposed for this were really leaders but they never met, so there was no defense of the Committee at the time that we were faced with the problem that the McCarthy group presented to us.

Q: In a way I would imagine, I don't want to put words in your mouth, that the rest of the Department was almost delighted...delighted is the wrong term, but relieved to see that there was a lot of concentration on these people who really weren't Foreign Service. The Foreign Service Institute was sort of...you know, they're not one of us and the more they attack it the less they'll be after us. Did you have any feeling that you were a sacrificial lamb?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, we did a little bit but when the Committee was actually set up and Wriston insisted that he do that, and he was going to be present, and they set dates for it, and he had a high powered group that came in. At that time Loy Henderson had just moved into the top administrative position, and he would not absent himself from these meetings for anything, because this is where Wriston at these meetings on the form of training, was where Wriston was also attacking the personnel system, following up on what was happening on the personnel system. It was a very interesting time because these meetings were very dynamic, and they led eventually to their bringing in Harold Hoskins as the director. I'm not sure how he was chosen, some of us wondered at the time. His qualifications seemed to be that he had an important role on a board in the textile industry. But he did have an interest in education, and was chairman of the board of the American University in Beirut, and was involved in other educational activities. He was dynamic. He was given charge by the Committee to bring about some changes in the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: On this board, did you have a person or persons that you could go to and say, look, we really need this and that. Sort of friends on the board who were particularly sympathetic to you?

SOLLENBERGER: Generally, the language program came out pretty well on that because that was really about the only part of the Institute that was functioning. The

junior officer training program was going on and it was a continuing sort of thing. That came under attack, the way in which that was handled. Of course, the whole recruitment system came under attack by the Wriston Committee. But there was generally a good deal of interest on the language aspect of the training program. This, again, may have been because Wriston was the chairman, was interested, and had an acquaintance with Dr. Smith. And the fact that we seemed to be producing something.

Q: One of the things that's often used is, to say, look here we are in the United States, a major power, and we're having trouble with this and yet the Soviets are producing so many linguists, or the British are doing better. We're talking about the early '50s, did you have any other Foreign Service Institutes of other countries, or the equivalent thereof, training things that you'd point to and say, they're doing a better job than we are, why can't we emulate them, or not?

SOLLENBERGER: Basically, that followed Sputnik, and the publication of The Ugly American.

Q: We're talking about Sputnik being the first satellite that was put up by the Soviets, and then there was this book by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer, which talked about how great the Soviets were in producing Southeast Asian speakers, and what a dismal job we were doing.

SOLLENBERGER: That had a considerable affect on us. But let me go back here on the committee. The fact that Loy Henderson was there, and heard all of the discussion on the training program, and had gotten acquainted really with the staff of the Institute at the same time, really led later on to a very interesting relationship that I had with Loy Henderson, where he would call me up personally about a number of things. But it also led later to the expansion of the language training, and establishment of the field schools in Spanish, French and German overseas. He began to take a keen interest in language training. And the interesting part of that was that he felt that he had been denied an opportunity when he should have had it as a young officer, and he wanted to see that others had the opportunity to get that. That was one of the benefits that came from this committee meeting, and the fact that Loy Henderson himself came to all of the advisory committee meetings on the Institute on training.

On the question of Sputnik, and The Ugly American, probably these two things that really led to the establishment of the National Defense Education Act. And putting in the National Defense Education Act Title IV on language and area studies. Of course, this dealt primarily with American education, but also with the needs of the government. There was a committee set up, chaired by Howard Mace, and had representatives of different agencies. I eventually ended up in that group, and met with them representing the Institute and Dr. Smith. It became very clear that before they could do anything they would have to have a system for measuring language proficiency. They turned to the Institute as the place where the linguists were, a group of professionals said come up with something that we can use. So we sat down, and we worked at it. We developed a language area system for evaluating proficiency, or skill, or background knowledge. It

was based on a practical utilization scale which later became the S/R scale that's still used.

Q: S is for speaking, and R is for reading. And it's a one through five scale.

SOLLENBERGER: Yes. We experimented with different ways of developing the scale. We brought in some outside expertise, psychomatricians who were dealing with matters of this sort. We were in touch with Princeton to get their view. We developed first of all a scale, and a form, that could be used for self appraisal, and we distributed this on a trial basis within the Department of State, to people who had agreed in advance in doing this. That they would subject themselves to a test so we could see how the self evaluation matched up with the test that they were given. And the test was to have been an oral interview, not structured at that particular point. It was really not very standardized, or calibrated properly at that early stage. But we also had a questionnaire on area. That was harder to develop, but we did, and after we tested it out in the Department of State, we decided to send it overseas on a self appraisal basis, on a volunteer basis, and we got quite a few returns from that. And that gave us a base from which to compare later on how tests, as they came back for tests, how this compared with the way in which they had rated themselves.

We found a fairly high correlation between self-appraisal, but we were a little suspicious of that because they knew they were going to be tested. So the tendency, if you knew you were going to be tested, is to lower your self appraisal. But we also had some records from people who had claimed on their applications to the Foreign Service their language skills, and testing them they did not know they were going to be tested after that. We got a little better view on that and decided we couldn't go on a self appraisal basis, particularly if assignments were going to be based on language skills, and if there was a possibility of promotion being based on language skills, you had to be able to defend within reason the scales that you use. We worked very hard on this. The same information was sent out by the government committee to universities where it sort of disappeared at that time. It was only some years later that they began to become interested in the system that the government was using because it had spread from the Institute to others; the Army was beginning to use it, CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was using it, USIA was basing its program and policies, and AID was doing the same thing. So people coming into the foreign affairs agencies were generally being appraised on the S/R scale that other Institute had developed. So the academic community began to become interested in it, and as some of the linguists went back into the academic community, they took this back with them. It's one of the things that I think the Institute has done that has had a significant impact on language training in the country.

Q: I would have thought that this practical testing would be sort of a challenge to the universities because there you have an awful lot of language being taught by people who are not native speakers, who have learned it academically. It's - I won't say pro forma - but people can pass a written test, and the whole structure is designed really to produce scholars or at least to get them through to meet a language requirement. So this would be a terrible challenge to have people come up and find out that they really aren't able to

function. I mean French is the particular example. When people go to France and find they're absolutely tongue-tied. Were you at all pushing this, or is this kind of let it work by osmosis?

SOLLENBERGER: We did some pushing. We had an opportunity to do this because we were also sending people back to universities. When you would sit down with one of the deans, and say, one of the problems we have in this area course that has a language component to it, is that the language component isn't really useful to us. We would generally get the argument back from them, our basic goal is to train people for the academic pursuits. We would come back and say, its becoming more elaborate now because not only is the government going to be requiring this, but increasingly business, and trade, overseas operations of major companies. For some time some of these companies had their own language training programs, like the oil companies.

Q: ARAMCO has always had a very strong Arab...

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. And you're going to find this so you need to begin to build in. It took time. And we were willing to give them time, and to cooperate to the extent that we could. Later on, they began to send some people to the Institute to check on our testing system, and on how we taught language, and would take their observations back to their institutions. But change from the academic institution was slow.

Q: It's very hard because you get instructors for very specific purpose, and that is native speakers. That doesn't fit at all within the academic structure.

SOLLENBERGER: Well, it is increasingly is.

Q: What about spinoffs. Did you find yourself in a way looking over your shoulder, or were they looking over their shoulder? Berlitz and other organizations that are commercial language trainers.

SOLLENBERGER: Well, we ran into a major problem in getting resources from the Department for the Foreign Service Institute just because of that particular problem. We had to go before Congressman Rooney from New York.

Q: John Rooney of New York.

SOLLENBERGER: I guess his committee covered the Department of State and hence the Foreign Service Institute. It was unfortunate that the personalities of Harold Hoskins and Rooney didn't match, and very early in the game this became apparent to the point where after a couple years, and a couple appearances that Harold Hoskins had, Rooney tried to get him fired. And the reason for this was, he considered him uncooperative in terms of giving training, utilizing Berlitz, as a training program for the Foreign Service. Berlitz was apparently one of his constituents in New York. It reached the point with Harold Hoskins that Rooney brought on the floor when they were debating the State Department appropriations, that Harold Hoskins should be fired - brought this up on the floor of the

House. At that particular point the decision was that Harold Hoskins should not appear before Rooney again, although he stayed on at the Institute. And since the major focus of the budget at that point was on the language training program, I was nominated to go up and face Mr. Rooney, which I did for a number of years.

Q: Rooney was one of the institutional memories of the Foreign Service. People having to testify before him, he was always noted for cutting them out of representational allowance, which he called the Whiskey Fund. It was maybe grandstanding, but there was a whole school of people who were trained how to stroke Mr. Rooney. How did you get along with him? Were you appointed a stroker, I mean a stroker trainer?

SOLLENBERGER: I wasn't appointed as a stroker but I learned fairly early on, being present when Harold Hoskins was testifying, that one of the things that Rooney wanted to do was to make a speech. This was not made for me, it was made for his constituents, and I should not respond to it. So he'd make a speech, we would let it stand, not try to argue with him. Once you started arguing with him, then he would lead you on into a ridiculous situation that would be difficult to get out of. Also, at the time, I got the administration budget office to have personnel respond to the utilization question which came up quite frequently. And it came up with regard to Chinese.

Q: Oh, yes. A very famous case.

SOLLENBERGER: Where the director of personnel was talking about the Chinese language officer in London, I believe.

Q: It was London. Could you give the background to that?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, the background to that was that there was a language officer in London because this was one of the possible places of informal contact because of the British having recognized China, and we thought we ought to have someone in London who had some background in Chinese. But, of course, the response that was given by the Office of Personnel was, when he was asked about opportunities to utilize his Chinese, I guess he couldn't expose our real interests. He said, I guess there are Chinese restaurants and places like that that he could use it. And Rooney had a hay day with that.

I very nearly got caught up in a problem of that sort when Nixon went to China.

Q: This was 1972.

SOLLENBERGER: 1972, yes. I was asked by Rooney whether we had provided any training for Richard Nixon before he went to China. Of course, we hadn't, and I tried to explain about that we had trained people who went with him, and that these people were utilized, and it was fortunate that we had some people who knew Chinese who accompany the President at that particular point. Then he got off of that, and said, “Did you watch that program that showed the President sitting at the table with Zhou En-lai eating? Did you train the President to use chopsticks?” He was trying to provoke

something going along that way. But I guess I squirmed out of that one all right. I didn't make the headlines anyhow.

Q: Did you find as the Wriston report was implemented, a change in attitude towards training? I'm talking about the State Department personnel, Foreign Service. Not just at the top, but within the ranks.

SOLLENBERGER: Unfortunately it was very slow in coming. The general feeling within the Foreign Service, and quite understandably, was that promotion is based on what you do in a regular job, not in training. And that any extensive time taken out for training, would only be held against you. It was sort of a blank in your career record, and there was no credit really given for the training that you received. That was a continuing problem for quite a long period of time. But one of the things that began to break that was when the Senate, and I think this was largely due to Fulbright and to Mansfield's time who were following up on utilization of the people that had been trained...apparently they had gotten some complaints or something of this sort. And the Department was more or less forced to come up with an assignment system that would show the utilization of people who had been trained in languages. The Senate actually required the Department to identify language essential positions as a basis on which to gauge the number of people who should be trained. And these language essential positions should be distributed from the lowest levels to the highest levels. Then they should report annually on whether these positions were filled with a qualified person or not. The Department didn't like this sort of personnel system. It was difficult to live, from an administrative point of view. At least Senator Fulbright was very insistent on this, so the Department had to come up with some sort of a system to report. When it became quite clear that there was not a very high correlation between the requirements as the posts had identified them actually for language skills, and assignment of language qualified people, well... Of course, one of the things that we found in getting positions identified from the field was that if people who had the language were in a position, they would say, it is necessary. That's why we got this job. People in jobs that didn't have the language, would say it's not necessary. Look, I'm in this job, I'm doing a satisfactory job, it's not necessary.

One of the interesting things that developed out of this, and in a very critical area, Japan. We discovered that the report that came in from Japan had literally people assigned to economic, trade duties had the language. And Alex Johnson, who was interested in Japan, saw this claim and said, I'd like for you to go out and check on this. There's something not quite right. I was planning a trip to visit the school in Yokohama. This is when Reischauer was ambassador.

Q: We're talking about the '60s.

SOLLENBERGER: Reischauer was the ambassador at the time, and Alex Johnson delegated me to talk with him about this problem. Reischauer hadn't focused on it up to that point, but he called in the head of the economic...I've forgotten who it was, when I was in his office and really threw the book at him about this. Did you receive this requirement from the Department? Did you designate language essential positions? And

you didn't designate anybody in the economic field! He was very embarrassed by this. He didn't have the language himself.

Q: Of course, this is always the problem. It's hard to get a non-language person to say you really should have it.

SOLLENBERGER: It can work the other way also. You can get some people in jobs where it's marginal, and yet from their point of view it's very important, this is one of my qualifications.

Q: Were you or personnel ever able to go out and do an evaluation? What it sounds like is sort of a self-evaluation which gets tricky in the field.

SOLLENBERGER: No. We sent testers overseas to test people in these jobs so that we could give a reasonably accurate report to the Senate on the extent to which the Department was meeting these standards. One of the results of this whole program was that the first fairly optimistic report that had a lot of requirements for a 3 and 4 level, we discovered that it would be very difficult to meet, so the requirements came down a little bit, and the 4s became 3s, and the 3s became 2s as requirements. We tried to get the Senate, Fulbright particularly, to agree that we would go on the minimum requirement and desirable if we could achieve it. That we would try to get higher but the minimum requirement was thus and so. He didn't want to buy that. He said, that's letting you off the hook, we want to keep the pressure on. I was called several times to Fulbright's office to talk about this with him.

Q: He was a professor, so he probably was essentially a friend in court, wasn't he?

SOLLENBERGER: He was, but he was also very critical of the personnel system in the Department. Later on, of course, he was not very popular in the Department because of his stand on Vietnam.

Q: Did you find a problem as you were dealing with the personnel system, from your particular point of view, something I've noticed is those who rise to the top of the Foreign Service, with many many exceptions, but there seems to be a certain pattern of young men and increasingly young women - particularly in those days it was young men - who would attach themselves to somebody high up, say as a special assistant. These are people who get to know people...their main strength is contacts, and getting to know how the system works rather than essentially what we'd call a substantive job. And getting into language training removes you from this thing, so you have a whole coterie of people who've moved up through personal influence who probably avoided language training more than most. Is this fair to say, or did you notice?

SOLLENBERGER: I noticed it. There was an element of this, but you also had the other side of it, people who had the language who capitalized on that, and attaching themselves to what they considered the right places, and moving up in part because they had the language. And increasingly as the designated language position system began to take

hold, and the insistence that key positions, like the head of the political section, these became desirable jobs to get into. So that encouraged people towards getting the skills that were necessary. When it reached the point of becoming a factor in promotion, where there had to be a report that was taken into consideration by the promotion panels, this is another thing that encouraged language skills.

Back to an earlier question that you raised about the Russians, and the French, and the British systems, we did look into those. One of the things that I did...I never got to the Soviet Union although I tried. We invited the Soviet Union to send some people to the Foreign Service Institute hoping to get a reciprocal invitation. In fact, we asked for a reciprocal invitation and there were always reasons for them not granting that, so we stopped asking. But we did get a good deal of information on the British system, on the French system. I went to Japan and visited their training facilities; went to India, Scandinavian countries, Norway, Finland, Brussels. So we had a good deal of information on their training and on their skills that they have, and it became quite clear that by the time we were in the '70s that we were pretty far ahead of most of the others in terms of having qualified people. But language training is only part of what we were focusing on.

One of the problems in the Foreign Service Institute was the lack of continuity. From 1947 to the early '70s, there were eight directors. So there was not very good continuity. Some of these people were very well qualified, but they had their eyes on other jobs.

Q: It really should be a position of much more permanency.

SOLLENBERGER: In academic work particularly, education, etc., you have to take a long-term view. A short-term, day-to-day operation is quite inadequate. We had to focus on career training so that when people reached the senior level there would be a certain number of people who had the training background, as well as experience to take over these jobs. And you had to plan at the beginning for this. That was very difficult, not only at the Institute but the same thing was happening in Personnel. Constant change of Personnel directors, and having to reeducate, go through the same process over and over again, reconvince a new group of people coming in as to what was necessary. We tried various ways of getting certain aspects of this institutionalized. Originally Personnel had the sole responsibility for selecting people going into hard language training, specializing. The system we eventually got set up was one that involved the Institute, and it involved the Bureau.

The other problem we had in the Institute was keeping students in training once they were assigned by Personnel. A job would come up, operations highest priority, pull them out of training before they're finished. It was hard to plan any sort of extensive training program, with the exception of university assignments of which there were not very many, where the people weren't in jeopardy of being pulled out because they were wanted on a higher priority job, from the Personnel and the Bureau's point of view. One of the things that Harold Hoskins did, which was inspired in a way, he persuaded the Department's administration that there be a certain number of positions that would be

budgeted for training by the Foreign Service Institute, and the Institute would control the salaries of these people, so that if they were pulled out, they had to be pulled away from positions that belonged to the Foreign Service Institute. This made it more difficult. It gave the Institute a stronger voice in saying, can't you find somebody else to fill this job until this person finishes his training.

That became a problem also because once you budgeted the positions, you had to show these positions in your budget, and the budget at the Institute went up dramatically because of the student positions that you had. And Rooney would begin to zero in on that, and you had to justify each one of these positions before Mr. Rooney. It was worked out, and worked fairly well for some time. I don't know whether its still in existence now or not, but to me it was a key policy decision that boosted training within the Department of State. It gave the Institute some clout.

The other thing was the position that the Institute had in State's hierarchy. Originally the Institute was a low level branch of Personnel. One of the different Personnel branch of training is one of them. The Foreign Service Act said it should report to a higher level. The Wriston report, the same when he talks about the low level of which he was reporting. That had an affect on the sort of person that was assigned as the director of the Foreign Service Institute. It took some time before the director of Institute position was elevated to the equivalent of the Director General of the Foreign Service. I think the first one that status achieved that was George Allen. They had a hard time with George Allen being the senior career diplomat in the Foreign Service, he was called back. He came to the Institute for a short period of time. But when he came in, he wasn't going to come if he had to report to Personnel. He wanted to report to the Under Secretary, and basically he wanted to report to the Secretary. So at least it got bounced up that way, and I inherited that reporting to the Under Secretary for Administration.

Q: You mentioned the language tests, the S/R level, there's something always goes through...MLAT, Modern Language Aptitude Test. What's the origin of that, and how was this employed in the Institute?

SOLLENBERGER: This came in, not from the Institute. This was not developed by the Institute. It was developed by Princeton's Educational Testing Services. We tried it out, and it seemed to be valid enough that it was useful as just one of the indicators as to whether the individual would be successful in acquiring the language as an adult. It was on that basis that it was used in recruitment, that you would get the scores of applicants on the language aptitude tests. One of the concerns was that we would use this in an absolute way, if the applicant scored low, no go. But we learned fairly early that you had to be careful with that. You had to look at other indicators. We used it in the selection of people for hard language specialization. That there had to be some very special reason for someone to be assigned to a particular hard language if they had an aptitude score below a certain point. There were some exceptions that were made, but it was accepted that there was a cutoff point that we wouldn't consider people below that point, Chinese, Japanese, Russian languages in particular.

Q: Was this something from outside that continued, or was it something that the Institute itself would tinker with?

SOLLENBERGER: We tinkered with it, because we found it as a useful thing in terms of selection. So when we were setting up the criteria when the committees that would meet on the selection of people for hard language specialization. And if we wanted to argue on aptitude on this we needed to have something that was fairly standardized and objective. It was reported to be an objective test, but we always, I always insisted that it can't be the sole factor, that there are other factors that have to come in on that. No, we were interested in that, and we checked it out.

Q: I'm not an authority on languages but my wife had a Masters in Linguistics, teaching English is a second language. So as one does on the marital bed you absorb a certain amount of this.

SOLLENBERGER: Not exactly pillow talk.

Q: The linguistic field, particularly at the time you started on this, was moving ahead rather vigorously. One of the things that I've noticed is, and I think the tests show this, the older you get the harder it is to learn a language. How was this a factor?

SOLLENBERGER: There is a correlation.

Q: You get a very bright but 52 year old person who wants to learn Japanese. What do you do?

SOLLENBERGER: You tell him you should have started earlier if that was your interest. In other words, there had to be again some very special reason if you're going to take on someone of a certain age. There was also the question of the rank of the individual for full time intensive training. It was expensive. You're paying salaries of the people, paying the training expenses of the person, and as the salaries got higher it became a little prohibitive. The general pattern that we would follow is that training should be focused as early in the career, if it was specialized language training, as possible. That there would be periods of refresher training as needed in relation to specific assignments later on in their career all the way up to ambassador. Increasingly we had a number of language officers who were applying for this who would want to come to the Institute for a month, sometimes three months, or go back to one of the schools that we had to get a refresher before taking up a job. If it tied in with the assignment pattern, schedule, that seemed to work fairly well.

Q: Did you find you had a problem of people being put into language because there wasn't an assignment, or between assignments?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, we had that problem, but that was not so much language as other training fields, as a holding operation. But a holding operation in which Personnel wanted the flexibility of pulling them out, when they wanted to, so Personnel was

somewhat supportive of training positions within the Foreign Service Institute.

Q: What about the problem of specific languages for specific countries? Hebrew comes to mind for Israel. But there are other ones. If you take Arabic you know this is great because you've got a lot of Arabic countries. Or if you take Chinese at least there are a lot of peripheral places you can use it. Particularly a language like Hebrew it's one country and actually it sort of excludes you at a certain point - it no longer does - from going to the Arabic countries. How did you deal with that, getting recruits for difficult languages.

SOLLENBERGER: It was a problem. In some languages it was hard to find people because there was only one post in some cases. Again, you needed someone that you could call on to cover that post. We tried to make the designation of language as central so that within posts of that language, some of the coveted positions, so that someone going into language training would have an inside track, let's say in moving up to head of the political section, or head of the economic section, or going as a CG [consul general] to a certain post.

Q: This means a collaboration with Personnel.

SOLLENBERGER: It meant not only a collaboration with Personnel. I may have put a little too much emphasis on the problems with Personnel. It also involved the bureaus. In many incidents the bureau sort of developed their own cores of people, particularly as you began to get specialists and these belong to us. And you also found a reluctance of the bureaus, as well as Personnel, to let people go into long-term training if they were assigned to the bureau complement and pulled out. So it was both the bureaus and Personnel that were involved in this tension with training.

Q: You had to deal with the problem of all of a sudden the decolonization of Africa in the 1960s. What were the pressures? Here is Africa, all of a sudden with a huge number of posts, a lot of native languages, yet they're sort of divided into Portuguese, English and French speaking posts. Were there pressures to teach Twi, Hutu, or other languages?

SOLLENBERGER: Originally there were not because these were not necessarily coveted assignments, and again one language for one post that would be of no use anywhere else. We tried to do some educational work with the Department, Personnel, etc. on this. As I said, training has to have a future look. We had to look ahead. It seemed to some of us in the Institute that we were going to need people in Africa with these languages early on. We sent some of our linguists to Africa to gather material and develop at least elementary language materials in some of these languages. We had a very gifted linguist who undertook this task, went out with a tape recorder and gathered samples, and brought great information back. We were able to hire native speakers, analyze the language, and did develop in some of the more important languages such as Swahili and Hausa materials. We were among the first to do this. There were some African programs, Berkeley had one, universities, and some linguists in universities who had done some field work in Africa. But no materials had really been developed in some of these

languages for use in American education, or in use at the Institute. Well, in India, for example, where there are 14 official languages, at least my feeling on this was that this is a future possible problem that we're going to have to deal with. If we have representatives in areas that do not speak Hindi, we ought to get a few people who can speak the other key languages of India and Ceylon, which would later on became independent. So we developed some materials in these languages and tried to get a few people into training in these. In some cases it seemed more practical for assignment purposes, and for promotional opportunities, to train people who had Hindi as their primary language and adding on another one of the South Asian languages so there would be several posts in which they could be utilized. But more than that also to become more aware of ethnic linguistic problems that creating tensions and friction in that area so we could keep abreast of the possible fragmentation.

Q: So in many ways you really had to read the papers in the morning to find out what was happening in the world and look ahead.

SOLLENBERGER: We had to look ahead. One of the areas that I pressed was Mongolian, and without very much success for a long time. Of course, for years, we had no post in Mongolia.

Q: We almost did during the Kennedy administration. We would do Mongolia, if the Soviets would do something else.

SOLLENBERGER: There were efforts on that sort of thing. But the question was, why do we need to waste the time of an officer, and he wastes his time learning Mongolian when the chances of utilizing it are very slim. My approach on that, both with bureaus and with Personnel, was let's take somebody with Russian background and language and let's add Mongolian to that so that he'll have plenty of posts to use it in in Russia. But he can be the person who focuses on Mongolia. Let's take someone from Japan and give him Mongolia. Let's take someone from China and give him Mongolian. So we actually got several people who eventually were utilized, but it took a long time and I was afraid...

Q: You retired when?

SOLLENBERGER: '76.

Q: Was anybody looking at the Soviet Union in this time and saying, yes, it's a big empire and they've got multiple languages in there and maybe something might happen. Were you at all looking at things like Krygyz, or Kazak, or any of these other languages, or was this just a pipe dream?

SOLLENBERGER: For the most part it was a pipe dream. No one expected the sudden collapse. There were other languages in the Soviet Union that are important that we paid a little attention to. But here again, our approach was to take someone who had Russian and adding one of these languages on to it so whether they were back in Washington or whether they were in Moscow they would focus on it.

Q: Were we doing any other languages?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes, we had several cases here where we had Azerbaijani, Romanian, that wasn't in the Soviet Union. We tried to approach it that way but we didn't really foresee the collapse and the immediate need. That's something that came up later.

Q: I was going to ask one more question and then I thought we might stop it for today, and next time we'll pick it up more for the FSI in general. Can you talk a bit about the war in Vietnam and its affect on the FSI?

SOLLENBERGER: It had an effect not only in the language program but on general orientation. When the decision was made to win the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people, and where AID would send in representatives, and we set up offices in all the provinces under our control, the decision was made then that there should be a training program that all of these people going out would be put through - AID, USIA, State, and there was a time when Foreign Service young officers were sort of drafted in their first assignment into Vietnam. We considered this a temporary requirement, set up a Vietnamese Training Center which became a school on its own, assigned a linguist, Eleanor Jordan, to head its language program. There was an interagency committee set up to monitor the program. The person who was selected to head it was the person who had seen service in Vietnam, was brought back to review the situation.

Q: Who was this?

SOLLENBERGER: Augie Williams was one of them. There were a couple of others, but there was a specialized school set up for it, and intensive training, a lot of effort was put in to developing specialized materials focused on actual needs. I took a trip to visit some of the provinces where the people would be assigned to get a feel for what would be required of them by way of general background. We did get area training into the Vietnam program. And got some rather innovative ways of dealing with the language, tie in the language and area, brought them together. One of the things that I discovered when I was traveling around Vietnam was that the interpreters that were being used, almost all of them, were Vietnamese of Chinese origin. Not only that but what the interpreters were feeding back to the young people was not always very accurate.

I posed this problem when I came back to the staff here, so they started to review some of the media things that were being put on, and they ran across a piece that was an American newsbroadcast showing an American interviewing a village leader in Vietnam about the local situation. We discovered what the interpreter said was entirely different from what the American was trying to get. It just wasn't working at all. [The American journalist would ask a question and the Vietnamese translator would ask something quite different, but would produce body language that made you think the right question was being asked. Sort of American interviewer: “Do you like the government?” The translator: “How was the crop this year?” Answer with positive body language: “Oh, much better than last year!”] So it was completely wrong. We took that film and we used it in the

Vietnam training...

Q: I saw the film before I went out to Vietnam. I remember that one.

SOLLENBERGER: That was using the shock treatment and it seemed to work.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point and we'll pick it up next time? I would like to ask one more question which I'll ask the next time. We were talking about Vietnam program. Was there any problem with it, with the other agencies that were using this? And then we'll move on to when you moved farther up into the hierarchy of the FSI, more general things including up through '76.

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Today is January 23, 1998. Howard, you said you wanted to talk a bit about the growth of language training after the McCarthy period, Sputnik, the early 1950s.

SOLLENBERGER: I hope I made the point that the Institute was very crippled by the McCarthy period, and had reached a very low ebb, and that the Wriston committee came in and breathed a little life into it, particularly by establishing a really high powered advisory committee. One of the interesting aspects of that was that while the report itself was focused more on personnel issues than it was on training, Wriston used the committee as a way in which he could continue to monitor what was going on in the Department of State, and put some focus on the training issue. It was a very critical period for the Foreign Service, so Loy Henderson, who was then the equivalent of the Under Secretary for Administration, I've forgotten the exact title, could really not be absent for many of these meetings. To some extent it was through these meetings that Loy Henderson began to see the role of training in the development of the Foreign Service. I would personally like to say that it was during this period that I was able to establish a rather unique relationship with Loy Henderson to the point where he felt comfortable, and I felt comfortable, in his calling me up directly when issues came up that were of concern to both of us. Some of these of these issues initially were not very pleasant.

Q: Could you give some examples?

SOLLENBERGER: Let me give you an illustration here. One day I received a very angry [telephone] call from Loy Henderson. He seemed to be grating me one side and down the other, and under those circumstances I [just] sat and listened [but] didn't respond. I couldn't understand what all the fuss was about and was looking forward to an occasion [where I could] explain [the situation] to him. Shortly [after I hung up], I suppose ten minutes or so, a call came in again and he said, "Howard, could you come by my office, [because] I want to explain the call that I just made?" (End of tape)

...why he berated me over the phone over a training issue. It turned out that he had an irate congressman in his office and he thought the best way to deal with this was to

demonstrate to the congressman that he was in charge and control of things, and so he called me up to give me what for. Now I'm happy to listen to what you have to say.

Q: What would a congressman be interested in? What could he possibly have?

SOLLENBERGER: Well, in this particular instance, as I recall, it had to do with a lecture that was given and was reported to the congressman as being anti-Semitic in its tone. And since at that time the area studies and the lectures that were given were sort of under my jurisdiction. As it turned out, Loy Henderson knew the lecturer very well and could very quickly see what the problem was, and asked him to tone it down a little bit.

Q: We're talking about this, that there would be two subjects, particularly during this period and one that would continue almost to today, that you find you have true believers, not within the Department, but among your monitors - Congress, other people - one would be on Israel and there have been accusations without end that our Foreign Service officers are anti-Semitic, that they're pro-Arab. And the other would be on China.

SOLLENBERGER: Add on communism generally.

Q: ...and communism generally.

SOLLENBERGER: Some of the problems came up from that point of view where somebody reported in the congress that they'd heard something at the Foreign Service Institute that they didn't agree with, and having to do with religion, communism--not just anti-Semitic, really religion in general. These were sensitive issues. The way in which we dealt with those...I talked this over with Loy and he agreed. The way to do this was for me to ask the congressman, either himself or to send a member of his staff, come and sit in on the lectures with the understanding that they would sit through the series so they could get in context what was being said, and what was being taught. And generally this worked out quite well, as an approach to the problem and we actually gained some friends on the Hill by doing that.

Q: Did you have a problem? Here we are, particularly during this period, with a policy of strong support, mainly for domestic reasons, of Israel, at the same time we're dealing with a big Arab world which detested this policy. And you would invite lecturers who wanted Foreign Service officers both to understand the policy, but also to understand the Arab world. I can see this would be so sensitive that it would be almost impossible to deal with.

SOLLENBERGER: Well, it was sensitive but by putting it into a broader perspective, we were able to diffuse most of the problems, not all of them. For example, on China one of the things that disturbed me greatly, almost to the point of resigning from the Foreign Service, was that the Department of State wanted the Institute to clear all of its speakers that it invited before the invitations were extended. I'll use a name here. When it came to John Fairbanks, the preeminent China scholar, we were told no, you can't hire him because he's on McCarthy's list. That was the sort of thing that I had difficulty dealing

with on a personal basis, having high respect for Fairbanks and knowing that he was not what McCarthy had intimated. These were the sort of things that we had to go through.

Q: Did Fairbanks talk to them?

SOLLENBERGER: He did originally and later on, but there was a period where he was blocked. Not only was he blocked, and I can understand the other one perhaps a little better than this one. Owen Lattimore, who was the preeminent expert on Mongolia, for example. He's was one that we had wanted to bring in. As a matter of fact he had been a consultant to the Department on Mongolia. He was another one that was blocked. I've forgotten some of the others but these two stand out.

Q: As we worked our way through the McCarthy period...I mean there was an initial period where you had these two jokers, is the only word I can think of, Cohn and Shinn sounds like a comedy team, which in a way it was, going around Europe taking books out of USIS libraries. One, were you hit by that particular thing, what books we could have in the library, and what books were recommended?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes. We were hit but at that particular point we were at such a low budgetary ebb we weren't really acquiring new books. It was from that period, and particularly I think because of Sputnik and the fact that...

Q: Could you explain what Sputnik was?

SOLLENBERGER: Sputnik was the Russian satellite, the first satellite that was put up to orbit the earth. This, in fact, caused a big stir in the United States.

Q: This is '56.

SOLLENBERGER: I've forgotten the exact date, but suddenly it appeared as though the Soviets were ten feet tall. They had jumped ahead of us on getting a satellite in orbit, so we began to look at all the other things that were coming out. There was a book out then by the title of The Ugly American. That suddenly attracted a lot of attention because it purported that the Americans were way behind the Soviets in terms of their relationships with people in foreign countries, language, understanding the cultures, etc. It affected the way in which the Congress began to look at training, as well as the Department of State, and taking advantage of that situation that Loy Henderson, and others in the Department, decided to move and to move aggressively on the issue of training.

I remember Loy asking me at one point whether we knew what skills we had in the Foreign Service at posts. Do we know at posts who can speak French in France, etc., and around the world. I said, no, I don't think we do, that's a question for Personnel. We said if you would draw him up a message to be sent out worldwide to get information on this, we'll do it. I said, you have to understand also that this will be self appraisal, people saying what they think their own competence is. He said, that's a good place to start. We went out with that and found there was really a very big gap between competence in the

language and assignments in the field. What can we do about it? Well there are a lot of logistic problems if we wait for people to come back to Washington to train them to go out. It's going to take a long time. He said, let's not wait. I said, the alternative is to set up facilities either at posts or central schools overseas in a crash program that would pull people in who do not have the language proficiency in the country and train them. The place to start is in the world languages where the demand is the greatest. Loy Henderson said, do it.

So we proceeded, and I think it was 1957 that on a crash basis set up schools, one in Nice, one in Frankfurt, one in Mexico City to deal with the so-called world language shortage to train people. Personnel was horrified. The idea of pulling people away from their posts when the posts were screaming for more staff, and sending them off to school. They had hoped it would be a matter of just a couple weeks. Its not going to work that way. If you're serious about it, it should be four months, if you want to get them really up to snuff, three months at the minimum, and if you have a three month period, you ought to build up the follow up at the posts so they can continue their training when they get back because probably most of them would start off from scratch and are not going to get to the 3 level in three months. You have a better chance of doing that in the field, than doing it back here.

We knew there would be opposition, particularly from Mr. Rooney. As it turned out there was. Loy Henderson was willing to accept that and to go ahead with it. He had enough clout in the Department to make it stick through the Personnel system, and we pulled people in to all three of these schools for three months, 12 weeks of very intensive training. I was involved in going out and deciding where the schools should be located, and setting them up. I did not like the idea of setting up a school in Nice. I knew that would attract a lot of negative comment, particularly from Congressman Rooney, but there were reasons why they thought Nice was the place to do it. We had a large building there and so rent would be free, a very nice estate to locate and that would accommodate the training program. That worked, and in a very short period of time we put a large number of people through this program, and sent back to the French, German, Spanish speaking posts. This was really a sort of unprecedented focus.

Q: The German training was where?

SOLLENBERGER: Frankfurt.

Q: And the Spanish?

SOLLENBERGER: Was in Mexico City. Interesting, I fought Mexico City, but I was overruled. I wanted to have it set up outside the large metropolitan area, there were too many distractions within the city. I had located a school in the countryside that was not in use that we could rent. There were accommodations, they were not luxurious accommodations, but they were livable. Review of the plan to set it up there was turned down on the basis it would be hard to get people to go to a place like that, even for three months. So it was put in Mexico City, which we did. It worked reasonably well.

This was also a time when under the National Defense Education Act, Title IV, the government was required to identify language needs and language skills. And as a result of that we had to develop a testing system. It was also obvious that we needed standards in testing if we were going to try to get people up to a level that was considered important so far as their function in the Foreign Service. That system got underway. I think we talked about that in an earlier session.

But as part of the buildup we also put regional language supervisors in the field, and this was not only in the world language areas, but elsewhere also, in the Middle East and in Asia. But in Asia it was primarily done through the field schools that we had then in Taipei, Taiwan, and in Tokyo. The people who'd been assisted with the post language training program. In other words a follow-up on the training that would be given in the United States. Enrollments in the post language training program, just to give you an example, increased from about 600 in 1953 to 4500 by 1960, a tremendous jump.

In addition to that the Congress began to move and in an amendment to the Foreign Service Act, the amendment came in 1960, the Congress stated that it was, I'll read this, "was the policy of the Congress that chiefs of mission and Foreign Service officers shall have to the maximum practical extent among their qualifications a useful knowledge of the principal language, or dialect, of the country in which they are to serve, and knowledge and understanding of history, the culture, the economics, political institutions, and interests of such country and its people." A very broad and sort of mandate statement of principle and policy. That was followed by another Senate policy which required the Department to designate language as central positions, and the level of language proficiency that was required, and to report annually to the Congress on its compliance. You can imagine Personnel was not very happy.

Q: Were you having your contacts in Congress helping them draw up these plans?

SOLLENBERGER: Fulbright and Mansfield were probably the principal people that were pushing this. Both of these people had called me up to the Senate to talk about what they wanted to do, and what the problems really were in the Foreign Service. I remember a couple of these sessions that I had with them and it was clear that they were serious. This was also a time when, and particularly Fulbright, was not held in very high esteem in the Department because of his stand on Vietnam.

Q: You were saying that Fulbright and Mansfield were serious about this. Was this done over the dead body of Personnel?

SOLLENBERGER: To some extent it was. But the advantage at that particular point was that we had Loy Henderson's support. And the other positive thing was that we had a director, a business man, who was able to get the budget up and he faced a lot of problems with Congressman Rooney to the point where Mr. Rooney at one point on the floor of the House of Representatives called on the floor to have him fired.

Q: Was there any way to coopt Rooney? We had almost Rooney handlers who used to take him around on trips. He liked to go to Rome and Paris and people sat with him and fed him a lot of liquor. Were you able to get anybody to sort of get to him to make him understand what was going on? Or was this just a fun thing for our political expediencies?

SOLLENBERGER: I think it was a fun thing for him. Plus he had a constituent that he'd hoped to get some business for, Berlitz. He was probably responsible for, I think, closing down our language schools. But they had pretty well done the emergency crisis job. He made a visit to Nice, a place he liked to go to. So under his pressure the school there folded. But the advantage that I had in trying to move ahead in organizing this program on an emergency crash basis, was the support first of Loy Henderson...not the support, but really the push from Fulbright and Mansfield in the Senate, and the way in which they were able to in a way force the Department to do what it didn't want to do but reluctantly they did. And getting the budget for this. The result really of the congressional policy statement was that language became much more important, not only the world languages, but the so-called hard languages. This put a real burden on the Institute because materials for advance training in many of these languages did not exist, or were quite unsatisfactory. And it required a major effort within the Institute for research and development of teaching materials, as well as teaching methods. Trying to not only keep up but to get ahead in the field. We had to recruit, and at that particular time it was not easy to persuade people from the academic community to come and work for the State Department.

Q: We're talking now about the Vietnam period, are we?

SOLLENBERGER: We're talking even earlier. Part of the reluctance was because McCarthy's attack on the State Department, and the academics did not want to subject themselves to that sort of a situation. I was lucky because about the same time that we had to start expanding, the Army Language School in Monterey was contracting and was becoming less academic in its focus, not as experimental as they had been. The dean and two of his senior linguists wanted to leave, so I recruited them and brought them to the State Department. I made the dean my deputy, and the other two moved in to a hard language field where we had had shortage. We had really a top notch staff. If you looked anywhere in the country in academia we could match them and stand tall with the quality of linguists that we had at that particular time.

Q: Well, you also still had this thrust which was, I guess, different than the academic world. The academic world was still trying to turn out researchers which meant people could read the language, but didn't have to speak it. There wasn't that much of a call, was there for speaking a language?

SOLLENBERGER: No. And the National Defense Education Act hadn't really kicked in so far as changing things very much in the academic community. But as a result of this, by 1965, the Institute had published through the Government Printing Office [GPO] materials in 30 different languages, and most of these had tapes to go with them, and we

worked out arrangements with the GPO whereby these could be sold to the public. So this began to have an affect in terms of the academic community where they were able to get the materials that were produced at an advanced level. And it began to change some of the instruction patterns in a few of the academic centers, not many but in a few. But it was sort of a wedge, if you will, of influence in the language teaching and in the academic world. At the same time the testing system, the S/R testing scale, the proficiency testing scale, became of more interest in the academic community. They would send people to the Institute to observe the testing procedures. We on several occasions sent teams of people out to several of the academic institutions, particularly when they were having workshops in dealing with language proficiency, because there was increased pressure on the academic world to begin to produce people who could practically use the language in everyday situations. But my point here is that I was very lucky during this period to have a lot of good support to move a program ahead probably in an unprecedented way, so far as the State Department was concerned.

Q: You need somebody of the stature of Loy Henderson who was there for a long time and looked upon the system as an institution. I mean a whole professional Foreign Service as opposed to somebody who comes in, often a political or even a professional who comes in for a couple of years and make quick fix and on their way.

Did you find as the program developed and the National Defense Education Act kicked in, were we able, we the Foreign Service, able to start finding more language qualified people out there who could be recruited for Foreign Service. Because when I came in it was almost a given that you got over your probation by studying a foreign language, which I did, while you were in the service. Were you beginning to see this?

SOLLENBERGER: It took quite a while for that to kick in, but it was one of the points that the advisory committee, under Mr. Wriston, thought we ought to push. But it became pretty clear that if you had the language requirement before coming in, you'd be getting people who had been primarily majors in foreign languages, and the Department felt, and I think rightly so, that they couldn't put that much emphasis on a pre-service requirement, particularly when you could do it after they got into the service. So while there were tests that were given, and records were kept of the language aptitude, as well as the language proficiency, the plan really was that they would get the language of their first post of assignment, and they would be required to get to a certain level. I think it was S-2 [speaking level 2] to get off the probation.

Q: Of course, there was the other problem, that if you went for people who studied language you were going to end up with maybe dealing more with the East Coast elite colleges because many of the other schools just weren't teach it. And you would not get the geographic and the class diversity that we were looking for.

I had a question on the Vietnam training during the '60s. How were you relating to the other agencies that were using this program, particularly the military, the AID. Did they feel you were doing the right thing?

SOLLENBERGER: We were under a mandate which came from, I guess, the White House that there should be training for all agency people going into the CORDS program...I've forgotten what CORDS stands for [Editor: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support]. And the Institute was instructed to set up a program in support. We had to develop language materials in Vietnamese because there was not much pressure to do training. But it reached the point where the enrollments in Vietnamese to the Foreign Service Institute were higher than in any other language, French, Spanish, and by a considerable margin. We set up basically a separate unit just to manage that program. We had a unique linguist, a lady, Eleanor Jordan, whose expertise was in Japanese and we gave her the task of getting that program developed, which she did very effectively.

There were problems along the way with the Vietnamese training program to a large extent because for a few years, Personnel decreed that all junior officers were supposed to spend their first assignment in CORDS. There were some - particularly those within the State Department, the FSOs - who didn't want to go and would protest by not doing their work in training. Of course, policy was lack of progress in language training meant leaving early for Vietnam. Some, of course, did resign and left the service because they were opposed to being sent to Vietnam for CORDS.

Q: By the '60s had you developed an equivalent to a language training matrix? In other words, you had a way of doing this so all of a sudden you're up against teaching Ukrainian. You can take the basic pattern for almost any language, put it into this, and have the equivalent dialogues except put it in a different language and this type of thing. Or did one have to be created from the beginning?

SOLLENBERGER: The general approach that we took was that you created from the beginning. We wanted to stimulate, one of the things I was interested in, I was to stimulate creativity on the part of the professional staff, and to give them the freedom to try out new things and new approaches. We had some very creative people that came in at that particular time, and gave them generally a pretty free rein. There were some mistakes that were made along the way, things that didn't work out, but by and large it moved the Institute's school of languages probably to the forefront of language teaching facilities anywhere. That was a personal satisfaction, but one that would not have been achieved, as I said, without the support of Loy Henderson, supporters in the Congress, and circumstance at that time. I've always been grateful that I had a chance at that particular point to make my contribution with that kind of support.

Q: In area studies, in universities one way to get the intellectual juices running often you want to get basically provocative or controversial people to get up and give a lecture or a talk, for this, that, in a way you'd like to have our students are going to communist countries one up against a good solid dialectical Marxist who can give and take with the best of them to give them some practice. Having them feel how a foreigner would react to them. Were you able to develop anything of this nature?

SOLLENBERGER: We had a member of the staff, not in the language school or in the

area part of the language program, who specialized on talking about communism. He lectured at almost every program, in every class that came through. One of the things that he did was to simulate, or have someone simulate a Soviet person talking about their goals, their procedures, etc. This was sort of an institutionalized function within the Institute. When it came to area studies associated with language training, we tried to have at least weekly, and sometimes several times a week in the afternoons, a block of time devoted to the country or the area associated with the language the students were learning. Therefore, we would bring in academics from the outside, as well as from the Department, and from the other agencies of the government. We rather systematically go through the history, the culture, institutions, religions and things of this sort. We had some rather remarkable people that we were able to bring in - Joseph Campbell.

Q: Would you explain who Joseph Campbell is?

SOLLENBERGER: Joseph Campbell was the author I guess of a series of books on culture, religion and myth, focused heavily on myth [Editor: In his The Masks of God, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949) and Myths to Live By (1972), Campbell talks about the symbolic clothing in which cultures dress their historic experiences]. Very well known. He later did a series for public television, an interview show entitled The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers. He used to come regularly and talked about not only myth culture, but religions, particularly Indonesia, the Middle East also. Margaret Mead would [lecture] on the cultural side.

Q: Probably the best known American anthropologist.

SOLLENBERGER: We were able to attract people of that [caliber].

Q: What about other departments. I'm thinking particularly of Commerce, Agriculture, the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], and Labor, which send attachés abroad. Were they interested in tapping in to the resources of the Foreign Service Institute?

SOLLENBERGER: Yes and no. There was a fair amount of turf struggle. Each agency wanted its own training program. They felt that they were the only true source of understanding of the agency's function, and there was reluctance to send people to central training programs. Perhaps it would be useful here to talk a little bit about the concepts that became entrenched in the development of the Foreign Service Institute. I'll put these mostly in the context of the period in which I was involved.

Q: What period are we talking about?

SOLLENBERGER: In 1965 I left the language school and was assigned as the acting director of the Institute. From 1965 to 1976 I was either acting or director or associate director.

Q: So we'll say from '65 to '76 you were at the hands of control, or one hand away from the control.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right. One of the concepts that we were working on, and I think became established during that period, was the concept of continuing education within the Foreign Service, and considering the times in which we were in, the rapidity of change in societies, etc., that prior education, knowledge was not sufficient, that you needed to be updated, and perhaps in many areas acquire new knowledge. The Wriston committee had suggested that one year out of ten, or three years in a 30 year career should perhaps be spent in training, and it should be evenly distributed. It was the result of the Wriston recommendations that the Senior Seminar in foreign policy was established. That became firmly established as a pattern [for senior officers].

A mid-career course was also established. That was one of Wriston's pets I think. He thought there ought to be a mandated mid-career training program. That was tried in several different ways, and never really caught on. I think there were two reasons: one, the reluctance of officers at that stage in their career when they were climbing and competing, to take time out for a serious training program, particularly when they were being taken out for language training and other things at the same time. The other problem was that...it was really a problem with Personnel. They were mandated at one point to fill classes on a regular basis, scheduled classes for people at mid-career. And what they generally do is to take people they didn't know what to do with, and put them into the training program. And people who were concerned about their careers at that particular point felt they were being put on the shelf when they were put into training. The idea didn't take well.

Q: I was in Personnel and we used to have a corridor word for these. These were called training officers. These were people that bureaus felt they could spare. We had some people who went to course after course.

SOLLENBERGER: Yes. Well, it wasn't just a Personnel program. The bureaus were involved, because the bureaus were assessed certain quotas to assign to training. Of course, they might think it that role. In any case, I called a halt to that program when I became director. It wasn't working and I felt it wasn't worth the effort and time that was being put into it. We'd have to approach mid-career training in a different way. That was to take some of the subject matter that we had put into the mid-career course, and to give it in short segments - one week, two week seminars - where it would be easier to pull people out and more or less on an interest basis, and on the basis of what they were currently doing in the Department. That seemed to work a little bit better and at the same time gave us the opportunity to look ahead. One of the concepts of training that I think became established during this period was the concept of looking ahead to future needs, not dealing only with the current and immediate problems that we were faced with. This was on the assumption that when an officer comes in to the Foreign Service you have to think about what you need him to have by the time he reaches the senior level. You need to begin to prepare all along the way, particularly if you're able to establish this concept of continuing education, to begin to build towards the future when they will become senior policy making officers.

We tried several things, one of which I'm particularly proud, although it failed, and I'll show you here. I'm holding up here a poster with a slogan that "pollution is a world problem."

Q: It has a picture of the earth with things swirling around and saying "Environmental Assembly, West Auditorium, Department of State, April 22, 1970." The poster said this would be a four hour program.

SOLLENBERGER: This was about the time of the first Earth Day. There was beginning to be stirring within the country recognition of a problem. Some of us thought that pollution would become a major problem down the road, and we better begin to pay a little attention to it on an international basis. It had no boundaries. I talked with the science adviser to the Secretary and the two of us went to see the Secretary and suggested that we hold a symposium, and that we invite not only people from the agencies and they're listed here. I think USIS, AID, ACDA, Peace Corps as well as the Department, and the diplomatic community, ask them to come, and we'd bring in some really distinguished people to talk about this issue with an international focus. So far as I know, this was probably the first occasion where this was done. The Secretary seemed interested.

Q: William Rogers.

SOLLENBERGER: That's right, seemed interested. We said, would you be willing to kick it off. I'll have to check on that. He called back several days later saying he was sorry but that he could not. He later told me that the White House had felt that this was not the time to launch this sort of thing, and this sort of initiative, that there were other things that were far more important. But we went ahead with the program. The fact that we couldn't get the Secretary to issue the invitations to the- (end of tape)

Nonetheless, it did initiate into the training program and we followed up with that in our training programs having short sessions on, not only environmental problems, but a whole range of new issues. This concept of looking ahead, I think, is something that was implanted by the Institute and is continuing and important during a period of change.

Full time intensive training was another concept that I think has been pretty firmly established now. We'd had enough experience with language training using the intensive approach that we were competent in extending this to other fields. Along with this, the idea of training to meet unmet needs within the Department was beginning to be recognized. It took quite a while for the focus and the need for economists, and economic background, to be recognized in the Department. Attention to the issue was called by Wriston during his Wriston period, to a shortage of that and the future needs. Recruitment was not bringing in enough people with that kind of background, and the field of economics was changing so that what had been taught was no longer valid. We went to universities to see what they had to offer in terms of sending people to universities. The response that we got from the universities generally was, send us your people for a couple of years and we'll make economists out of them. The Department could not afford that.

We decided to try intensive training, which we did, which worked.

Q: How did you develop that?

SOLLENBERGER: Brought in two economists, John Sprout from Georgetown University was one of them. And we had some within the Foreign Service also. We set up a highly intensive course to take people with little or no background in economics, or maybe with undergraduate courses, but it was antiquated and no longer useful. The idea was that within a period of six months you'd produce somebody who could function effectively as an economist and who could speak the language in terms of dealing with the international scene, professionals in the field of economics. That worked so well that not only did our students measure up well on the exams that were given by universities for not only undergraduate majors, but graduate record exams. Our students measured up very well against those.

So the concept of intensive training we then began to think about applying that to administration because the Department said, we've got problems in administration, which they did, management. What could training do about that? And increasingly the Department was coming to the Institute saying, we've got problems. Can you set up a course in this, that, and the other thing? Generally, it was fragmented, did not have the concept in how you develop people in all of these fields through a full career. But the concept of intensive training took a hold.

Q: Did you run across any problems with this economic intensive training? Actually it's everywhere, but at the same time you were goring a very big odds and that is, you can turn out the equivalent of a person with almost the ability to deal at the Master's level in six months with bright people, I would think the universities would be kind of unhappy about this.

SOLLENBERGER: They were initially, but they began to take some notice of this when we gave our students their exams. Of course, they would come back and say, this is a highly select group. And we admit this was a fairly highly select group. And the arguments that the universities generally put up was that in fields of this sort it requires time to absorb, and that it should be interrelated with other training, other educational fields, and not taught in isolation. Its not in the real world, and its not that way. There's some validity, of course, to that argument.

But it seemed to some of us in the Institute that not only was this useful and necessary in a time of rapid change, and with knowledge itself was changing, and where you had to sort of recalibrate, or retrain people in fields that they once were competent in but were no longer competent just to keep up with the rapidity of change. And that this was one way in which you could meet these requirements in a relatively short period of time, and put them back into the real world where they could function much better. I believe now that many of the business firms, etc.,--well, the military has followed this concept for some time, how you train somebody to do a particularly small job very intensively and put him into a job. But business has begun now to focus on this as way of updating

people, bringing them in to new technology, etc., to highly intensive training, taking them out of operations for a while and training them. So I think this concept, which was not really originally developed within the Institute, but was put into practice and demonstrated as valid and effective. It has had some affect on changes in the whole training educational pattern within the country.

Q: Looking at the cadre of officers who were coming in...let me make a proposition and see how you react to it. We're talking about the 1990s. One of the great problems that is faced, I think, throughout our system, is that the people don't write very well. But earlier on I would have thought that you would have been working on creating a cadre of people with good writing skills. I always assumed that somebody could write when they came as a supervising officer. I was wondering whether that was the assumption at this time? How do you feel about it?

SOLLENBERGER: This was one of the things that came up time and again with Wriston and his advisory committee met deploring the state of communication. And not only in the Department - and apparently Wriston had read a number of reports and things of this sort - but also in the universities.

Q: So this is not a new manifestation at all?

SOLLENBERGER: This was not. There was discussion at various times on whether we could do an intensive writing program. We gave up on that one, and preferred to put that into other programs requiring the short intensive programs on some particular subject where you would require the officers to write reports. But it didn't work.

Q: What is the problem with teaching logical writing? I recall reading somewhere and somebody I interviewed said there was this course where you counted out the number of adjectives, or something like that, and you came up with...I mean there were mechanistic ways of doing this. Were you looking at this sort of thing?

SOLLENBERGER: We were looking at that sort of thing. We brought in some of these programs that were advertised as being able to improve your writing skills. Basically on that particular skill, as well as on public speaking, expressing yourself, and increasingly that was becoming important also as television, etc., public media was used more. I guess my response to that was that in a sense we failed on that, but that it really is the responsibility of early education. It has to start very early as a pattern in education where there's more requirements for expressing yourself clearly in writing. But part of it is also the thinking process. It's more than putting it down on paper. You have to think clearly before you can write clearly.

Q: This, of course, has great pertinence today. I mean, you met the monster and it was too much for you. What about things such as what we call trade craft. I mean there are things like negotiating skills which is now big. Were you looking at that? Also, how the Foreign Service officer whose often been dealing abroad is plunked into Washington, finds himself the Department of State representative up against essentially the civil

servants of other agencies who have been doing this for years, and the State Department guy may be bright but he's never been up against this. Were you able to teach negotiating skills during your time?

SOLLENBERGER: We certainly thought about it, and we tried to get it into some of the short intensive courses that we offered. There's another thing here that I perhaps should mention and that is the concept of interagency training, and the concept of familiarizing yourself with your own society. When you serve a good part of your career overseas, and you come back and things have changed back here, you're dealing, as you say, with people in different agencies and organizations back here. You need to know a little bit more about the functioning of your own society. There were several ways that we approached that through these short intensive seminars, but also in bringing interagency groups together, and exposing them to the points of view of the different agencies, the private sector. This was certainly true in the Senior Seminar that focused heavily on reacquaintance with the American society that [the senior officer] had to represent.

[But here is another story]. During the Kennedy administration, I think, Kennedy scared a bit by the way in which Khrushchev said, we're going to confront you...

Q: This was about '61 at the Vienna meeting. Kennedy was basically bested by Khrushchev.

SOLLENBERGER: Where Khrushchev, I guess, not only intimated, Kennedy but said Moscow would pursue its policy of liberation around the world. And insurgency was a tactic that they would use. So Kennedy came back, and in looking for ways to respond, settled on counterinsurgency. Bobby Kennedy tackled this issue, as well as General Maxwell Taylor. Again, they turned to the State Department and the Foreign Service Institute and said, we would like you to put on a counterinsurgency program which would be interagency, and it would be required that all officers in these agencies at a certain level, and certain functions, shall attend. And Bobby Kennedy and General Taylor were there to see that it happened that way. The Institute assumed the administrative support for it, but it developed as an independent program, and was set up in independent quarters and there was an independent interagency committee that supervised this. But one of the things that happened as the whole concept of counterinsurgency began to fade was that counterinsurgency doctrine seemed to have less and less relevance to the problems that we were dealing with. That raised the question what to do with this established program that had been set in motion by Kennedy. George Allan, who was then the director of the Institute, thought that the time had come to change this, and as director of the Institute he was chairman of the interagency committee that was supposed to be supervising this. There was strong opposition in certain quarters for this, particularly in the military who found this interagency a device to get their interests...

Q: Essentially counterinsurgency was often time very heavily weighted toward the military, wasn't it?

SOLLENBERGER: ...and the intelligence. I inherited the task of dealing with this, and

assigned to head the organization was Howard Hugrude, who had been a deputy under secretary of Defense. We got acquainted, and we talked about the program, he came to the conclusion that the time had come to change and that we could do it gradually. He had contacts in the military and in the intelligence agencies that made this possible. And over a period of time it became a short senior seminar focused more on the United States, and on domestic problems and how they affected the international affairs. But also continuing a segment on the threat of insurgencies as they appeared around the world. Gradually the nature of this seminar changed, it continued as an interagency training program but it brought senior level people from different agencies together so they got acquainted with each other, and they talked and there was follow-up in terms of personal relationships that were established through that program. That was of interest in several ways.

The Vietnam training program was interagency program, so when new interagency problems came up, specifically as we mentioned, the drug war, [FSI became involved. One day,] I was called down to the White House on very short notice to talk about what could be done in training [to fight] the drug war. There were turf problems between the different agencies. My suggestion, which was taken up, was that they establish a mandated program within the agencies that [dealt with the drug program to supply] people. That they be trained together, and we would get each agency to come in and talk about, and describe what they were doing, and [their agency's approach]. From that we would try to [encourage mutual] understanding, and we would get a personal relationship going between people working in this field. So the Vietnam training program, counterinsurgency, drug war, these things began to come to the Institute as interagency training programs. From my own personal point of view it seems to me that this was a practical, working solution to some of the coordinating problems that the government was having when specific [interagency] problems came up on which sort of immediate action was required.

Q: This, of course, is one of the big bureaucratic problems. There is a difference between official contact between heads of an agency or heads of a bureau, as opposed to somebody on a first name basis calling and saying, "We have a problem." It becomes a solvable problem instead of an interagency issue.

SOLLENBERGER: In a way I was quite amazed in meeting some of these people at the end of their programs to find out how surprised they were to [realize] what the other agencies were doing in this field, and what the overall problems were. [They] seemed very appreciative of the opportunity to participate in a program of this sort. I don't know what's happened to the drug war now. My point here is that the concept of interagency training for specific purposes, I think, has been established and is probably in one form or another a continuing thing within the Institute.

It was important for the Department of State also. Let me back up just a little bit. [Our embassies overseas house a variety of agencies.] The concept of the country team being under the State Department and specifically under the ambassador [was developed to] bring about the coordination of this ever increasing number of other agencies that were

sending people to our missions overseas. It seemed to me that, if the Department of State were serious about trying to form a country team, [then it] ought to insist on having the people that go into the country team trained together so that they know each other, talk to each other, and they'd learned about the Department of State. [I see] the Institute as the place to do that.

Q: One of the things that I, as a retired Foreign Service officer, always ran into - and I think every Foreign Service officer has this - I ran into it just a couple of months ago... I was in Bosnia as an election observer and somebody remarked to me, "Gee, you're from the State Department but you're a regular guy." There's always been this idea that somehow the Foreign Service is snobbish and doesn't really understand the United States. Part of the solution is just to expose other people to us to find out that we're sort of real people. Did you find that this was part of your effort?

SOLLENBERGER: This was part of it, that's right. Of course, that [stereotype faded] as the Foreign Service became more democratized in its selection of people. You [recruited] people that were a little less stuffy.

Q: What about the Senior Seminar? I was in the 17th Senior Seminar. I found it an excellent program but the one area I felt it failed in was that the military did not send their top officers there. These were very nice people, but in later life these would not become the generals, the admirals that you could call up and deal with. Whereas our people who went to the War Colleges would have friends for almost life, but they would also reach high positions, particularly in the military services, and they could call on them. I never ran across one of our military colleagues again. How about recruitment in the use of the Senior Seminar?

SOLLENBERGER: This was an issue that was discussed many times with Personnel, and it applied not only to the Senior Seminar but to other training programs. [You can't get away from the thought] that, if you wanted these to be really productive, you had to follow up with appropriate assignments, which meant that you had to bring into these programs people who had the potential to move into the top levels, and then you had to move them into the top levels. The concept that we were trying to get established on this was that if someone was assigned to the Senior Seminar in foreign policy, this was a sign that he was on his way. And that he or she almost certainly get a better assignment as they moved out. There were problems from the Personnel point of view, and I acknowledge this. Within the service it's hard to plan a year ahead as to just what job is going to be open, and there are many pressures and demands also on filling these slots. It's not an easy function from a Personnel point of view to plan that far ahead and to carry through on it.

The military, on the other hand, and the other agencies, too... The only pressure that you could bring on them [came from the argument] that, look, you're exposing yourself to a large number of other senior officers. You ought to put your best foot forward, put your best people into these programs. We would have meetings with other agencies trying to do the same thing and ran into some of the same problems that we did with our own

Personnel office. You can gauge from what I've said here that there were many areas where there was tension between training and Personnel, and many of them were understandable and real.

Q: With the departure of Loy Henderson and [the establishment] of the new Under Secretaries for Management, during this '65 to '76 period, did you sense a lessening of the clout of the Foreign Service Institute?

SOLLENBERGER: On the one hand, yes. And on the other hand, the Department and other agencies [increasingly] were turning, and even the White House, was turning to the Institute for training to deal with some of the problems that they faced. The problems that we faced were really [due to] competing [trends]. At the same time that there was increased interest in training, and continuing education and training, etc., the Department was faced with [budget] cuts. It seemed almost like an annual event that you do more with less, and the Institute is going through that right now again. The different responsible people dealt differently with this. Training, I did feel, did not have the priority that it deserved within the Department itself. But the problems were understandable. William Macomber was Under Secretary. He was interested in training but he had so many other problems, at least one sensed this, on his desk at the time that it was really hard to get his attention. Eagleburger came up through the system. He was supportive of training.

Q: But his support may not have been wholehearted. I saw him one time in the elevator and he said, Stu, what the hell are you doing in the Senior Seminar?

SOLLENBERGER: Just to touch on a couple of other these [issues that, I think, fall into the rubric of] training. You asked about training [for negotiation skills] and things of that sort. We began to experiment quite early in the use of case studies and role playing, and found that we had to develop many of our own cases and [materials]. That was given a boost when we had resources to do that, say in the Vietnam training program. We had several role playing [scenarios] that we worked out that took the students off-site to play these games, and they seemed quite effective. Case studies, we were pushed by the academic community to do more in the way of a case study approach, and that was good. I think that has taken hold over the years, particularly since I've left.

The role of wives. This was a problem that I struggled with for a long time without very much success, and largely because [Congressman] Rooney at one point said, not one cent of the appropriated funds shall be spent on the training of people who are not employed by the government, and that applies to the women.

Q: We're talking about the wives.

SOLLENBERGER: We're talking about the wives at that particular point. And yet increasingly the feeling was that they were such an important part of any team, family [team], that went overseas, that it was critical that they receive training. With language training, we devised a system which we stretched, whereby if we didn't have to create a

new class, we would let wives sit in. We would sometimes make the class particularly small so we could add more people to it. We started a wives training program, a seminar here that was supported...I've forgotten how it was supported budgetarily, but we know that we got it underway and we somehow got around the prohibition not to spend money on the training of wives. This was very slow in coming and we never really licked the problem during my time.

Q: It was something you understood was a resource problem, but it was also part of the problem of essentially getting Congress to back it up.

SOLLENBERGER: ...back it up with resources, and you couldn't do some of these things without the resources to do it.

Just a couple of other points that have to do with things that I think are pretty well established by this time. One of these is [our] relationships with academic institutions. Originally that was very slow in getting off the ground. There were two ways of [making connections]. One was by sending Foreign Service officers out to academic institutions for training in various fields which not only exposed our officers to the academic world, but exposed the academic world to the Foreign Service. This was useful. We extended [that program] with the idea of sending out officers as diplomats-in-residence, mostly senior people who were between assignments and needed a good place to keep abreast, or people who had ideas that they wanted to pursue in an academic setting and then bring the results of this back to the Department. We felt the way to do this was to [establish a] diplomat-in-residence program, [which was], I think, quite successful. At least [that was the conclusion I drew] as I went out to visit some of these people on location, and saw the reaction of the institutions to which they were assigned, and their own reactions. Some of the things that were produced out of this were very useful indeed.

The fact that the Institute and its language programs were helping in proficiency testing, sending teams out to some of the universities, and inviting academics to come in for workshops at the Institute, was useful and helpful. This I understand has continued and has expanded. So I think this was something that was well established.

Talking about some of the problems, the budget. I think I mentioned that Harold Hoskins during his tenure [in the 1950s] fought hard for [budgetary resources]. And it was during his tenure that the budget at the Institute began to creep up, and we got a fairer share of the State Department's budget. He was less successful in getting appropriate facilities for us. [Around the start of the Kennedy administration, FSI] moved from [the] old C Street entrance to the converted garage at Arlington Towers [in Virginia], which was really a dismal place.

Q: I was talking to somebody just yesterday who was talking about we were in a garage, and there were cars parked below us and there would be times when the carbon monoxide would get into the air in the ventilation system.

SOLLENBERGER: But [getting better facilities] was [something he was] not able to do.

I had hopes when I became director [of FSI in the mid-1960s] that I would be able to get better facilities. At one point it looked pretty promising that we could get the Navy quarters [located] across 23rd street from the Department of State. There were some buildings there that would be useful, and things went ahead and there were plans that were drawn up and it seemed as though there was general agreement and approval, until some of the Naval admirals who lived at their residences in that area went to President Kennedy, who was also a Naval officer, and the word came down, forget it. We lost.

We had another plan and that was to [move] to where the Institute is now located in Arlington, [Virginia]. There was a possibility that that would become vacant and available. But that was vetoed. But we did manage to move into a place in Rosslyn, a high-rise building [at 1400 Key Blvd.]. It was under construction and they were willing to make some adjustments in the way in which it was designed on the interior to accommodate training requirements. That was an improvement, not only there but I think I had one of the nicest offices in Washington on the 12th floor overlooking Georgetown and the river. But [I remained] unsuccessful until [Arlington Hall, where we are recording now], and I must give credit to those who were able to engineer this. It was not an easy task, I know.

The other problem is the pressure [on personnel billets]. Hoskins again made a significant contribution in fighting for training positions so that Foreign Service officers, that were assigned to the Foreign Service Institute for periods of training [exceeding] a certain number of weeks, would come on the rolls of the Institute and all their expenses would be budgeted for by the Foreign Service Institute. [These would be recognized FSI billets.] This increased the budget of the Institute considerably. But it was one way in which we could deal with the problems that the Department was facing where they were reluctant to release people for long-term training, hard languages, any of the other long-term training programs. They felt that they were being pressed for manpower. That was a very creative way of dealing with that particular problem.

There repeatedly would come up, not annually but at least every couple of years, where Personnel said, these ought to be lumped under allotment to Personnel. Or the bureaus would want the positions back. Or that they ought to be centralized in some other way where it would be more flexible. From the Institute's point of view we didn't want flexibility. We wanted control over the students that were assigned to us. They would not be pulled out midstream, and this was one way of doing it. It also forced the Department to plan [for] training needs. How many positions would be needed for Senior Seminar, for different hard language programs, for diplomats-in-residence, for the whole range of long-term training. It forced a planning process that I think was useful to the Department. That was a contribution that was started by Harold Hoskins that I think was very useful.

Q: There may be something which will occur to you that I didn't ask and when you get a transcript you can develop something, or if you see something that we didn't cover we can have another interview.

Thank you very much.

End of interview