

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

ROBERT C. TETRO

Interviewed by: Lane Beatty
Initial interview date: December 1, 1989
Copyright 2003 ADST

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreign Agricultural Service - Administrator	
Secretary of Agriculture Benson's seven-country travel to Europe Nahrung Fair in Cologne, Germany Commodities trade	1958-1959
Rome, Italy - Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Attaché Commodities FAO Conference - 1967 Market development Humphrey-Muskie Politics NATO Agricultural Marketing Service [AMS]	1962-1969
Early Assignments U.S. Navy Veterans Administration OFAR	1946-1950
Rome, Italy - Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Attaché Marshall Plan Ambassador Luce	1950-1953
Buenos Aires, Argentina - Department of Agriculture – Agricultural Attaché Environment PL480	1953
Washington, DC - Department of Agriculture - FAS – Assistant Administrator Relations with State Department	1961-1962

Politics

Background

Bankhead-Jones Act program
Extension Service master's degree - 1937
Washington, DC - 1939
New Orleans assignment
Amherst

INTERVIEW

Robert C. Tetro was Assistant Administrator, FAS/FAA following USDA Secretary Benson's seven-country travel to Europe, Approx. 1958-59

Q: As you know, our Secretary of Agriculture Mr. Benson has just returned from a trip abroad visiting seven countries on a trade mission. With him was Robert C. Tetro, Assistant Administrator of our Foreign Agriculture Service who is in charge of the agriculture attachés around the world.

Bob, how were you received in these stops you made around seven countries?

TETRO: Well, I think I'm reflecting the secretary's thought that we were very well received. The reception in every country was very friendly and, I think, again proves that foreign people are foreign people wherever you find them. They have much in common, much to talk about and they get along together.

Q: Well, what do you think about the possibilities of increased trade with those countries, Bob?

TETRO: This I think we have to divide between what we can do this year and what we may be doing over the long run. This year most of Europe suffered with very high temperatures. In some areas this has been reflected in what they would call drought. It's been very serious, and perhaps wouldn't look that way to our people in the Plains, but it has definitely reduced their summer and fall crops. As a result, we probably will sell them more feed grains this year than we did last. Aside from this, Europeans have recovered from the recession, moving again towards higher levels of living, picking up the pace ahead a year or so ago, which means that they should be better customers for livestock products and feed grains to support livestock products which they have.

Q: Breeding stock, perhaps?

TETRO: Breeding stock may well be in this. I think in general, here though we should say that we have competition, that there are other countries selling as we saw at the Nahrung Fair at Cologne.

Q: That's the food fair.

TETRO: This is a very large food fair; we had a very nice exhibit there. But many other countries are in the business of selling farm products to Europeans.

Q: Some of it processed, too, like ours?

TETRO: Some of it processed, some of it packaged. We definitely are going to have to be competitive in quality and price in order to maintain ourselves in these markets.

Q: What about cotton and tobacco, Bob?

TETRO: Cotton and tobacco, owing to our natural advantages, are still good possibilities for sales in the European area.

Q: Are you including all of Europe now, or would the Iron Curtain countries be a different situation?

TETRO: The Iron Curtain is a different area. There, I think we find that agriculture is no longer the Achilles heel of the Soviet, that they are relatively self-sufficient at present levels of living, including taking care of their satellite countries. Their plans cover certainly most of the satellites; Yugoslavia and Poland might be exceptions to this.

Q: Bob, what specifically do you think we can trade with Yugoslavia?

TETRO: Until they become a cash market, this is going to be a bit difficult, but we probably have continued sales under (PL) 480 there of cotton, tobacco, possibly a little fruit, possibly breeding stock. In the long-run, I think that these same items will be cash sales when Yugoslavia gets on its feet. I think citrus and possibly canned fruits have good possibilities in the Scandinavian area. In general, I have always felt - this goes back many years, Lane - that we are still one of the major sources of feed grains as Europe, through its Common Market, becomes more of a United States-type operation, higher levels of living, they will need to look to us for some of the basic feed grains.

Q: Are you including wheat in that category?

TETRO: No. Wheat is a food grain. They will bring in some wheats for blending purposes because, again, they have a relatively soft wheat and while they're accustomed to bread made from the softer wheats, they'd still need to have some blending wheat. So we're not entirely wiped out of the market.

Q: Thanks very much, Bob Tetro. This is Lane Beatty in Washington.

Q: So you're on your way to Rome?

TETRO: Back to Rome for another cruise, I feel like. Freddie Reinhardt was the ambassador and he was excellent. A bit of an aside, Reinhardt gave me the best performance rating I've ever had. I talked with you a little earlier about some of the relationships there. But this performance rating ends up saying, "If I could only have one person with me in the embassy, it would be Mr. Tetro."

Q: Oh, how wonderful.

TETRO: FAS never gave me anything like that. Well, my story at this point could be very brief because of what I have to say. In 1962 I stopped fighting to get the world straightened out. I didn't drop my values, but there was no way of pushing any more for the kinds of things that starting back twenty years before I had aimed to do.

When I became administrator, I was probably at my peak for getting these things done, getting my concept of how the department works both within itself and outside itself with other agencies because we didn't have to work only with State, certainly with Labor, certainly with Commerce. We had knock-downs and drag-outs with Commerce on commodity affairs; we probably still do. How you react to that bureaucratically - I have a story on Gus Burmeister who we got rid of when I became administrator. In the fights that I had with Burmeister in the Garnett and Max Meyers' operation, I used an interesting approach. Burmeister never trusted anybody, so in the debate I would tell him the truth. By the time he realized he'd been had, I'd be by him. It worked beautifully, particularly with Art Minor.

Here I had an assistant, Gerry Tichenor, who was a big deal. He was my buffer with Art. When I had a problem with Art, I'd send Gerry down, and Gerry would sit and listen, and listen. I couldn't do this. I'm too impatient. But then finally Gerry would say, "As you were saying, Art," which he hadn't been, "maybe we ought to do this," and half the time he was right. Tichenor was great. One of my biggest mistakes was not making Tichenor the assistant for the attachés. I didn't for one reason: he never had any experience in the area. But he had done a better deal than Doug Crawford who later drank himself to death. Anyway, we're trotting back to Rome.

Q: Why is it you think that your agenda is finished? [cross-talk]

TETRO: As the attaché in Rome, you don't have the power.

Q: You don't have the power. But you think that would be your last try for the administrator? You have no intention of ever trying for it again or thinking it would be possible?

TETRO: In 1967, Freeman came over for an FAO conference and went through several of my statements. He had really wonderful contacts Freeman has a heart of gold and is a hell of a nice guy. He and Kennedy both came retired in World War II. They had that in

common. But then in '37 when Dorothy Jacobson was the assistant secretary - she was my friend, she and Charlie Murphy. I was at the airport with Alice and Jane, and Paul and I were walking to the plane. He takes me aside, puts his arm around my shoulder and says, "Bob, I'd like to have you come back to Washington as assistant secretary." And I knew that for other reasons somebody was trying to get Dorothy out. So I said, "Mr. Secretary, thanks, but no thanks." I don't know whether that would have been better. In '62 I retired, but I stayed on two payrolls until '76. First Rome - And when I say retired, when you're retire, you do what you want to do. I had a ball.

First of all, I still had a contact for a while with Charlie Murphy. I still had some kind of contact with Freeman and Dorothy Jacobson that the FAS guys, particularly Art Minor, didn't know about. So if I wanted to get something done which we had agreed we wanted to do, I could do it. You'd just have to ask. We had this market development program, a lamb feeding demonstration project which we'd set up where the Italian we used got to be an expert and consulted with Spain and Greece and two or three other places around the Mediterranean. In the beginning he had no interest in feeding at all. But when he learned he could make money on it, we were in business.

The other thing we had which was fantastic, Bill Schultz and I could take 5,000 bucks any time we wanted to, to do any kind of a show anywhere with the consulates. You got the ConGen to agree. We had some excellent projects, even selling [materials] produced in Washington and Oregon in northern Italy, which we did.

The other area where I think FAS has completely lost control is their market development program. Ray wasn't the only one that wanted me out. The Serbian consulate wanted me out.

Q: Why?

TETRO: They wouldn't do anything Howard Howard Rex Cottam wanted me to do. Yet, when the Serbian consulate in Italy got under the gun with Congress, Art Minor went back in a corner. Who the hell stood up and defended the office, protected it, saw that it was properly dismantled but Tetro?

Q: It sounds like you had said earlier, there were two routes to go - to make noise or not to make noise.

TETRO: To do something useful. Yes. Hopefully.

Q: How many years were you in Rome the second time?

TETRO: I went over there in '62 and came back in '69.

Q: They don't do that any more, do they?

TETRO: As long as the Democrats were in, you couldn't get around me. They wanted to.

Sure. We had a good shop; a good family. I still exchange Christmas cards with some of the kids in that office that I've known since 1950. I'm not getting any younger here, so that's a bit of a problem. We did some things that we liked to do and enjoyed it. And we had home leave. I couldn't afford home leave now. You could go on cruises back and forth. I used to fight this all the time. I don't know if the State Department regs [regulations] still have this. An attaché cannot be forced to travel by means which he disapproves of. You have a choice. You've got a choice to cruise if you can. We flew once. Then we had a change of administration. Well, here we had a problem. We had had a cocktail party at our house. We were pushing for Humphrey. Humphrey/Muskie-

Q: You just can't stay out of politics, that's the problem.

TETRO: We, a couple of friends, set up a committee for Humphrey/Muskie which had this cocktail party at our house among other things. We paid all of his expenses and sent back \$2,000 or \$3,000 to the state. So come '69 and we lose, I've got to go.

Q: Most definitely. You've been a thorn in the side, aren't you?

TETRO: Eddie Meyer was sent over. He worked with me in Rome. He, by the way, when I became administrator, I fired him. It broke his heart. Ralph Roberts was a business administrator and he put us up to it. He was a great assistant secretary to work it. I did not have much trouble with [him]. When we took over, I got an order to fire Pat O'Leary. I went to Freeman myself and said, "Mr. Secretary, this guy is really Republican." Pat O'Leary, when I was appointed administrator, was one of two people who called me up at home and said, "Give me my military 90 days and I'll get out." I said, "Pat, just shut up. Sit down and keep quiet." And we kept him until he got fed up with Ioanes and took off.

Q: Ioanes stayed on as administrator until when?

TETRO: Precisely, I don't know. But at that point, I was administrator, Ray was still a deputy on the other side. He was in charge of market development for a while. But at any rate, Pat called me, "Give me my 90 days." And then I got the order fire him and then I went to Freeman and said, "Mr. Secretary, I've got a problem running FAS. You may not realize it, but it's a horribly complicated operation." [...] barter program and that general sales manager we stole from ASCS to get their CCC money. We got not one, but two of them. The guy was the deputy over at ASCS when he discovered that these two units were being transferred - there was a secretary's memo announcing it - tried to get it changed. Of course, Godfrey, the ASCS contact came to Duncan's office - Duncan didn't even understand what the hell was going on here. And Duncan, Godfrey and I sat down and Oris was across the table with Bob Lewis, I guess, and I said: Oris, how can we put out a secretary's memo that says the secretary is a damn fool? And Oris said we can't. God bless. We had a good working relationship with the man. But that operation lost a thread.

Oh, by the way, I told Andy, I said: Andy, you can't fire me; I'm a veteran. You've got to

hold me at grade at least for two years - the law says so. And then Ioanes said the problem with that was what they were going to do with me. So I began - I had a special job and I was examining the Common Market to see what our problems might be and how they might develop. I even have a folder on that somewhere around the place. But I was obviously not very happy that they had to get me a job but they didn't want me.

Cottam ended up as the head of the FAO office in Washington with which we had been working off and on for years. When he couldn't make Nixon get him the ambassadorship that he wanted, we got him that job. And here I did have another aim which was, hopefully, to be director-general of FAO. But I gave that up for other reasons. The family just couldn't stand it. The cursing and fighting bureaucratically which you've got to do to stay on top, can get you down, can get your family down, too.

We'd gotten Howard a job here, which I could have had if I'd wanted it. Howard calls me up one day. And he said: how would you like to be the senior economist for North America? A dear friend of mine, McLean, who I worked closely with who, since '48 or '49 was in that job. So I asked what about him. He was sick and was going to have to take disability retirement and would be out in about two or three months. So I got that job.

Shortly before I left Rome in '69, I was asked by the NATO Defense College - their version of the war college - to give a talk on the importance of food and the problems that NATO might face. The first thing I discovered is that nobody knows very much about this. And so I begin to put on paper on some days when I had nothing better to do. A copy I've still got. When I got to be senior economist, I kept building on this paper. And then in the early '70s, you'll remember that food got to be an enthralling topic but nobody knew much about it. I've already got a paper developed. So I go everywhere I want to go: seminars, universities, two or three places where Alice could go with me, first-class air travel paid, hotel paid all the way. I enjoyed it.

Going back to the director-general Oris Wells who said, "Oh, Bob you never could have done that." The director-general-to-be in Burma. He was the assistant general and he aimed himself a program to get to be the top dog. And I was one of the first two people he called to have lunch with to see if, in my case, I was aiming for the job. And I quite honestly told him at lunch that up until three years ago, yes. But I said I decided that neither I, nor my family, could handle the stress so I better not try.

Q: I have another line of questioning. How was getting onto the Foreign Service track of FAS, how was that on the family? Was it a completely positive experience for them?

TETRO: Compared to the early '50s and even Buenos Aires, it was a picnic. You get an educational allowance. Bobby, he's going into language training in Danish next month for 6 months. Full salary. We didn't have that. The educational thing alone for college, back and forth travel, we didn't have that.

Q: To bring the kids back, this is true.

TETRO: Here's where Howard and I did have our differences. He mobilized the Foreign Service. And I said, they've got feet of clay, too. But the Foreign Service nowadays is probably [more diverse]. But when I first go into it, it was historically composed of graduates of the Big 3. People don't even know who they are anymore: Harvard, Yale and Princeton. They had to be people from fairly wealthy families. They did have to take a test; they weren't stupid. But from fairly wealthy families who didn't care about a few hundred or a few thousand dollars here or there.

Q: They would have to spend on their own.

TETRO: Yes. A completely different background in the '50s. I was still there. Where are the big economic universities today? MIT is still pretty good [...]. Basically, there are people from fairly modest backgrounds who can't stand some of these costs. So that's one of the reasons we improved. The other states still haven't faced up to this. What used to get me was the rotation of officers, they put them in slots whether they had any skills for the slots or not. So the constant rotation, so they're getting a smattering. They're getting smart people, so they're pretty good with the smattering. But in foreign trade and foreign financing trade, we're getting to where the nitty gritty has to be detailed and you know what you're doing. You've got to slow down the rotation, increase the specialization. Rough work.

And by the way, with the exception of two courses, I must say that through my whole career, I've been lucky. I had, by accident, prepared to be lucky, but I was lucky. I didn't ask for the assistant administrator's job. I didn't ask for the administrator either, but they gave me the administrator because they didn't want somebody else to do it. On the whole, luck has been good. If I had to do it over again, which I don't, I wouldn't change very many things. Rough on the family. This is back when we still used to have an almost annual - One of the reasons we went to Rome was my thought that the world had to get together. Who's going to be tops in the world getting together? Those who had some understanding of another culture and another language. These kids had both Italy and Argentina for living experiences. When I came back in '69 - I was at university in '53. We were in Bethesda for 6 years. (End of tape)

-each division of the bureau is represented. We got into a snafu, a fight which really didn't get us anywhere. But as a group we reported back to the division chief H.R. Tolley and in the process he had given different assignments for different members. The unit that I was to review for this committee was State and Local Planning itself. I also had Farm Population and Rural Welfare, a different group entirely. But in those days the bureau chief division heads, every week we had to meet. And I used to go with my boss Sherm Johnson to those meetings. I was to give a report at this meeting on this state and local planning division. And I'd start my litany of what I think is wrong with it and how it might be straightened out. And about 5 minutes into this one, the head of that division said, "That's not so; he can't say that." Then H.R. Tolley who was the bureau chief said, "Bush, just sit down and listen" and we went through the process. And this was discussed across the bureau. At this point in the program the division chief was a man named Oris

Wells. Moving ahead a little faster, Tolley went to newly formed Food and Agricultural Organization at the United Nations as head of economics. A few other people went with him. And Oris Wells became the head of the BAE.

At the first staff meeting we had with this division chief and assistant, Oris gave clues as to what good management is. He said we've been through a pretty rough period here the last year or two. State and local planning, by the way, is not decimated. He said the approach is pretty simple: When we have a bureau problem, it shall be discussed openly here, and we will come to decisions about what we are going to do, and once we decide on that, you're going to do it.

Oris later became the director of the Agricultural Marketing Service, another department of the organization. He had been my third surrogate parent, by the way, now. I'll tell you why a little bit later. Oris, in the later years said that AMS was very big, wide organization, department wide. It covered a lot of things. And he had three major assistants. He said, my approach to management is very simple. He said, I get good people, I see that they learn what they're supposed to do, and I sit back and let them do it. Simple. Not easy.

Okay. We're still back in the bureau now, and now we began to move on. OFAR was one of the units that - I leave Farm Management, believe it or not, because Wallace had decided that he wanted an outlook and situation board - this is another world food board, I think. But the first outlook and situation board.

I left the Navy in '46 and went back to the bureau. And I had done some things before I got out. Sherm Johnson who a few months short - about 6 months - of getting out, I got a call from Sherm and he said, "I've got a problem with returning veterans. We need to develop some brochures." A lot of them wanted to work with Farm Management. You went to the Veteran's Administration. The Veteran's Administration asked the Navy to second me to go develop these on the basis of a line of work that we had done in farm management just before the war. How did they do, what's good, what's bad, what size. It was a perfect vehicle for what we call occupational briefs to go to veterans. If you want to go into farm management, here it is.

For about four months, I am in the Navy having a fascinating experience having nothing to do with FAS. I am seconded to the Veterans Administration, but they don't know their ass from their elbow. I'm working for Sherm Johnson. So I had a wonderful time. Nobody knew where I was or where I supposed to be, so I could have goofed off. But I was fascinated by the assignment itself. I've even got those briefs somewhere. VA did put them out. They even began to send veterans to talk to me about what they wanted to do. And I got fed up with admirals who wanted to retire from the Navy on a pension, work a little something to double that by being in farming. Nearly all of it was in poultry.

That's about over and about to go to bed when a friend of mine calls. He has ties to the lobbyist for the ice cream association who wants a lackey to do the work. I like the job, but I'm now up to a P-5, five thousand and something. The job is \$7500 but the old man

says, I've had enough of this. If you work out, in two or three years you've got my job - \$15,000.

So I go to Sherm Johnson and I tell him my problem. He had a rocking chair and when he had a problem he rocked. And he finally said, "Bob, you know what, sometime you've to decide. Do you want to work for money or do you want to do something useful?" So I rolled that around. Now I have already decided, because I had been doing things which were useful. I had already thought about my basic goal. Wendell Wilkie's "One World" which was published in 1940, which to my mind was the first 'You've got to go UN'. The only solution to these problems is on a global basis. The sooner we get there, the better off we are. He is the only Republican I ever voted for. I was sure he would win, but he didn't. That is my next goal up here. So I went back to do other things that I had been doing with Sherm. And then this world food board predecessor is set up. Bush Allen, the guy that said he was not going to listen to that nonsense from me years before, Ph.D. Wisconsin, is head of it but it's got to have a regular editor.

Q: There you go.

TETRO: There I go. I get a little promotion in that job. But in that job I then had to prepare every departmental report dealing with the economics of food, including OFARs. I had a hell of a time with it because in those days we had some pretty sloppy writers who had a pretty stinking, nasty attitude. But we worked things out. Bush, by the way, was a fascinating man to work with. He was a genius. And he and I had an excellent working relationship.

You know, the meetings in those days, we'd go into this room and Bush would purposely close the door and say, "Okay, whatever you're here for, we are here as a conference and we're going to talk this things out. And we did, as open as we could be. Well, some people did better than others. Again, we're now moving into OFAR. I'm very happy at this job. Kids in school in Arlington. We had three children.

Q: What year is this?

TETRO: We're now coming up to 1950. We moved to Arlington in September of '49. We had been here two or three months when the Marshall Plan was set up in Europe. Jim [...] had been in the information unit in OFAR with which I worked on these papers. He said, "Hey, I've got a job for you." What do you mean? "Agricultural attaché in Rome." Forget it. Two weeks later: "Hey, we've come back to you again; you're lucky." I said, "No way at the moment." Two more weeks-

Q: They're still asking you for Rome.

TETRO: Yes. Somebody went into my papers. Once you know how to write the descriptions, you get promotions. The previous two times Alice had said nothing about it. This time for Rome, I called her. The day before we had a little side asphalt piece put in to get the car off the road. And she's out in a fairly hot, arid period trying to get that thing

cleaned up. When I got her, she said, let's go. My back teeth dropped - couldn't believe it.

Q: With three kids.

TETRO: Three kids. They were kids - 3, 4 and 6. We had just paid our first payment on the mortgage and we had to clear out. Sell. Temporary move because a buyer wants to move in before you move out. But anyway, we go to Rome. And here's where my first boss, Howard Cobb- Here we have a fascinating problem and we've got some young, good people.

In the early days of the Marshall Plan, the quality of the people working in technical assistance was absolutely tops. You still had a post-war do things right, get them done. And there was a challenge of this thing. In '50 to '53 when I was first in Rome, we had a hell of a good crew. Howard was an excellent boss with a good flair in management. For example, he had set up the embassy and the Marshall Plan program sites together.

Q: For Italy?

TETRO: For Italy. How do you use this? To improve your reporting, when you're working with the programs, you ask the Italians for a certain kind of information. You need to help them get it, otherwise they don't get the program. So you've got a two-way thing here. I was the Ag attaché and I had three guys working with me. Joey Montoya was one. [He was] bilingual in Italian. I very rapidly became fluent because you can't move out in the country in Italy, particularly in those days, without being able to talk Italian. I used to get in the car my driver - you had an Italian assistant everywhere you went. I said, we going to talk Italian until you see that I'm going to go bananas. But press me.

Q: How long did it take you to become comfortable in the language?

TETRO: A year-and-a-half to two years. I had the French background quite adequately. And I was also going to - they had a language teacher and she was an excellent teacher. A tyrant, but good. About the third or fourth month I was taking lessons from her because that was a tremendous job. We had a lot of work night and day. I wasn't getting my homework done in the language. So I walked in one day not too well prepared and she said, "Mr. Tetro, you're wasting my time. You either study or..." So you added another hour at night to your schedule.

The FAO, in 1951 decided that they were going to move headquarters to Rome.

Q: From where?

TETRO: It was in Washington.

Q: It was in Washington?

TETRO: It was originally set up here in Washington on Connecticut Avenue. The United States bought that land because they had to. The second director general was an American. But the embassy had a little problem with how to handle the traffic with everybody that came with FAO. They were going to send a liaison with FAO in Rome. How do you do it so we could have a combined operation? Howard was against the war college. Howard and I went this way on one thing: He thought the Foreign Service could do no wrong. I did. His one goal was to be ambassador, which he finally made.

Q: Where was he ambassador?

TETRO: Kuwait. And he thought Dick Nixon was a friend of his, so when Nixon got in office he went back to Washington. I think he wanted Iraq. I don't know why, except it was a little step higher. He got back to Washington and as far as Nixon was concerned, he couldn't care less. It was about this time that I - War College in those days was great. I couldn't have disagreed with him more on that. It's an assignment I wish I could have gotten.

So we have a change of administration in 1953. My first ambassador was a guy by the name of Jamie Dunn. The top exec was Thompson who later became the ambassador to Moscow. Fascinating people. When Dunn left and went to Paris, Ellsworth Bunker came in. Another fascinating man.

Q: You've been posted to Rome and there is no formal set up? You have no idea how long you'll be there or anything like that?

TETRO: In those days you spent two years and went back for home leave. Tommy was the deputy and my two years was coming up and I go to Tommy and tell him, "Tommy, I can't afford home leave." In those days, you paid for your own kids' education, you're paid for your own language lessons. And the other costs we had. And Tommy looked at me and said, "I can't either." So no problem for Ike to extend it. During the next course, Eisenhower is in. Bunker comes to our special staff session. "Gentlemen, he said, I have news for you. I have been replaced by Mrs. Luce." A top character like Jacobson became ambassador of Poland. Every department head but one said, "When she arrives, I won't be here." And they weren't. I was the only one left because I couldn't afford to go anywhere.

Q: Why did they object? Was it the change of administration?

TETRO: I lay awake the night she nominated Ike Eisenhower. You know she nominated Ike. And she got out of G.I. Joe, G.I. Jane. She said things about the Democrats handling the postwar that weren't very nice. And the whole mess of the Foreign Service operation, we'll do it better. Wasteful. So she arrives: Here I am. Well, she was a fascinating woman to work with. About the third time I met with her, I thought to myself, don't get close to this snake or it will bite you. A lovely, beautiful attractive woman. She used to have a budding rose in a little- (end of tape)

She was a trooper though, and attractive as I've said.

Shortly after she arrived, the head of the Marshall Plan operation, a man named Chauncey Parker said, Mrs. Luce, if you want to understand the problems of Italy, I suggest you do what I did: take a tour of the south. This is where the problems really are - where they talk dialects, and even though your Italian is good, you don't understand it.

Q: Did she master the language?

TETRO: She learnt a bit. In this case, she agreed with Parker and we set the trip up. It was very much like Parker. We were fighting communists in those days, too, you know. It was part of the show. Two days before we were to leave, she comes down with a flu and so we had to decide what the hell we were going to do. And she says, "I'm going." And, by God, she did.

Q: Trooper.

TETRO: For the two or three days she would prepare her performance part of the show and then she'd go to bed. By about the third day, she was beginning to get into it. We even had evening sessions to recap what went on during the day and what have you. We often, in this case in Sicily, had a communist demonstration against Mrs. Luce. Parker was learning to speak the language and took lessons. And when we took him down to one place in particular, not far from where the people were, after he'd said something to the crowd - we almost managed the crowd - this was a managed operation - they got up and said, "Vivono Stati Uniti." Long live the United States. And by the third time they chant this, Parker hears it, and leaps out to the microphone, "Viva Italia." We had a great time.

With Luce now, I get from OFAR Washington we're setting up the service.

Q: So this is in '54?

TETRO: Yes. No, that was '53. Prior to that, Fred Rossiter wrote to me and said he would like me to come back to head up the commodity area of OFAR. And I immediately wrote back that Joe Becker is there. Joe Becker is an old friend of mine. We used to square dance together. And he writes a letter that says: Joe has agreed that you should do it. He's going to be doing something else. You could already see the Democrats and Republicans debacle. Mind you, I'm a Democrat from way back. Socialist first. Anyway, he says come back. And this is when Clare Boothe Luce calls me over, with her beautiful smile, gentle pat on the shoulder, "Bob, I would like to have you stay here." I'm not sure what would have happened had I done so.

But when I got back to Washington, again, temporary housing, it became pretty clear that Fred can't deliver on this commodity job. "Got a problem, Bob; why don't you take a little leave?" So we took home leave and went up to New England. Clayton Whipple was then the deputy under Reed. I get back to Washington and Doug Crawford says- I had gone to see Doug Crawford and asked what can you get me. And he said, well, I've forgotten the guy's name, but at that point a bachelor attaché was designated for Buenos Aires, but

Doug hadn't sent it across to State for approval yet. And he said, "You know what, maybe Clayton would let you on that post." Clayton never quite knew what my contacts were because I had some on the Republican side, too. I had excellent contacts on the outside of our organization. I went in to see Clayton and said, I'm back, what am I going to do with this thing? I had BA on the back of my mind. And we talked. And he said, "Why don't you go back to Rome?" One of the reasons I had gotten pushed out of Rome was two people were to go there - one to take the attaché job and other to take AID in a split up which I didn't agree with anyway. So they're there. So I say, Clayton, "Those jobs are off. I understand there's an opening in Buenos Aires that might be interesting." "Great idea. Why don't you do that." Thank you very much and I close the door and left. I run to Doug Crawford, get it over there fast and approved.

Q: Really. So you're off to Buenos Aires?

TETRO: So off to Buenos Aires.

Q: And how did that compare with Rome?

TETRO: Piece of cake.

Q: Piece of cake compared to Rome?

TETRO: Yes. The business community in Buenos Aires were basically Italian.

Q: Really?

TETRO: I could talk Italian. Buenos Aires is a cosmopolitan city. You go to dinner parties and people were Italian, German, English, French. And some of the people would talk them all. The upper crust in BA is really something. They never did understand Peron. So we're safely in BA now.

Q: Is Peron there? Is he in charge?

TETRO: Evita died the year before. Peron is still in charge. I'd forgotten that Henderson, my predecessor was there. He had a fantastic letter system collection that he'd worked up. He was an old statistician and the files- As you move from one post to another, you left the new attaché with the files to see what your predecessor had been doing. The first thing you've got to do at least as well as he did. And in this case my predecessor was excellent. And I had some pretty good people to work with. A Johns Hopkins Iowa economist. The economic counselor was a man by the name of Sandiford who later became assistant secretary, political consular. The living in Buenos Aires, that was the only place I wasn't screaming at my wife all the time about spending money. The cost of living- Well, we got our pay in local currencies at the "black market" rate which made it easy. It was something like three times what the official rate was. And we fell into a lovely place in Olivos, one of the suburbs where I took the train to work, the subway. The kids took it to school.

In early '55 one of the information guys there who had - several of the homes had swimming pools near two clubs. We belonged to two. I played golf. Two golf courses. I belonged to both of them. One I played golf, the other was swimming for kids and other club affairs. In early '55, the information guy who was going to leave had one of these places with a pool and we put our dibs down to have that when he left. About this time, I got a letter from Gwynn Garnett who has now become the administrator.

Q: And he's the second administrator?

TETRO: Or third. I think third. But when Gwynn was pumping up the PL480 idea, he came by Rome. And I, apparently, was one of the few people that encouraged him in this idea. I said, look, you've got these surplus commodities; use them. That's basically what it is. He remembered that.

Q: He was the idea generator of PL480?

TETRO: He was the father of PL480. We had put into effect one of the early uses of these commodities in Italy. We had something to demonstrate you could do it. He remembered this, remembered my support and he said why don't you come back to this important position in Washington. And I sit down and write a two-page letter. I was a left-wing Democrat and I don't want to be - I didn't say that part. I told him the family was very happy here. There were in school, in schools and were doing great.

The family is doing very well; I just didn't want to move again.

And about a month later, Ioanes comes tearing down. He's deputy deputy. "What the hell is your problem? We like you here." Besides the PL480 assistant administrator job is open. This is what I thought Gwynn wanted me to do, that I thought I could have done but didn't want. But Ray said, "Oh, no, no, no. He wants you to be in charge of the attaché service and the international affairs part," - Fred Rossiter's job. And I said, what about Fred? Well, poor Fred had gotten so stressed out fighting these various things embodied in the operation, he had practically gone into the john here on the fifth floor and damn near bled to death with an ulcer-

Q: Oh, my god.

TETRO: -and was told to get out of the job. This, for me, old "One World" Wilkie - ideal. International Affairs, one world, United Nations is in business. Great. Attachés, I love 'em. And I think I know how to work and autowork. Perfect. I never realized there was going to be bureaucratic infighting still developing. So I'm back as assistant administrator and we have a ball with people who do a lot of things in our shop. One of our basic approaches was to try and get clearly that the attaché ran the attaché office. And that instructions to that attaché - work performance instructions - cleared through our office. We didn't want every Tom, Dick and Harry at FAS calling attachés and telling them what to do, otherwise you had chaos.

Our biggest fight in this respect was over there with Gordon Fraser who had now come in as assistant administrator, and Pat O'Leary and some guys. They had a good shot. They had some good people. Little by little they did understand that they had to cleared it with us. We had our own area office for each area of the world. We also had a problem of raiding attachés. What is a description of the job; how do you handle it. And here we lean on the Foreign Service approach. We also had a problem of how do you get along with State with this new arrangement. And here we had trouble, also, with some of these characters that wanted to push embassies around. And our answer to this one says clearly, one problem you've got when push comes to shove is that the top dog in an embassy is the ambassador. Whether you like it or, he can tell you what to do; he can fire you if he wants to. We had a few cases where he did. A few cases, by the way, where we agreed with the ambassador.

So this is how I get back there. I don't get to be administrator. In between, we go through the other part of that job, which is that as assistant administrator, I was going to FAO meetings. I was going to UN meetings in New York. I was on a special committee on commodity arrangements that met twice a year, once in New York and once in Geneva. Once we met in the Karachi Building. I had quite a mess of stuff going on the FAO and the commodity fields. Because of my work in BAE, I'm a commodity expert. In many cases I knew more about commodities than the specialists we had in OFAR or FAS. Used to and still do.

Working arrangements were worked out with Gordon Fraser and even with Pat O'Leary when he came over here. Our problem was Art Minor. Minor had a heart as big as gold for certain things. He wanted everything done his way. So we were constantly fighting with him. He was good on language, he was good on family problems. Everything else, he wanted to be the lead guy. He was the pettiest one. And we said, you know, we've got ideas, too. He said to one of the market development people, "why is this guy always calling the shots? And we had a small staff meeting where the administrators and the bureau assistants in BAE, I was constantly fighting with them. A couple times Garnett said, "Okay, okay, I'll decide." But that part was the only problem.

Now we come to '61. And you may recall my comments on Al Smith; they come up now. He was another Catholic. I'm not Catholic by the way. My father was the only Tetro in the whole bloody family. All the rest of the family is Catholic. I've been to more masses than most Catholics between Italy and- Anyway, here's Jack Kennedy. I had been a socialist. Wilkie was my only Republican vote. But from '32 on, I voted for Democrats. Now here's Jack. So I get work with the Democrats including Cochrane.

Q: Politically, you were on his campaign, working on his campaign?

TETRO: They had an office uptown. I would often go after-hours when I was at FAS. They would send me papers if they wanted things filled in and I'd do it. Galbraith and Cochrane and I were very close. Jimmy Patton, head of the Farmer's Union and Johnny Baker, his assistant and I would work very closely on some of these international

programs. So I had a background base there. So Kennedy squeaks through. I met Lawrence out of a lot with this so I talked with him. Lawrence is a guy that I went to find after I had talked with Alice about going to Rome. And I said, look, what do you think? And the first question was, "Do you like to drink?" Oh, my god. I never even thought much about it. Yes. I guess so. "You'll do great." And he said, "In five years, you'll be head of the service." What prophecy.

Q: Really?

TETRO: We then got Freeman as the secretary. I'm interviewed.

Q: Now why is it that you were interviewed? Is your name put forward by yourself or by-

TETRO: Jim Patton and Johnny Baker. Ioanes they didn't want, and he was afraid I was going to get it.

Q: He was the next in line.

TETRO: We had Max Myers. Max is a great guy and a wonderful friend. But he had no background in the work at all. He just kind of sat by and signed papers. So he was obviously going to go out, but who was going to come in? This is where Jim Patton and Johnny Baker finally arranged it. I became administrator. So we got John Duncan coming up from Georgia to be assistant secretary. If you think Max Myers didn't know what was going on, this guy- Now Bob, explain it to me again, just how do these things work? About the third time you get that, you're in trouble.

And Ioanes, all this time, is feeding Duncan about what a shit I am, which he did very successfully. So one day when I'm on my way to another trip to Rome at 7 o'clock at night on a lousy flying night, I'm called to Duncan's office and he says, "While you're over there, why don't you find yourself a job? I don't want you anymore here." So I stood up and started to go around the desk. He thought I was going to hit him. All I wanted to do is shake his hand and say thank you. Well, it wasn't quite that easy.

Q: It was all internal politicking by Ioanes to-

TETRO: To get me out.

Q: What was his agenda?

TETRO: He wanted the job and he got it. We had a guy named Eskildsen at the time who would have been my choice. But Eski needed a bit more training, but we were lucky because he got leukemia and died a year or two later anyway. But Dorothy Jacobson called me over when she heard about this. Freeman never said anything to her about it. He and Duncan had worked it out. And she said "Bob, what the hell do we do?" I said, you've got no choice. The only guy who's able to cross the field is Ioanes. Whether you like it or not, you're stuck with him. And she was. And she said, "What do are going to do

with you?" Charlie Murphy, the undersecretary, was another guy I'd talked with. "What would you like to do, Bob?" because he was on my side against Duncan. And I said, you know, I think New Zealand. He asked, "What do you mean?" I said, I want to get as far away from Washington as I can. He laughed. He said, "You'll be back here pretty soon. Seriously, what do you want to do?" And I said-

We're getting closer to what you want to know about. I go five miles south of my hometown and get a job as backup guy for making sure machines and the ladies kept the boxes for packing toothbrushes. And this is where I learned a lot about some parts of administration. But I had a ball there. It was kind of heavy work, but after working two years in the woods, I was pretty strong. It didn't bother me. I even ran upstairs with the boxes on my shoulders. In this process I saw the same toothbrush coming down, going into different boxes. A prophylactic brush. You could get it at Liggett's for 50% less.

But anyway, I was doing reasonably well there and I got a promotion. From thirteen bucks a week, I went up to fifteen. The head of the department, a man called Doc Lindsay, who I call my first surrogate father - I had three of them in my career - gave me a call on one Roosevelt's programs under the Bankhead-Jones Act. Would I like to be an assistant to the extension service marketing people. What does it pay? Twenty-five bucks a week.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

TETRO: It paid ten bucks more than I make. So I'm rich. And I get to work with two interesting men, one with a master's degree from Penn State, the other from Iowa. Two different types. The Penn State guy: very outgoing. The Iowa man had the most intricate filing system I think I've ever seen. I learned from each of these guys. There was something to learn in that working process. But Bankhead-Jones was aimed to kick you out of there. How do you do that? You get your master's degree using this process. And I set my course work up so that I could do it at the same time. And a month before I got my degree, the secretary of the extension service suddenly realized that I had been going to classes on his time. And he would have made a hell of a furor about this except, at this point, what can you do about it. And I got my master's degree in '37. And in that next process was the second dip of the depression curve. The big dip was '32. There was a little bit of climb back to '37 and then bang, out it went again. It was not easy.

But I had about decided to get out of there by going to a land economics operation that was headquartered in New Haven for New England. But a supervisor out of Philadelphia, a major officer of the USDA and a friend of mine was the head of the New Haven office - a classmate who offered me a job as a P1, about 2,000 bucks. I'd get more money. And I had already begun the paper work on this one when I got a letter from the dairy section of USDA.

There was another classmate named Herb Forest who apparently had put my name up. I don't know exactly what went on there. I never did know. Somebody else said that the head of the statistical pool thought I was a good-looking kid and maybe she could seduce

me if she got me down there. Of course, I thought the better of the story. She never did though.

Q: Did you give her the opportunity?

TETRO: It never crossed my mind. But I got an offer from them as a P2 - 2,600. Fifty bucks a week - that was big money. And Salter, the man who had offered to me the P1 understood. I have a lot of stories on the philosophical side, by the way, and also on the research side that leads me into a byway via BAE. Anyway, I get to Washington in 1939 and get into the analysis side, the write-up side for marketing agreements. This is what the dairy section did in those days. We had field men who did the field work. Then we had analyst types. For a few months, they had me on research. And these were the days of monopolistic pricing. And a guy at Harvard put out a book on this approach.

I was there in January '39. Toward the late spring, I came up with a paper that had to do with how you price milk that comes into a market from out of the market, milk in the market and set prices. But what do you do when you have to bring milk from the outside? And I ran that whole process through with this Harvard study approach to all your curves and costs have you. But when I get down to the out-of-market sales, I'd say that this doesn't fit any category. It is subject is to bargain between the outsiders and the insiders. And I got into this later in a different context which I'll probably forget before I get there.

However, that didn't interest too many people, that study. And they thought they needed me to do something else. What was I going to do now? I'm going to do the backup work for setting up agreements in markets. This is a pretty easy approach to life. But once you get out of it obviously the kind of price information you want, you develop what you've got, and there's a tremendous amount of statistical material already available. So you have the statistical pool and you put down the heading and the citings for the kind of tables you want. They put all the numbers in and then you write the reason you're going into the market.

And I had a wonderful Irishman from the Connecticut area whose approach to this was very simple. He was my boss, by the way, and I learned a lot about writing from him. I thought I was writer before. He says, we want to find trouble in the country. That simply means you need to find a producer group, a cooperative hopefully, that will say, we don't like the prices we're getting. Then you move in and you hold a hearing, and in comes this wonderful publication I develop which says with all this trouble, here is these data and now we can take this approach to develop an agreement along the following lines for these kinds of prices.

Well, one of my first was New Orleans, Louisiana. By the way, I was already having breathing trouble in Washington, coming from New England. The 1st of July, 1939, I got orders to go down to Louisiana where I'm to get some back local price information that we didn't have. I meet an interesting man who was sort of the executive of the coop for the New Orleans market at that time. And he takes me out to various places where milk is coming from the New Orleans market. And we sit down and he says, "This is Robert

Tetro from the dairy section of the Washington. He wants to know what you get for your milk. Can you show him your slips?" So these guys all trot up and I take their slips and I put them down. This is pretty raw data. But you get enough raw data from enough places and you've got a base for your first pricing approach. You could also use it in negotiations.

You go back to Washington after a couple of weeks down there and you develop the order. Now you go back to New Orleans for hearings with both producers and distributors, and what they think of your proposal. These were always held at night. Then you don't have anything to do until the next night. So, these were the good old days in New Orleans. I would go back to my hotel, not change my clothes exactly, but what I would do, I'd take all the money out of my pockets except for five bucks - big money in those days - which I'd put in about three different pockets, then I'd go back the French Quarter to play games with the B-girls. And they also had some gambling. I liked blackjack in those days. I like card playing. I played bridge for a long time and mastered it. But anyway, this so-called 21 game, you know how it works. I did reasonably well. But I had one particular part where I would struck with what was going on, knew it was going to be close because I was holding a twenty. The dealer comes up and he hits a 16 - I'm well ahead of him - and then, believe it or not, he takes another card and you have 21. Amazing, you know. However, he made one mistake. He was reaching for my money before he turned the card over. So I cashed in the rest of my chips.

I had one other experience where I liked to shoot crap. Nice games. And these I think were pretty honest. It's you against the house and you and everybody against the house. And my game there - I don't know whether you've played this very much. If you're on a run, you may double, but then you pull back your original and see how far you go. Well, there was a great, big lady standing in the back of me. And I went five times. And I was pulling my money out all the time. This lady was betting that I was going to go 6. And I crapped. I thought she'd kill me. That was a fascinating part of the whole process.

Coming back to this guy Garner, we had one basic disagreement with the coop. And out-of-market cream, you don't have a sanitary code that permits you to keep it out. So if you get your price too high, you're going to suck in this milk from all over the Midwest. Oh, I'll take care of that. Well, his approach to it was to get on a train and dump it. He was quite a character.

I'm in the dairy section, I wrote the New Orleans agreement. I wrote an agreement for Louisville, I wrote the original in Washington. I'm working on a revision of the order for New York. And my original boss had moved up the ladder - this is the old surplus market here - and he brought - Anyway, I had a very nice producer/distributor couple who came down with a problem which had to be resolved with the boss. Here is this character - I could tell you a long story about him, but I won't bore you - I go in to see him. And he has his shoes off with his feet up on the desk and he's picking his nose with this lady. And he had gotten into a lot of other things that I didn't like at all. And I said, I've got to get to hell out of here.

About this time, a man with whom I had worked at Amherst, called me from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics where he was in farm management. He had moved up. And in 1940 - this is back end history of USDA - an approach to how you handle all agricultural programs across the country was set up with state and local planning operations. In addition, they wanted for every major division to have a writer/editor type who would work with the division of information to upgrade the publications of that unit. When I was getting my master's, while I working for these two guys back at Amherst, we put out monthly farm economics facts and I also did the writing for that and the editing for the other stuff coming out. I nearly flunked English my freshman year. I saw to it that I took English and I kept it as a minor through graduate school. But in the process I learned to write.

So, I'm still fooling around at the bottom of the depression, and I took a course with the Newspaper Institute of America. I had great ideas about being a journalist. I got a certificate in writing, but that didn't get you a job in writing. The competition at the bottom of the depression was fantastic. However, in this process, I learned how to write and rewrite. Going back to Sullivan, one of the first pieces of paper I gave him when I was working under him, I had used all of my beautiful English and all of these fancy phrases and what have you, to write something. He comes back, looked at it for 15, 20 minutes and asks, "Bob, what the hell are you trying to say?" And then he taught me to get down to the nitty gritty. Be clear in what you're doing, which a lot of people don't do.

Okay. I've got this job with farm management, and here I come to my second surrogate father, Sherm Johnson. He's the head of that Department. A South Dakota who was great.

Q: And these offices are in-

TETRO: He is with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

Q: And where are they located?

TETRO: This is part of the history that I told you about had been a problem. The office of Foreign Agricultural Relations originally was a division in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics back in the '20s. A man named Leslie Wheeler - you'll find that in the notes I gave you - to get to the office of the secretary for foreign agricultural relations. This, as I said, originally was a unit - the old BAE. The BAE was set up back in the early - shortly after World War I. These history notes you will find; you would need those. My part in this was that I was a part of it. I was in this bureau under an excellent division chief and some very interesting people in a bureaucracy which got to be very competitive.

I am doing quite a bit of writing at this time, too, within the bureau itself. The editing and everything but these I cleared with division of information. I was in the process of making very close relationships with people down there. The division, and each technical division, like farm management was then supposed to be under the direction of an overall state and local planning unit. This comes up because the state and local planning unit was created under planning, and the man who later went to OFAR, Henderson, was in the

state and local planning unit and his first approach to how do we manage all of the department programs, either all department programs, the AAA and the farm security and what have you, this was one unit and the bureau was supposed to handle that. We were to provide the technical expertise. But how do you approach the whole show of planning? [] worked out my number one which later was cited by one Congressman as a communist threat. It had many of the aspects of dictatorship.

Well, as the technical unit between them, and AAA, and the soil conservation service, and the Forest Service, we had problems. We had specialists in each one of these areas whose job it was to see that this thing was technically correct. Fire management had some of the best. So now I've moved up slightly from being a writer. I'm an assistant to the division head to oversee some of these other things, including this crap - the bureau. The fight got so bad that a special committee- (end of tape)

End of interview