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

ALBERT STOFFEL

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is Thomas Dunnigan speaking on behalf of the Oral History Program of the Foreign Service and of the Lauinger Library of Georgetown University. The date is May 9, 1994 and I will be talking with Albert Stoffel, a Foreign Service Officer for a number of years, who happened to be a classmate of mine.

Al, let's begin by exploring your background and why you decided to enter the Foreign Service.

STOFFEL: I was brought up in Rochester, New York. All my grandparents were French and had come into the United States late in the 19th century. I entered the University of Rochester in 1934 and majored in economics. However, I soon discovered that I was more interested in history, government and international affairs than I was in economics. Although I did get my degree in economics, I had actually taken more courses in these other fields.

Upon graduation in 1938 I went to New York City, having been hired by the Lumber Mutual Casualty Insurance Company as a trainee. I spent about 3 years in that company. I was relatively successful and learned a lot.

But when World War II broke out, I was very much interested in what was going on in Europe. I was very anti-Nazi and was dedicated to the defeat of that system, so much so that in 1941 I began to see if I could not get involved in the war. I applied to the Royal Canadian Air Force and they turned me down because of the Neutrality Act.

Later I discovered something called the Civilian Technical Corps of the Royal Air Force which, if I passed the technical examination, would allow me to go to England and work as a radar technician. I did so. I passed the examination, although I had no technical training.

I went to England in the late summer of 1941, traveling on a small, fast Norwegian ship with 13 other passengers and I spent several interesting months in England but never

really made any contribution to the war effort. After Pearl Harbor, the British gave us our choice: to remain there or to come back home.

I chose to return to the United States and entered our Air Force as an aviation cadet in communications. I was commissioned at Yale and spent the war in North Africa, Sardinia, Corsica, the invasion of Southern France, back to Northern Italy, up to Northern France and into Germany. At the end of the war, I went into military government as Denazification Officer for the city government of Wiesbaden.

I found that job quite interesting and felt that I was making some contribution to correcting the evils of the Third Reich. I noticed that the Foreign Service examination was being given at Headquarters United States Air Forces Europe in Wiesbaden.

Earlier, about the time I graduated from college, I had written to the State Department about the Foreign Service and got a letter to the effect that because of budget restrictions they were not appointing anybody to the Foreign Service that year. I made no further efforts in that direction. However, I now decided I might as well take the upcoming examination. I applied, was accepted and took the examination without any preliminary study, never having even seen a copy of the examination.

In 1966 I returned to the States, left the military, and went back to the insurance company for 6 weeks. I soon decided that wasn't very exciting after World War II. I went over to Pan American Airways and got a job as an Assistant Station Manager in Dakar, West Africa. I would have to train for 6 months in Gander, Newfoundland.

While in training, I discovered that I had passed the Foreign Service Officer's examination. But I had missed my appointment for the orals because of the delay in forwarding mail to Gander. However, I wrote to the State Department and they agreed to give me the last oral examination that would be given that year.

I flew to Washington, arrived late because of a transportation strike of some kind, got into an argument with the Department of Agriculture representative about allowing Nazis to continue to do supervisory work in his field. I figured that they would reject me quickly, and I would go back to the Pan American job with which I was quite happy.

They told me to wait outside and they would give me my decision right away. To my surprise when the chairman invited me back in, I was told that I had been unanimously accepted. Whereupon I had to make a decision whether to stay with Pan American or go into the Foreign Service. I decided in favor of the Foreign Service.

Q: Very interesting, because I don't think there are many of our colleagues who had the experience you did, with the RAF, before the war.

Now your first assignment in the Foreign Service was to Saigon, in French Indochina. A city which has become famous since that time. Can you describe what Saigon was like physically when you arrived there in early 1947.

STOFFEL: As you perhaps know, Saigon had been known as the Paris of the East, before World War II. It still had elements of that atmosphere after World War II. The living was good, the social life was active, the French were in reasonable control. It was fairly typical, I think, of certain Foreign Service posts at that time.

I was the second Foreign Service Officer to arrive in Saigon after World War II. My chief was Charles S. Reed, an old-time Foreign Service Officer, in every sense of the word. He did the political work and I did the economic work. That sort of set my career throughout the Foreign Service. I was either on the economic side or, eventually, involved in aviation diplomacy.

Q: Was Saigon at that time a Consulate General? Or was that under Embassy Paris in any way?

STOFFEL: We were a Consulate General of a French colony. However, I don't recall that we had any direct connection with our Paris embassy. We did get guidance from the office of Southeast Asian Affairs in State.

Q: At that time, was there not a consulate in Hanoi?

STOFFEL: Yes.

Q: Did you have links with them?

STOFFEL: To a degree, yes. But because of the poor connections between the two places, we didn't travel there. There were occasional courier runs.

Q: Were the French suspicious of our motives at that time in Indochina?

STOFFEL: They were. For example, later, when I'd been transferred to Paris in 1955 I discovered that two Americans, myself and Laurie Gordon, an oil company director in Saigon, who had earlier served with the OSS in Southern China and Northern Vietnam, had been named in, I believe it was, the National Assembly as spies. The suspicious work that I was doing, according to this allegation, was preparing World Trade Directory Reports for the Department of Commerce.

Q: Very suspicious work I would say.

Did we have any line to the Viet Minh at the time?

STOFFEL: One month after I arrived Mr. Reed went on leave and left me in-charge. At that point, within the first or second day that I was in-charge, a representative, who purported to be from Ho Chi Minh, came to the consulate to talk about Ho Chi Minh's political intentions. Cooperation with the French, of course, had already broken down on December 19, 1946. Next he would go to the Americans. Finally, only reluctantly, according to this story, would he go to the Soviets for support.

Q: Was there any confidence among the people, in the Consulate General, that the French could suppress the revolt?

STOFFEL: At that point yes. Security was fairly good in Saigon. Beyond the city proper there was a lot of unrest. We lived on the edge of the city. Every night my wife and I would play cards with a loaded 38 caliber pistol lying between us, because there was no protection from hand grenades or shots through the barred windows. When bullets would start coming through the garden, we would then raise a large American flag on the front porch. However, we never had to use our gun and we got fairly used to the sporadic shooting.

On one occasion coming home from dinner, as we turned a corner in my convertible Peugeot with the top down, something hit the car right under my left elbow. It turned out to be a poor quality hand grenade that didn't explode, fortunately, until it hit the ground and only put two small holes in the car. I just took off, not waiting to see what might follow.

Q: I can understand. Do you have any unusual experiences in your line of work there?

STOFFEL: Yes. Shortly after my arrival, we got a report that an American airplane had been found in Saigon harbor, in connection of the clearing of wrecks from that harbor. I was designated by the Consul General to go out in a small native canoe with a native diver and see what he would bring up.

He started out by bringing up 2 skulls, other bones and eventually 2 dogtags and a silk map of the area (which our military fliers carried at that time) to aid escape. We also recovered some other items from the cockpit of what turned out to be a U.S. navy TBM, a dive bomber, that apparently had been shot down about 2 years earlier before while strafing ships in the harbor.

At that time the consulate didn't have any funds for this purpose, so I had to pay for the diver and for the removal of the airplane. Sometime later a U.S. navy grave registration team arrived. They laid out the bones on the floor of my office and showed me that I, in effect, had 3 skeletons. They also reimbursed me for these funds. Letters from two of the families thanked me for personal items and especially for the fact that the relatives now knew that their loved ones had, at least, not suffered capture or a lingering death.

Q: That is one of the more unusual Foreign Service duties that I have heard of. Now you left Saigon in 1948 and went to Toronto. That was a sea change in many ways, I presume, for you.

STOFFEL: It was and that was really an emergency move. Because while my wife was pregnant with our first child, they discovered that there was a spot on her lung, as it was diagnosed at that time. However, in Saigon there was not a single lung doctor. By the time the baby, William, was born in July 1948, the doctor told me that my wife was a very sick lady and should be removed forthwith.

I had warned the Department of this situation when we had the earlier diagnosis. Finally, having received no response, I reported them that we were planning to leave in September. I learned later that the Department prepared a response--to the effect that, if I left, I would leave at my own expense. Mr. Reed, in the meantime, had been assigned to the Department and intercepted the message, turned that around so that the Department treated it like a regular transfer.

I was first transferred to Washington after we put my wife, Jill, in a sanitarium in Rochester, New York. The doctors immediately put her on the danger list because of a very serious condition. The Department then transferred me to the Consulate General in Toronto. So that I would be near my wife and could make arrangements for our baby to be taken care of, by my sister, Marion, in Rochester.

Q: What did your work consist of in Toronto?

STOFFEL: I was in-charge of immigration visas.

Q: Of which I presume there were a good many.

STOFFEL: There were because a lot of people were coming from Europe to Canada. Often they would immediately go down to the American consulate to see if they could get a visa to go to the United States.

Q: In 1950 you went to Berlin where out paths crossed briefly. Your wife must have recovered sufficiently at that time to allow her to accompany you.

STOFFEL: Yes. Earlier in 1950 I'd gone into the German specialization program, and taken training at the Foreign Service Institute and that summer, at Middlebury College in the German language. My wife, who had rejoined me toward the end of my stay in Toronto, had a relapse and had to go back into the sanitarium.

With the Department's help and cooperation the decision was made that, rather than to go on to the full college year of German specialization, I would go to Berlin and would take our two-year old son with me. Then my wife could join me later after I had set up the house, which she did in about 3 or 4 months.

Q: Now your job there, as I understand it, to report on happenings in the German Democratic Republic.

STOFFEL: That's right. The mission in Berlin was divided into the Berlin Element, which was responsible for the administration of the American sector of West Berlin. Our element was Eastern Element. We reported on the German Democratic Republic as if we were an embassy in East Berlin.

Q: In that type of work, could you have any personal contacts with East Germans?

STOFFEL: Oh yes, frequently. For example, we could get Soviet permission to go to the Leipzig Fair. We could travel relatively freely in East Berlin, which we did. We would go to the opera and the theater over there, into cafes and restaurants and what not. So we had casual contacts in that way.

Then we had an arrangement whereby the various intelligence agencies would call our attention to interesting individuals. For example, in my case, people that were involved in the economic life of the German Democratic Republic (a term that we did not use at that time. We called it East Germany or the Soviet Zone). We would interview them in a safe house, somewhere in West Berlin.

Q: That was the time, as I recall, of increasing pin pricks from the Soviets and the East Germans, although they never went to another blockade. East Germany and West Germany had barter pacts through which bartered goods moved back and forth.

STOFFEL: Yes. There was a kind of cross-sector trade. In fact, people lived in one sector and worked in the other sector at that time. There were things one could buy, but were restricted, for example, in what we could buy in East Berlin. Mainly because the black-market value of East marks was so low, compared to the official value placed on in it in East Berlin. The Soviets wouldn't let us buy much except records or books. The favorite record was called "Ami Go Home," I still have my copy. We bought all kinds of Russian books at very low prices.

Q: As I recall, the outstanding event, the principal event, of your 5 years in Berlin were the riots in June 1953. Did you have a role in that or not?

STOFFEL: Not exactly a role, but I had a Mission car take me to the border with East Berlin. Then I walked over to Alexander Platz where there was a lot of demonstrating. Young East Germans were throwing rocks at Soviet tanks, etc. Of course we followed the whole development carefully in connection with our work in Eastern Element.

Q: Looking back on it, should we or could we have done more at that time to help the East Germans?

STOFFEL: I think probably not. With the benefit of hindsight, I would say we did about as much as we could do, short of stirring up an actual conventional war with the Soviet Union.

Q: Which of course we did not want.

STOFFEL: Right.

Q: What was the end result of those strikes and riots in June '53? Was it beneficial to the East Germans? Did it improve their life in any way?

STOFFEL: No, not really. I think it was similar to what the Soviets did in Hungary in 1956. They cracked down swiftly and thoroughly.

Q: The people in West Berlin offered food, did they not, for those people who wanted to come over and pick it up?

STOFFEL: Oh yes. There were extensive programs in that direction. As I recall, I think this is correct, there were even places where West marks were given out for shoppers that came over from East Berlin. At different times there were different programs.

Q: In 1955 the Soviets, as I remember, gave control of the traffic between West Germany and West Berlin to the East Germans. Was that on your watch or did that come after you left?

STOFFEL: I am not sure of the timing. At any rate that affected the German travelers but we were still under Soviet control.

Q: The Allies remained under Soviet control. This was for the inter-zonal German-German traffic.

STOFFEL: Yes. I crossed the border twice without Soviet authorization. I once went to Leipzig at a time when, for some reason or other, the Soviets were mad at us that year, and would not give us the normal permits for the Leipzig fair. At somebody's request, I went there on my own. Simply with my diplomatic passport and no Soviet authorization, and came back out and had no trouble. Scary!

Q: That was unusual.

STOFFEL: That was unusual.

The other instance was not planned. The normal route that we used between Berlin and West Germany was between Helmstedt and West Berlin. But on one occasion my family and I were going to the Riviera. It was suggested to me that I try a route that was, more or

less, on a direct line from Berlin toward Munich, which wasn't used normally by U.S. personnel, but they wanted to see if it would work.

So I got the authorization from the Soviets for that route and drove off with my family. I think at that point we had two children. My wife, incidentally, was now over her tuberculosis. When I got to the vicinity of the West German border, the East German police seeing my U.S. occupation license plates--they kept waving me through. I assumed they were passing me on to a Soviet control point. To my surprise I suddenly found we were in West Germany and nobody had checked me out of East Germany.

Q: No Soviet check.

STOFFEL: No Soviet check whatsoever which didn't disturb me too much until I realized that in two weeks, I'd be coming back by the same route. Nothing disastrous happened except that I had to wait for a Soviet officer, who came up to me and said, "Did you go through here two weeks ago?" I started to explain. He said, "That's all right, I just wanted to know," and waved me through.

Q: Well there are different ones.

Do you have any unusual or interesting points you'd like to make about your tour in Berlin at that time, those years?

STOFFEL: Two. One that I participated in the 1954 Foreign Ministers Conference in Berlin. One Saturday morning I was in bed with the flu and a temperature of 102. I got a call from one of my superiors telling me to get down to the Allied Control Council building.

I was to be the facilities officer for the conference and the barren building had to be ready in about two weeks, as I remember. So I went down to the little medical office we had and got a shot. By noon I was working on that problem. I had put together the offices for Mr. Dulles, Mr. Eaton, Mr. Bidault, Mr. Molotov, etc.

Q: The building hadn't been used for some years.

STOFFEL: Exactly. We had to set-up restaurant facilities, conference rooms, etc.

Q: That conference got a lot of publicity but it led to little, I gather, in the final analysis.

STOFFEL: Yes, that's true.

Q: Well we heard in later years a good deal about the flight of people from East Germany to West Germany. I believe it was called the "brain drain." Was that something to which you paid much attention?

STOFFEL: Oh yes. Because this was a terrible drain on the economy and the educational facilities of West Germany. I remember one statistic that I saw. A certain technical university in Leipzig, within say a week after graduation, about 98% of the graduates supposedly were in West Germany getting good jobs. This of course is why the Soviets and the East Germans decided to put up the Berlin Wall.

Q: Anything else about your days in Germany?

STOFFEL: There was one thing that has repercussions to this day. It occurred two weeks after I left Berlin, in the summer of 1955 to be transferred to Embassy Paris.

I went home and spent the summer with our two children in a log cabin that my father had on one of the Finger lakes in western New York state. In the fall I reported to Paris and became the embassy Export Control Officer, that was my position in Paris.

Let me recap: In the Berlin Eastern Element on the economic side, which I was responsible for, we had an American contingent. One member of which, by the way, was John D. Anderson who in 1980 was a presidential candidate. The American staff, of course, handled classified material.
On a separate floor we had a German operation where the staff followed newspapers, kept clippings and wrote reports of various kinds, none of them classified. I had a good German secretary, who was bilingual in German and English, and therefore very useful.

A male member of that German part of Eastern Element, came to visit me in Paris at the Embassy. He had come on as a tourist to Paris.

He wanted to tell me that 2 weeks after I left Berlin, that secretary and her mother had been kidnapped from West Berlin, through a ruse by a young man who had persuaded her to give him English lessons. When the English lessons had progressed to a certain point, he said that he would like to repay her, to show his appreciation for what she'd done. So he invited her and her mother to dinner.

They got into a taxicab, which he had provided. As he drove away said, "My God, I forgot my billfold, we've got to stop at my house and get it." They didn't think much of it but they did think something was wrong when they suddenly found themselves racing for a gate between Berlin and the Soviet zone.

Without their stopping, the gate was raised and in they went to East Germany. There they were interrogated by the East German secret police and Miss Trapp was asked to spy on our office. They told her they knew I had left 2 weeks earlier, to indicate how much they knew about what went on there. They wanted her to spy and she was smart enough to eventually go along with them. But she said, "You realize this isn't going to work unless I show up for work tomorrow morning." They said, "All right, we'll fix it so that you can do that but if you double cross us, we'll get you."

So she came back to work the next morning and immediately reported to her boss and then to the security officer. Eventually this was publicized because it was related to another attempt where there was an attempt made on one of the German RIAS employees (Radio in the American Sector). US authorities finally decided that maybe these people would be safer if they publicized these attempts.

Some months later, I made a trip back to Berlin. I talked to the people concerned, including the employee involved. She told me that she'd really like to get to the United States. So I said, anything that I could do, I'd be glad to help.

Sometime later, I was visited in Paris by a German artist who had migrated to the United States after World War I. Among other things, had set up a large graphic society. We had met him on board a ship on one of our crossings. He would invite us out to dinner when he came to Paris.

So I asked him on this one occasion whether he could use a bilingual German-English secretary. He said he might, because he was now engaged in publishing the UNESCO series of art books. He was traveling all over the world in connection with this series of very fine art books. So I gave him the name and address of the employee.

Some months later he returned to Paris with the German employee. They had met in Munich and he was taking her around to meet his colleagues.

She went to the United States with her mother. Eventually she married her boss. They had three children and lived in the New York city area.

In 1993, at the request of the FBI and the German authorities, she returned to Berlin to testify against Marcus Wolf of the East German secret police. Her testimony was needed to confirm that Marcus Wolf had carried out her kidnapping.

Q: That sounds like a story with a frightening beginning and a happy ending.

You've already mentioned that your next post was Paris where you were engaged in export control. Were you assigned to the embassy or to another one of our organizations there?

STOFFEL: To the embassy. The COCOM people, who were in a separate building, ran the United States membership in COCOM, (coordinating committee) the purpose of which was to prevent strategic goods from getting to the other side of the Iron Curtain.

My particular job was export controls in France. In other words, to make sure that American goods going to France were not diverted to the USSR, China, or other communist countries.

Q: Re-exported.

STOFFEL: I decided to do, more than react to what was called to my attention in that field. I arranged to get manifests for American shipping lines from the United States to France.

On one occasion I recognized some initials. There were two sets of initials on a case of automobile truck parts. I recognized one set of initials as belonging to an American-owned company in Paris. I didn't know what the other initials were so I found out.

I called the American that I knew who had the parts business. He told me who the other initials were. And to make a long story short, we discovered that these truck parts were being diverted to communist China.

That's the kind of work I did there.

Q: Did the French resent your being there?

STOFFEL: No, I don't think so. I had very good relations with the Quai D'Orsay. There was a man by the name of Noel Maier, who was the their representative on COCOM. Our relations were excellent.

Q: Presumably, you worked closely with our mission to COCOM.

STOFFEL: Oh yes, absolutely.

In another case, I took an Embassy car to this American company and took all their records back to the Embassy to go through them. In the course of which, we discovered the extent to which this diversion was taking place.

Q: Any particular event you'd like to tell us about that transpired those several years you were in Paris?

STOFFEL: Our third child, our second son Robert was born there. Our daughter, Elizabeth had been born in Berlin

Q: That's always a large event in anyone's life.

Well from Paris you came back to Washington.

STOFFEL: That's right.

Q: You were assigned, I believe, to the Aviation Division?

STOFFEL: That is correct.

In Paris, my office had been next to the Civil Air Attaché in Paris, I forget his name now. Knowing my background in military aviation and that I was going back to Washington, he asked me if I would be interested in working in the Aviation Division of the State Department. I said, that sounded interesting.

There were two sections in that division. One of which handled relations with foreign governments in respect to air transport agreements between the countries. The one I headed, handled more technical matters, such as relations with the Federal Aviation Agency, the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce, et cetera.

Q: So you had to be a bureaucratic in-fighter in those cases.

STOFFEL: Yes, there was a lot of that. And then I did get heavily involved in the negotiation with the Soviet Union for their first air agreement. In fact, I made the first draft of that agreement. I went through the whole process of clearing it through the United States government which was quite a job.

Q: I can imagine.

Jets were coming on stream, I presume you have some interesting stories about that.

STOFFEL: Yes, certainly interesting to me at any rate.

It starts with my experience as one of the early "Wristonees". The Aviation Division had been run by civil service experts who had been the who had been in these jobs, in the case of both my boss and my assistant, for 15 years or more.

They didn't really have much faith in we generalist Foreign Service Officers doing their highly specialized jobs. A couple of we Foreign Service Officers, sat and twiddled our thumbs for quite a while, until I got irked and decided to do something about it.

I found at one of the universities, I think it was George Washington University, a course in civil aviation. I went over and took the course. My final paper was titled America's Civil Aviation Agreements on the Threshold of the Jet Age. It was published by the Journal of Air, Law and Commerce. It became quite popular in the aviation industry. They had to print hundreds of copies of it. Even in recent years, I've run into it. For example, I have a Japanese book on aviation of which I can't read anything in it except my name as a cited author.

Now my boss, the head of the Office of Transportation, Larry Vass, approved the publication of this article as was required. But apparently he didn't read it too carefully. Because, in negotiations with the Netherlands, some months later, he was horrified to have the other side, the Netherlands representative, cite my book to prove some point. He came back to my office and said, "Goddamn it Stoffel, the next time you write something, I'm going to read it."

So anyway, this was what I was doing to become an expert in aviation. And to prove to these people that Foreign Service Officers could be experts.

I also discovered that there was something called a Godfrey Air Fellowship in the catalogue for this university. I asked my professor what that was, and he said that Arthur Godfrey would pay for flying lessons if you wanted to learn how to fly. I said, that's the best offer I'd heard yet.

While I was in the military they never let me fly because I was 60% color blind. This didn't bother me in civil aviation and I got two of these awards. I learned to fly an airplane and flew solo to North Carolina, and to West Virginia. Finally I gave up flying after I was sent to Germany. I decided, I had 3 children and a wife, and I was going to kill myself if I didn't quit because I had waited too long. It was fun and I'm glad I did it.

I used it in the Aviation Division. People like Hughes Aircraft would want to demonstrate a helicopter for me. I'll never forget the way they demonstrated a Lockheed Jetstar. They served me a martini and put it on a table in front of me. Then they did a barrel-roll and didn't spill a drop of the martini. In all these cases the pilots would let me fly the aircraft (within limits). I even got to roll a T-33 jet!

Q: An incredible feat I would say.

In other words, you helped to break down the barrier between "Wristonees" and the old Foreign Service Officers.

STOFFEL: Yes, I think I did and in the course of doing it, I even got over-specialized in aviation.

Q: Were you followed by other Foreign Service Officers into the Aviation Division?

STOFFEL: Oh yes. That was accelerated after that as was the reverse. My civil service boss, Henry Snowdon, went overseas to London as a Civil Air Attaché. I think Wristonization made a lot of sense.

Q: You were there apparently during the period of the U-2 incident?

STOFFEL: Yes. For example, I handled with the Soviet Embassy, Khrushchev's visit to the United States. I worked with their Military Air Attaché. The Soviets were very concerned with weather reports. Understandably, with weather like you have in the Soviet Union, they should be.

In connection with Khrushchev's arrival in his TU104. The Air Attaché kept wanting to know how they could follow the weather as the flight approached.

I finally said, look, there's a public number in the phone book. All you have to do is call this phone number and you can ask the FAA, how the weather is between here and Moscow. Well, when I mentioned to one of my Defense Department friends that I had done this. He said, why did you do that? I said, the damn thing is in the phone book. Well, he said, why make it easy for them!

Q: After your tour in AV, you were rewarded with a tour of the Air War College in 1960.

STOFFEL: Right.

Q: Any comments about that year?

STOFFEL: Yes. I found that very useful and I only had one big gripe with the air force and that is they addressed all of us, who were not military, as civilians. I mean "civilian" was our title. It wasn't Mr. Stoffel it was Civilian Stoffel.

Q: You weren't able to correct that, I guess.

From there you were assigned back to Washington.

STOFFEL: I was actually assigned to Bonn as Civil Air Attaché but before I left, they asked me if I would undertake a temporary job as Assistant to a Special Assistant to the Secretary on Civil Aviation. Now the Special Assistant was Joseph Fitzgerald who was Chairman of the Board of Ozark Airlines. They wanted me to be his assistant. I actually reported to Under Secretary George McGhee.

The purpose of the operation was to prepare civil aviation aid projects for African countries because we were afraid of the penetration of Soviet civil aviation into those countries.

Q: Which were just getting independence at that time.

STOFFEL: I must say we weren't terribly successful. In the first place, Joe Fitzgerald had problems back at Ozark Airlines and he spent a lot of time there, and left me to carry the ball up on the 7th Floor where I was a little out of my depth.

Finally I went to George McGhee and said, I've got to get to Bonn. He put me off for a while but he finally agreed and I went to Bonn in January of '63. I did not realize that within a few months he would follow--as Ambassador to Germany.

Q: George McGhee had been Under Secretary at that time.

STOFFEL: Yes, he was Under Secretary

Q: For Political Affairs?

STOFFEL: Political Affairs.

Q: When you were working back there, you were working under Fitzgerald, so you had no base actually in AV or AF.

STOFFEL: No, I was up on the 7th Floor.

Q: You finally arrived in Bonn in early '63 to handle Transport and Communications. What were your big problems there?

STOFFEL: One of the biggest was access to Berlin. Remember, that was the time when the Soviets were making threats about Berlin. Eventually it came to troops armed and facing one another. It was fairly hairy.

I think we had 2 military airplanes shot down while I was there. One we think was a result of a defective compass that allowed this airplane to feel that he was going straight. Actually he was curving right over the Soviet zone.

Part of my job involved several committees in Berlin. For example the Stock Pile committee. I was the American member on that as well as on the Air Safety Committee. We had meetings in Berlin and I'd coordinate with the air force officers who were going up. I'd say, why don't you guys pick me up here. They said, because we'd have to pay a landing fee at Bonn, and they wouldn't do it.

Eventually there was a twin-jet. I forget which number it was, sort of a business class jet that the air force was using. Very often the Soviets in the Air Safety Center would ask what kind of an airplane is this?

Unfortunately, in connection with this particular airplane that flew into Tempelhof, the Soviet had looked it up in Jane's "All the World's Aircraft" which was available in the Safety Center and found out that there was an armed version of this aircraft. The manufacturer, I think it was the North American, was trying to promote an armed version of this twin-jet business airplane. I don't think they were ever built or sold.

Nevertheless, that made the Soviet rep say, this is an armed aircraft and we're going to shoot it down. It was in Tempelhof and it was sitting there and they called me. The Air Safety Center, American Element, reported to me and I said, you tell the airplane to go. We can't let them tell us what aircraft we can and cannot use, so we've got to take our chances.

A couple of hours later, I got a call from one of my air force officer friends on one of these committees. He said, "Al, you know that airplane that just left Tempelhof?" I said, yes. He says, "Guess who was on it." I said, don't tell me you were on it. He said, "Yes. What are you trying to do, get me killed!"

So the next meeting we had, he said, "Al, how are you going to Berlin?" I said, I'll take the regular Pan Am flight. He said, "Why don't we pick you up." I said, you always refused to pick me up. He said, "This time we'll pick you up."

Because he was going to take that airplane and this was the first time that it was going to go in after the Soviets had said they'd shoot it down if it came in again. So I said, okay. He told me later that they said they were going to pay the landing fee out of their own pockets if they had to.

So they picked me up and I got on the airplane. I said, where are the parachutes? They told me where they were. I said, where is the escape hatch? And they laughed. I said, look, I'll go along with this scheme of yours but by God if there's any shooting I'm not going to spend time fitting a parachute or looking for the escape hatch.

Q: I'm out of here!

STOFFEL: And actually it went in, no problems.

Q: Well, I was in Bonn with you at that time. The third time we were together. I remember the highlight was the Kennedy visit, that kept us all active. Did you have anything to do with that or not? Clearing planes?

STOFFEL: No. I remember sitting on the platform with Kennedy when he spoke to the embassy. I don't recall that we had any problem in my area. I later had a problem in connection with President Kennedy's funeral.

I was at a party one night and I got a call from Lufthansa in great distress. Because Erhard was going to fly to the funeral on a Lufthansa airplane and they, of course, wanted to land at Dulles International airport. Some U.S. official said Lufthansa airplanes don't have any landing rights at Dulles, and they can't land there.

I said to the Lufthansa representative: you have permission to land. That's a state aircraft. When a government charters a private airplane, that plane becomes a state aircraft. So I called the Department of State from the party. I said I want to talk to somebody in the economic/business affairs division, and I don't care if it's the Assistant Secretary or any secretary on duty but I want to talk to somebody right now. Eventually someone came on the line.

I said, I have cleared this airplane to land and as a state aircraft and don't let anybody tell you that it can't land. It would be a disaster to tell Chancellor Erhard that he couldn't go to that funeral in a state airplane.

Q: Apparently he got there all right and you were safe.

STOFFEL: It was one of the few times that I took something into my own hands. But I was sure that I was right or I wouldn't have done it.

Q: Having written the papers yourself.

It was during this period that Pan American inaugurated their New York to Berlin flights.

STOFFEL: Not New York to Berlin, West Germany to Berlin--Frankfurt and the other German cities. I flew in the first 727 that landed at Tempelhof, just as an experiment. I was on the flight with a PanAm Vice President by the name of Sam Miller.

My previous experience with Sam Miller had been on one occasion when I was flying to Newfoundland in connection with my PanAm training program. I was on the airplane; Vivian Leigh and Laurence Olivier were sitting in front of me and the airplane caught fire. The number 4 engine burned right out of the wing and the airplane came down in Connecticut and landed on the belly. Sam Miller was the pilot, about 29 years old. That airplane was so close to blowing up, you wouldn't believe it. We were lucky to get out alive.

Q: What a coincidence that you'd run into him again. Then a Vice President?

STOFFEL: Yes, he was a Vice President.

Q: Did the Soviets growl about this PanAm service into Berlin?

STOFFEL: Yes. As you remember that was typical of Soviets; no matter what the subject was, they made difficulties. For example, one big problem in connection with the jets were that there was a de facto 10,000 foot ceiling on the airlanes from West Germany to West Berlin. Sam Miller raised the subject with me on this flight in, he said, these airplanes don't perform well below 10,000 feet. Can't we get that raised? I told him no, there's not a chance. It would cause so much trouble, it just isn't worth it. And it's only a short flight.

Q: Did you find that our allies were cooperative in these air matters with you regarding Berlin?

STOFFEL: Yes. There was a little commercial competition among Pan American, British Airways, and Air France. The companies would make a complaint--PanAm is doing this or that. But in general we got along pretty well.

Q: Now in regards to your communications duties, did we still maintain censorship in any form in Germany at that time?

STOFFEL: I don't think so.

Two subjects did come up in the communications area. One was the agreement on COMSAT, the satellite communications system. The other was standards for color television. There was a French system and an American system and whatnot. We did get involved in that but we never settled on a common system.

There were some interesting things. For example, the German PTT was so defensive as a government agency that they didn't want any outsiders in communications. In one instance, just a little thing, there was an answering system in D.C. run by an organist at St. John's Church near the White House. He decided, when he was studying to be an organist, that he wasn't going to make a very good living at it. So somehow or other he got into the answering service business and set up a successful answering service. He also was trying to sell it to the Germans. The Germans weren't interested of course. They had their own answering service. His was different because you had an actual secretary, a person who would answer the phone and say, this is such and such company.

Well, it didn't look plausible that Germany would ever allow that. We had one go-around one year and it didn't work. The next year he came back.

In the meantime I had found out that the Deputy Minister of Communications was a viola player, I believe it was, and played in a chamber group. Of course the American was an organist. We got another German friend who was also a musician and was Vice President of the big Siemens company.

The day before we were going to meet at the Ministry for this meeting, I had these three people who had in common, that they were musicians on the side and were all in the communications business to a friendly dinner at our apartment. The American visitor and I had agreed on a fallback position that would be acceptable. I forget how it was going to work but it involved a less intrusive U.S. participation.

We went into the meeting in the German Ministry of Telecommunications. They caved in and gave us the whole thing. Not speaking German the American sitting next to me didn't understand what was happening. He wanted to raise the fallback position. I just quietly shut him up. We'd won the whole thing and no fallback was necessary.

You know he never pursued that German offer and I later found out that he made two trips a year. He made a winter trip through the Caribbean and visited a number of countries there. He made a summer trip to Europe ending up at Castel Gondolfo in Italy. I think he had all these things going so that he could write those trips off as a business expense, and he never really wanted to set the damn thing up.

Q: Any other comments about your period in Bonn?

STOFFEL: I thought that was one of the most interesting jobs I had, certainly in the aviation part of the Foreign Service. I couldn't see any aviation job in State that I would want to have after that. That was one reason why I took early retirement.

Q: So you took the 50/20 provision.

STOFFEL: The other reason was that was an FSO-2 job and I couldn't get promoted to FSO-2. I don't know why, to this day, but I was in that job for almost 5 years. I was a little irked. When Boeing offered me a job as Director of International Affairs, I jumped at it, and never regretted the move.

Q: Well, looking back on it, what are your views of the Foreign Service as a career for a young man/woman?

STOFFEL: I don't know really, what the Foreign Service is like now. I have a feeling that when you and I were in it was really the best of all possible worlds. I think we had some great people. The way those of us in Berlin stuck together is one example of the spirit of the Service at that time.

I actually still recommend the Foreign Service to a number of people. In the first place, I recommend to anybody who is interested in the international field--take the Foreign Service Officer examination. Then they don't necessarily have to go in but it'll help them get another international job. Probably it's a good cachet to have on your record.

Q: I certainly want to thank you Al. Is there any other general comment you'd like to make?

STOFFEL: I think my combination of almost 25 years in the Foreign Service and then 15 years in Boeing worked out very well. I would like to see more of that.

I would like to see a provision, for example, for officers in mid-career that don't seem to be living up to their potential, whereby they might be given a leave of absence to go out and work in industry; with a possibility of coming back if they wanted to. I always felt that after some years in Boeing, I would have been a better Foreign Service Officer for that experience in industry.

Q: That's interesting, why?

STOFFEL: You just learn different ways of doing things. When I was in the government, I learned a lot of ways of doing things that I carried over into Boeing. They were useful to Boeing because the people that had been sitting in Seattle, doing things the Boeing way, just couldn't understand these Ambassadors that keep getting in our way.

I thought it was great when the Ambassador would come to affairs that we'd set up and we'd be able to talk to them and get them on our side and all that. Some Boeing people couldn't see the value of that effort.

By the same token, a lot of the government people just can't understand the salesman that comes in, and wants to sell shoes and airplanes or whatever. Some FSO's are less than enthusiastic about this side of their work. There are some very good economic and commercial officers in the Foreign Service but I've also met some that were just a disaster. They just didn't want to get their hands dirty on business.

I think some experience in both fields is really a good idea for people going in either direction. For example, Frank Schronz, who is Chairman and CEO of the Boeing Company. He was in the Nixon administration, as an Assistant Secretary of the Air Force and an Assistant Secretary of Defense. When he went back to Boeing I thought this might not help him. But he went right to the top and jumped over a lot of other people.

I think it was because Boeing had found out in the meantime, through people like myself, that it was important that they have people who knew their way around the government, how the government works.

Q;
Well I certainly want to thank you for these thoughts Al. It's always a pleasure to see you. We wish you the best in the future.

STOFFEL: Thank you.

Q: Following further conversation, I realized that Al Stoffel had had a number of dealings and meetings with the Soviets in the days when we were not on good terms. Al, do you think you could tell us of some of these incidents which I think are of considerable interest.

STOFFEL: I don't think I've touched on the fact that as a Reserve Air Force Officer I had a mobilization assignment at Tempelhof Airport as communications officer for the airport.

Q: That's Tempelhof in Berlin.

STOFFEL: Right, in Berlin.

Another of my colleagues, Jules Bernard, and I would go there on Saturday mornings and put in our 4 hours at the airport which helped develop our contacts with the military. And led to some rather interesting developments as far as the Soviets are concerned. This was during the Korean War and the U.S. military staff in Europe had been reduced to take care of the needs in Korea.

The colonel, whose name I forget, commanding Tempelhof, would invite us to a number of parties, especially when the Soviets were going to be present. In these latter cases, after inviting us, he would say, would you and Jules mind coming in uniform. The reason being that he wanted to impress the Soviets with the size of his staff.

This also resulted in one little incident where my wife and I were at a party. One of the Russian guests-of-honor walked by to another party of the room. As he went by, my wife grabbed her ear and said, "My earring's gone." She looked down and it wasn't anywhere around her. She finally said, "Well, the only thing I can think of is that it caught in the colonel's pants as he went by."

So with the help of a Russian speaking American officer, we went up to him and sure enough they found the earring in the cuff of his pants. We always wondered how he reported that back at his headquarters.

Q: That was a very interesting and amusing story. I'm sure you have others.

STOFFEL: On one occasion I had planned to fly into Moscow on Chip Bohlen's aircraft which was coming from the United States through Berlin.

Q: He was then Ambassador to Moscow?

STOFFEL: Yes, he was Ambassador at that time. When he came through Berlin on the way in, we discovered that because of an emergency requirement by a member of the American staff at the Moscow embassy, if I flew in and took this last seat on the airplane coming out, that person would not be able to go back to the States to attend to this emergency.

So I understood, but, having obtained the necessary Soviet visas to visit Moscow, I decided that I wasn't going to waste them. So I took a bunch of black-market East German marks and went over to East Berlin and bought a cheap railroad ticket to Moscow.

Unfortunately there was no other Westerner on the train. The announcements on the PA system were in Russian and Polish and that was all, neither one understood by me. Whenever an announcement would come, especially at the borders, I would just wait in my compartment and see what would happen.

When I got to Brest-Litovsk they put me in a room and said I could wait there. We were going to be there for about 6 hours. I asked if I could go out and walk around. They said, oh sure. But I had no identification because they had my passport. So I walked all around Brest-Litovsk, visited a church, I think it was Easter Sunday and the church was full. Had no impression that I was followed at any time. Then I got back on the train and we took off on the wider gage Russian tracks.

I spent about a week in Moscow. Again, I didn't speak any Russian but I got around Moscow by finding what bus would go from point A to point B. I would hold out a bunch of coins and say, "Proshad Vastanya." Whatever my destination was. At one point a Russian came up and asked me for directions. I wasn't able to help very much.

One reason we were interested in this trip was to see whether there would be any difficulty in an American buying a ticket for international travel with East marks. We wondered if there would be a problem in Moscow. When I came to make reservations to return I was put off for a day. They said there was no train on the day I wanted to leave.

The next day I went back to get my return ticket. They said there was a problem about the price. I thought, oh my gosh, they've found me out, they're going to make me pay in dollars. The man said, we owe you 80 rubles.

On the way back, Dave Henry took me to the train from the embassy, I had been visiting with him. He was astounded to see that a high ranking Soviet officer had been placed in my compartment with me. Unfortunately, I didn't speak Russian but we got along well enough. Among other things, this Russian officer showed me how to drink tea by straining it through a piece of hard candy held between the teeth.

The trip was uneventful. On one occasion we stopped in a rural town and everybody, including all these impressive looking officers in uniform, fled from the train. And came back after some shopping carrying live chickens and dead chickens and all kinds of food that they bought in this town.

That was about the end of that adventure.

Q: That trip had a happy ending anyhow.

Now you had other trips, I gather, that took a somewhat different course of events.

STOFFEL: This was sort of the last trip that I was going to take for the Foreign Service, when I had decided to retire at the age of 50 with over 20 years of service. I had one more official meeting in Berlin right at the end. There also was going to be a farewell party for me in Berlin because of the work that I had done with Pan American, the Air Safety Center, the Strategic Stockpile in Berlin, etc.

So we decided to close the apartment at Bonn in Plittersdorf and take the two children with us to Berlin, say goodbye to our friends in Berlin, and drive the car back and then down to Genoa to get on the ship to go back to the United States. Before doing that, I went to say goodbye to our Minister, Martin Hillenbrand and his wife, Faith.

Faith recounted a story which I had heard a little of earlier. The last time she'd driven to Berlin, she had been stopped by the East German police, the Volpos, and accused of speeding. Martin pointed out that she may have been picked on in this case because she had been driving a car with German diplomatic license plates. Our trip would be the next time that those plates were going into Berlin. So we should be very careful about our speed and obeying all the rules.

For that reason, when we reached the Soviet border at Helmstedt, my wife, Jill, took the drivers seat because she drove more conservatively than I did. I kept track of the speed, and so did she, to make sure that we stayed under the legal limit. But going across the bridge over the Elbe River, which had been narrowed for a long time because of war damage to the bridge. As I recall, the speed limit was probably 50kms an hour.

Jill was watching it very carefully when she suddenly said to me, there's a car behind me flashing its lights. I said, don't pay any attention to it. She said, I think it's a police car. I said, still don't pay any attention to it.

And we kept on for awhile until we came to some bushes. When a Volpo, a policeman on foot, stepped out of the bushes and stopped us. He came up and said we were speeding and told us to pull off of the roadway because we were blocking traffic.

I instructed my wife not to move and told the Volpo that he didn't have anything to do with us--that we were traveling under Soviet sponsorship and we locked the doors and the windows. And sat it out with traffic getting by us, little by little, but also backing up behind us.

Knowing that there was an American army military convoy behind us, having seen it at Helmstedt when we checked in, I waited and prepared an emergency slip that all cars are given indicating what the problem was. With the Volpo standing at the driver's window, I jumped out of the other side of the car, ran over to one of the trucks and handed it over to the driver and told him to give it to his commander.
At this point, the commander seeing that there was a problem, came back and the convoy stood there blocking the road along side of us. I explained the problem to the commander and he said, you shouldn't be talking to these people at all. The commander didn't understand German.

At this point, the Volpo was trying to get me to get the convoy to go on and then we would settle it. I said to the Volpo, if the convoy goes, I go with it. He readily agreed at this juncture. I told the commander to pull his convoy out and I would get in the middle of it. I got in the driver's seat and drove the rest of the way in the convoy.

We were greeted at the Dreilinden checkpoint into Berlin by a delegation of Americans and Russians, including a high ranking Russian officer, probably a colonel. Who said that I had been speeding and that I purposely blocked the roadway and made various accusations. There was a young American lieutenant who defended me. I'd already given him our story.

About this time a Volpo colonel walked up, and not having heard the accusations that were made against me, gave what was a relatively more accurate account of what had happened--that my wife was driving, etc. They agreed then that the Americans would investigate the matter and give a report to the Russians. We were allowed to proceed into Berlin.

At first there was talk of my family and I flying back from Berlin and a U.S. soldier would drive the car out. But with more consideration, the Department of State decided that we shouldn't give in to the East Germans to this extent. So they recommended that I drive the car out, which I agreed to do, requesting that all travelers, while I was in the Soviet zone, be warned and told to look out for my car in case there were problems.

On the way out, we were told that they didn't want to make trouble for me. They zipped us right through all the way with fewer delays than we had ever had before. I think they had had enough problems.

So that was our last trip from the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, thank you Al.

End of interview