

GEORGE M. BARBIS

Interviewed by: Raymond C. Ewing

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[Note: This interview has not been edited by Mr. Barbis]

Q: Today is October 8, 1996. This is the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program conducting an interview with George M. Barbis on his Foreign Service career and my name is Raymond C. Ewing. George, it is good to have you here this morning.

BARBIS: Thank you, Ray. I am happy to be here. It has been a long effort to arrive at this point.

Q: Well, we went through a lot of rain and traffic and finding directions. And, of course, we have had several conversations over some weeks and maybe even months. George, I notice that you joined the Foreign Service in 1953. You finished undergraduate work at the University of California in 1950 and then you were at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advance International Studies for a master's degree. Why don't you start back even before that and tell me a little bit about how you got interested in the Foreign Service?

BARBIS: [Well, I suppose it goes back to] Greece, during World War II. My initial professional interest, I recall, was to become a doctor.

Q: Well, how do you link that...

BARBIS: Well, the Greek war in Italy, and then the German invasion of Greece and the occupation by the Germans, and following through BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] surreptitiously what was happening in the world, and also reading the very fancy German propaganda publications which I recall more specifically had these colorful maps of the whole campaign in Russia. So, although I was isolated I was able to keep up with what was happening on the war front. So, gradually, I got it fixed in my mind that this is what I wanted to do. When I returned and was repatriated to California by the US government, the first thing I did was to register at [the University of California at] Berkeley and I put in a semester, the fall of 1945, only to be drafted in February, 1946 which interrupted my studies for a year while I served in the US Army [until 1947].

Q: Let me interrupt you at that point to clarify a couple of things up to then. You were not born in Greece?

BARBIS: No, I was born in California [on July 8, 1926]. My two brothers [were also born in California].

Q: And you went to Greece... [static]

BARBIS: [Static]... put them in school there a year or two and we will see. And that is what we did. My older brother and I started at Athens college, a Greek-American institution, founded by Greeks who had a connection with America and then supported with funds from the United States to a great extent.

Q: Most of the instruction was in English?

BARBIS: It started at the fourth grade, as I recall, and then went through seven grades of high school, middle school, and by the time you were a freshman or sophomore you were expected to be almost bilingual in both languages. [Static] So the faculty was both American... [static]...vice president, to give it the binational character.

Q: You were in Athens throughout the war?

BARBIS: The Greek war broke out in October, 1940, when the Italians invaded through Albania, and our school, which was outside of Athens ...[static]... mountain looking down on a valley was made into a hospital. So, we all went to our families. I had been a boarder. By that time my older brother had returned to the United States with my father who came and, I guess, decided that we were not going to move permanently to Greece, we would return to the United States. Why we didn't all return together, I don't know. My guess is, and I regret I never discussed it with my father, that my mother was not yet an American citizen and he had to come home and get all her papers for reentry. I am not sure we had green cards in those days, or at least when she came to the United States in 1924.

My mother had family in a little town outside of Corinth called Xylokastron, "wooden castle," half way between Corinth and Patras on the northern coast of Peloponnesia. So, my mother and younger brother and I moved there where we had relatives both on my mother's side and my father's who made sure that we had enough to eat even before their own family. So, although... [static] ...whenever it rained, the women would go out and collect snails which, for some reason, came out after the rain.

Q: Were you able to go to school?

BARBIS: I then switched to the local public school which was all in Greek. But, because of the situation the hours were not normal. I think we only went for a few hours in the morning. So, my education suffered somewhat. Although when ...[static] ...unlike many entering freshman, I was not required to take English ...[static] ...because my English, they felt was perfectly adequate.

Q: Maybe before we go further we can talk just a little bit about the sort of idealism you had first when you entered the Foreign Service and then what was going on in Korea and then just very briefly about how you saw the general picture in Southeast Asia as you went to your first assignment there.

BARBIS: You are going back to my teens, I guess. As I mentioned when I started thinking about what I wanted to be when I grew up, I never wanted to be a fireman, or policeman but somehow being a doctor appealed to me. But that was changed with my interest in international affairs that grew out of my wartime experiences in occupied Greece. I guess all of us in our late teens, early twenties, have a certain idealistic view of the world. I felt that the experience that I had had, which was unique-born in California of immigrant parents, and although we grew up in the Greek American Orthodox environment, that was the church that we went to and most of our family associates were like us, Greek Americans, I never considered myself Greek, nor did my brothers. We were born in America, we were Americans. And, although my parents spoke to each other in Greek, and some of that may have rubbed off on us, none of the three brothers spoke Greek when we arrived in Greece. In fact, my kid brother was only five years old, so he very quickly learned the language and was in a Greek surrounding all the time being so young. Whereas Bill and I were boarders in a Greek environment, but also an American environment, and especially in the boarding school. So, English was still very much our language. In fact, Bill had difficulty adapting to Greek and when my father came a year or year and a half later to sort of assess how things were and what we were going to do, somebody at Athens College told him that "George was doing very well but Bill is never going to learn Greek and you ought to take him back to America." And that probably had something to do with the final decision, too.

The point I am trying to make is that at that period in my life, and subsequently, I always did have ideals about fairness and justice, and I had seen a lot of it those first years under occupation in Greece. There were pictures in the newspapers of children with bloated stomachs, corpses of people who had died in the streets from hunger or cold being collected every morning. And, also, coming back to America this was the country of affluence, great comfort and great opportunities. I guess I never lost my attachment to America. In fact, at one time Greece was under a dictator when I was there. His name strangely enough was Metaxas, the name of the spokesperson for the NRA. One day he visited Athens College. He visited my particular classroom. He was a short man with a mustache, a colonel when he became dictator. He walked and talked to each student in our class and asked your name and where you were from, etc. I gave him my name and told him I was born in America. He asked where my parents were born and I told him in Greece. "Then," he said, "You are Greek." Then he said, "What did you say your name was?" I said, "Barbar." He said, "That's not your Greek name. What is your Greek name?" So, I gave him my father's family name, which he cut to "Barbis," or the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] guy at Ellis Island cut it to "Barbis." But, I resented that because I didn't consider myself Greek. In later years I have a special feeling for Greece and Greek civilization, etc. but I am certainly as American as anybody else born in this country.

Q: You experienced Greece at a very difficult time and then you were in Korea during an immediate post-war period and you saw some difficult times in Tehran.

BARBIS: Well, nationalism was asserting itself in Iran for the first time and that led to the nationalization of the oil fields and evicting the British who had dominated or had great influence in Iran over the centuries.

Q: Did you feel in that period of the '50s and early '60s that the United States was the world leader? That we really had a responsibility to try to deal with some of these grave problems that were very apparent?

BARBIS: You have put it better than I was trying to. Very much so, a certain pride in fact. After Greece was liberated and the American legation and then later the embassy returned to Athens, there was also a UN Relief and Rehabilitation [UNRRA] which came in to distribute food and clothing and modest economic assistance. I got a job working with them [in 1945], most of them being Americans. In fact, I still remember the name of the man that I was under, I had a clerical kind of job running the mail room and distributing correspondence and communications throughout the mission. Joe Van Bleck was his name. That gave me a certain feeling of being part of my country again and I guess had some influence too in wanting to go into the Foreign Service.

Q: This would have been about 1944?

BARBIS: Yes, September, 1944. The British came back and Greece was thrown into a civil war, the nationalists versus the communists. We moved from Xylokastron to Athens. We were on the line that separated the communists from the British, because the Greek government didn't have many resources and it was the British under Brigadier Scoby, who sort of preserved Greece's independence. Obviously I sided with the non-communists and of course they were the ones that the US and Britain were supporting. So, I lived through that civil war at its bloodiest.

Q: Were you in school then, too?

BARBIS: No, at that time everything had come to a standstill. Very soon after the occupation of Greece, especially in the German occupied parts of it, two resistance movements developed. One, was, as it turned out, communist directed and controlled, but a lot of people who were not communists joined that group. A second group was sort of royalist and always was the smaller group and was very much anti-communist. Many Greeks looked ahead, what's going to happen after the war. Everybody was confident the Allies were going to win it. That this occupation would end and the Germans would be gone. Although, the early years, of course, the news was never encouraging, as we saw country after country falling to the Germans and on the eastern front, city after city falling to the Germans, until the Russian winter and the Soviet determination to defend themselves won out. Anyhow, very soon it became apparent, especially to the ordinary Greek, that the communists were really looking ahead because we kept getting stories of how in the mountains, where the Germans didn't have any presence, guerilla bands were forming and most of them under the nationalist liberation movement, which was the communist controlled one. They started eliminating teachers, doctors, lawyers, because even in these small villages you had professional people like that. In fact, a second cousin of my father who was a doctor and used to go from village to village on a horse, suddenly never came back once. It was later discovered they had killed him. Not because he posed any kind of threat at the time to them, but because they were looking ahead and he obviously would mobilize people against them when things came back to normal. After the Germans were defeated and withdrew from Greece, these groups started fighting each other, the nationalists and the communists. The communists really controlled all but one square mile of Athens. It was only because of the British effort, which we supported...we had a special unit of Greek Americans who spoke Greek, etc., who were parachutists and had jumped in northern Greece and participated in forcing the Germans out. Some of them stayed on and participated in some of the UN activities of supervising elections and things like that. I guess, if I had been here and never gone to Greece, I might have been in that group because I would have been eligible for the draft before the war was over.

Q: But at the time you were working in the mail room where there were few Americans around?

BARBIS: This was before that because when this civil war was going on nobody had come back except this British military force that gradually was able to extend the perimeter and then forced an armistice and then negotiated an agreement whereby the communists laid down their arms. The civil war was resumed, however, several years later when we did get involved and played a major role through General Van Fleet, who headed our military mission, in assisting the Greek military, which had been rebuilt by then. But all this happened some years later.

Q: Then you were back in California?

BARBIS: Yes.

Q: You entered the University of California, Berkeley in the fall of 1945, when did you actually return to California?

BARBIS: I returned [to Berkeley] in February, 1947 [after discharge from the Army].

Q: When did you get back to California from Greece?

BARBIS: Oh. I guess it was ...[static] ...the first thing I did on returning to California was to... [static] ...but because I had registered already, I got an automatic six month deferral.

Q: You registered when you returned?

BARBIS: One of the first things I did was go register at the university because I had already lost...by that point I was 19 years old, so I was...although everybody else, all the veterans were hitting the university campuses at that time, so I was not by any means older than most.

Q: When you were drafted and went into the army, where was your service?

BARBIS: Well, I was inducted at Camp Beal, outside of Sacramento and then went to Fort Ord, [California], but was shipped to Fort Lewis in Washington state for my basic training. When I completed basic [training], I was offered the opportunity to go to OCS [Officer's Candidate School] at Virginia, Fort Belvoir, to get a commission in the engineers. I asked them [if I accepted] what my [full] obligation was. They told me I would have to sign on for two or three years, so I turned it down. [Static] ...anyone who had had a semester of college before he entered the service could leave the service with honorable discharge after 12 months and I left after 12 months and nine days. I went right back to Cal and stayed through the spring of 1950. I actually completed my AB [bachelor's degree] in January but stayed on for a semester in graduate school and then moved to the School of Advanced International Studies [SAIS] in Washington, DC, which had just become affiliated with Johns Hopkins. I spent a year and a summer at SAIS and earned my masters degree.

While I was a student in Berkeley, I guess it was during my senior year, I took the [written] Foreign Service exam and did not pass. So I was determined to try to get in. I didn't take the exam again and I don't know why, but at SAIS I was studying Turkish and my Turkish teacher was an official... [static] ... a wonderful man and this being the time of the Korean war, the Department of Commerce had launched a new program and were recruiting madly young people just out of college to send out as, what they called, requirement officers to report back on the needs of the host countries for certain metals. They had a job like that in Iran and Karim introduced me, and I don't remember the details but I was recruited as a [Foreign Service] Staff officer, [pay grade] FSS-11.

Q: That was the Department of Commerce or Department of State?

BARBIS: Well, although it was the Department of Commerce who made the selection, it was the Department of State that recruited me. I went to Tehran as an economics officer (requirements). At that time the Iranians had just nationalized their oil industry. I was there when they booted the British out. My main job was to discuss and try to determine production plans or schedules and the tin plate requirements for making barrels to store the crude oil. Gradually I expanded beyond that into other economic/commercial activities in the economics section and after my first eight or nine months the political section started asking for my services. I remember assisting the biographic officer and doing some bios. At one point Ambassador Loy Henderson, Mr. Foreign Service, sent me along with another young officer, Lou Hoffacker, who was a consular officer, on a road trip to Baghdad to scout it out as a possible evacuation route. We had experienced the evacuation of the British, many of whom had gone by road and so we thought if we were forced to do the same (I think this was just prudent planning, there was nothing to indicate that we would be thrown out too), we wanted to know if it were feasible to move out with families. That was quite an interesting exercise.

Q: How long did it take you?

BARBIS: [Static] ...Lou and I did the driving. His wife, Connie, was with us. I remember we stopped at an old caravan [way station], which was about halfway. I remember I didn't get much sleep because the bed was just loaded with lice and fleas, etc. And I also remember as we approached Baghdad and started seeing houses and residential areas, on the corner of a street there was a Coca Cola stand and at that point we were very thirsty and very hot, with no air conditioning in the car, so stopped for a drink. We stayed at a nice hotel and were entertained by David Newsom, who was I think at that time, although a career Foreign Service officer, the USIA [U.S. Information Agency] man in Baghdad.

Q: So, you were in Tehran about two years all together?

BARBIS: No. While I was in Tehran I took the written Foreign Service exam again. That must have been the fall of 1952.

Q: And the exam was still 3 ½ days?

BARBIS: Yes and to my surprise I passed it. I still had about six months or more to go on my tour, which was a two year assignment. Also, the first RIFs [reduction in force] had been put into action and one of the first [activities reduced] were the traveling oral panels, [especially those going] overseas. There was to have been a panel in Cairo, and although I would have had to get to Cairo on my own, that wasn't an unreasonable burden. But, since they were only giving orals at that point in Washington I would have to go from Tehran to Washington at my own expense and return to Tehran at my own expense. So, I asked Ambassador Henderson for his advice. He confirmed what I was inclined to do anyhow, which was to... [static] ... So, with his encouragement and confirmation that I was thinking along the right lines, I must have borrowed some money. An Air France [flight] took me from Tehran to Beirut to Paris, [then I took the] boat-train to Le Havre, and then the SS France [across the Atlantic]. I was in steerage class, but still it was a French liner with excellent cuisine and I think all of that cost me a little over \$500.

Q: All the way from Tehran to New York?

BARBIS: To New York and then by train to Washington, DC. I took my orals in the morning. I remember there used to be a hotel on F Street, not a very plush hotel but adequate, and I had a room at the very top. I had gone back to the hotel after the oral, I don't remember how long the oral was, probably a couple of hours. While I was there, reading or resting, I got a phone call that afternoon from the chairman of my panel who told me he had an old friend of mine with him, Homer Davis, who had been president of Athens College, and had been very glad to tell him one of his students had passed the oral and he congratulated me. So, the next day I got in touch with Ed Mulcahy, who was the personnel officer for the Near East, and Ed said he had good news and bad news. The good news is I had passed my oral. I said, "Yes, I know, Dr. Burns called me." He said, "The bad news is you were RIFed from the Foreign Service Staff [FSS] status that you had and we can't send your name to the Senate for confirmation as having passed the oral because they are going to ask us how come we are firing people and hiring people, and in this case the same person." So, Ed said, "Do you have any leave time?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Stick around, don't go back to Tehran and certainly don't go to California. Let me see what I can figure out."

Well, [in May 1953], after a few days he came up with a brilliant idea which saved my skin and also set a precedent for other appointments. He said, "We are going to appoint you as an FSR-6 [Foreign Service Reserve officer]." Then the problem was to find a post to assign me to where I wouldn't incur an additional expense to get there. [According to Department regulations, I was in Tehran, so the] Department would only [pay the equivalent of moving] me from Tehran to whatever [the next] post was. First they came up with Morocco and it turned out that would have cost me a few hundred dollars because Tehran-Rabat was a lot less than Washington, DC-Rabat. Then they came up with Hanoi and that too involved a certain differential [between Tehran to Hanoi and Washington to Hanoi]. Finally they came up with Pusan, Korea where the difference was \$50 and I cheerfully wrote out the check to Pan American Airways. And that is how I started my Foreign Service career, as a Reserve officer as opposed to a Foreign Service officer, and went to Korea in August, 1953. [By the way, I received my commission as a Foreign Service officer in June 1954.]

Q: Now, remind me, the embassy was in Pusan?

BARBIS: The embassy was in Pusan as a result of the North Korean march down through Seoul and Taegu [and] the difficult days of the Pusan perimeter. But, by the time I was [traveling] there, the war was winding down. We were deep in negotiation for the armistice and in fact those negotiations were concluded before I got there. [The truce was formalized in July 1953.] The Korean government had moved to Seoul and the embassy was gradually moving [back]. So, I only spent one night in Pusan and then took the train in the morning and went to Seoul.

One of the first things I remember is that I had a marvelous introduction. There were two men there, who became dear friends, Bob Brown and Charlie Davis, with USIA. They were information officers. Arthur Dean had just arrived in country with Kenneth Young to make the final arrangements for the demilitarized zone and where the military armistice commission would be housed in Panmunjom. Charlie, as press attaché ½, had a jeep, so the two of us and the VOA [Voice of America] correspondent, Paul Garvey, drove to Panmunjom and we were there when Arthur Dean and Ken Young arrived. So, that was quite an introduction for me on my first weekend in Korea to be exposed to what was the main issue at the time.

Q: And it still is the main issue today, the relations between the two Koreas.

BARBIS: [Static] ... which meant I did a lot of WTDs, (World Trade Directories), which we no longer do. This gave me an opportunity to meet a lot of Koreans in the business community, go to Rotary [Club] and things like that. But, a few months later, Vincent Brown, who had been an economic/political officer, a special slot formerly housed in the political section, and with whom Roy Haverkamp and I shared a house, was transferred. I stepped into Vincent's job, which meant I started doing a lot more political work than commercial work. I kept my desk down in the economic section but more and more I did political reports, which gave me a lot more satisfaction and was really what I was interested in. I had majored in international relations, not economics, although I had a basic education in economics.

Q: In this period in the Republic of Korea, the early period after the armistice, the economic conditions were pretty difficult. Syngman Rhee was the president and was pretty well in control, I guess, politically.

BARBIS: Very much so.

Q: And relations with the United States were pretty important?

BARBIS: Very important, very close, but not without tensions. My first ambassador was Ellis O. Briggs, a man of the old school, a model for many of us. He was a wonderful guy. He introduced us all to martinis which he adored. He was very sharp, very good with Rhee, very firm with Rhee, with whom we had had some very serious disagreements during the armistice negotiations because he didn't want to have anything to do with that. We had to bring all kinds of pressures. I wasn't there for that but I read about it. So, although the relationship was very close, they were very dependent on us and they knew it.

We had a major economic reconstruction program. We called it the office of the economic coordinator because [it wasn't part of the embassy, but was under the United Nations commander in chief]. I had a wonderful director of that... [static] ...wonderful experience for me because here was a case where the country team, which was a new concept at that point I think, really worked very closely. And because of the fact Korea had just been through this terrible war, informality was the rule of the game. Officers, like myself, third secretaries, frequently dealt with [minister-level officials]. The chief of staff of the ROK [Republic of Korea] army was a frequent guest at our house because Roy Haverkamp, with whom I shared the house, had been detailed to USIA as a motion picture officer and one of his duties was to visit military units and show them USIS movies, etc. [Static] ...ROK army leadership. The chief of staff, as I recall, wasn't much older than us. We were in our mid-late twenties and he was probably in his late thirties. So, we had a very informal relationship with many Koreans like him. And, within the embassy it was a very closely knit group, and to this day many of us from that period are still the closest of friends.

Q: I remember a little bit later, it must have been about 1960, perhaps, Syngman Rhee was deposed. Was that opposition beginning to build when you were there?

BARBIS: It was starting to build. Rhee, of course, was [the] George Washington of Korea. He had fought in Geneva after World War I for the independence of Korea. Parenthetically, I heard something last night watching PBS [Public Broadcasting System] that I may have known but certainly had forgotten and that is that [a documentary about Theodore Roosevelt] gave the green light to the Japanese to occupy Korea as part of his effort to stabilize the situation in North East Asia between Japan and Russia.

Q: To end the Japanese-Russian war.

BARBIS: Right, and then he won the Nobel prize for his role. But that kind of made an impression on me last night. I had admired TR as one of the great presidents and never would have thought he would have done something like that. He did it for strategic national interest reasons. Anyhow, that is history and I won't dwell on it.

Another thing that was wonderful about that assignment was that we were on the ground [floor] regardless of our rank in the embassy or our role, in helping the Koreans build a new governmental structure.

Q: Because after the Korean War in many ways it was the first time that Korea really had a chance to develop as an independent nation because of the long period of Japanese occupation.

BARBIS: Right. And that period of Japanese occupation leaves scars to this day. Korean feelings towards the Japanese are still very strong. Maybe I am talking in too much detail here.

But, one of the proudest periods of my career was my role on the Korean desk. I was assigned to the Korean desk when I returned to Washington from Korea at the end of 1955 [and took up my duties in February 1956]. I was one of two assistant desk officers. I was given responsibility for following political/military affairs as well as domestic politics, etc. I had come out of Korea with quite a bit of knowledge about the political situation. As political/economic officer I had worked closely with the Korea labor movement because we were trying with the assistance of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] and the ICFTU [International Confederation of Trade Unions] to develop it as a democratic movement. But, I had also done quite a bit of reporting on the domestic political situation. And, I had some excellent sources. A very close friend, who was the boss of the lady who later became my wife, Mark Sherbacker, had gone to Korea as a Navy officer so he was there from the very beginning of the military government doing social work and then joined USIA and was our cultural officer. He knew everybody from Mr. Rhee down to the lowest professor at the university. Through him I met people I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet in the cultural and intellectual worlds of Korea. Through Mark I became very close to the two "Young Turks" of the liberal party, Syngman Rhee's party, and was able to do reporting that [concluded] that the liberal party was going to dominate with or without Rhee, but that also there was a movement for greater independence and greater democratization, if you will, and openness. So, I followed this closely when I was on the desk.

In December, 1957, there was a vote in the national assembly of Korea where the vote was very close but Rhee... I have forgotten the issue but it was a very important domestic issue with constitutional implications... Because he couldn't afford to lose that vote, his people with his support, came up with a crazy rationalization based on fractions and overturned the decision of the assembly and didn't let it come into effect. I had to do a memo for the Secretary, John Foster Dulles, through Walter Robertson, who was a China first type of guy and therefore very supportive of President Rhee who could do no wrong, even though Robertson would agree that at times Rhee upset us. The memo, [with] my name as drafting officer, [was cleared in] the Office of Northeast Asia Affairs [and went to Robertson, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Far East Affairs (FE)]. [It] stated that unless we react to this and make it clear that we don't agree with Mr. Rhee and that he has to pay a price for this, we will establish a precedent for the people of Korea who will take all our mouthings about democracy and liberalism as hypocrisy and we can't afford to do it. We will pay for it in the longer run. When it got to Mr. Robertson he refused to sign it because he didn't know me from Adam. He asked who this Barbis was and was told the assistant desk officer and then asked who was the desk officer and was told Sam Lane. He said, "I don't want Barbis' views, I want the views of the officer in charge." So, the memo came back to us and we rewrote it and I presume Sam's name went on it instead of mine in the final version. But, they did not change, and I give credit to Sam and to the office director, Howard Parsons, for accepting my argument and point that we have to show our displeasure over this in order not to discourage people who do have democratic aspirations.

The memo did go to Mr. Dulles and he did approve it. But, he wrote in the margins in his own handwriting, "Aren't we being a bit too severe with Rhee?" That killed the recommendations, obviously. Soon after that I left to go to Chiang Mai, my next post. The national assembly incident had occurred in December and it took some months to reach this point and I was assigned to Chiang Mai late in 1958 and actually went there the spring of 1959. Anyhow that was one of my proudest moments in the Foreign Service.

Q: Before we go on to Thailand...

BARBIS: No, this relates to that. You are saying wasn't Rhee deposed in effect in 1961. He was. There was a student revolution occasioned by the harshness of his rule as things got progressively more difficult with people rebelling in effect and expressing opposition to many of his policies. After the students had forced him to flee to Hawaii, I got a telegram from Marshall Green, who was then, I believe, the DCM [deputy chief of mission] in Seoul. Marshall had been regional policy advisor to Mr. Robertson in FE and focused on Japan and China. His office was right around from the Korean desk and whenever he had to deal with Korea he would call me over to sort of brief him and help him develop his own thoughts, etc. So, Marshall knew well what my views had been and what role I had played on the desk. So, he sent me this telegram in effect saying, "You were right, you were vindicated." It was a short telegram but I knew what he meant. I have never discussed this telegram with Marshall although years later I worked very closely with him in the bureau and I guess we will come to that later. But that ends my Korean days, other than that is where I met Pat. She arrived six months before I left and we had a romance. I left without any commitment. Pat finished her tour, came home around the world the other way, and I met her in New York. We saw "My Fair Lady," which was the hit on Broadway at the time. She worked briefly for Arthur Larson, the director of USIA, before going on home leave. I had flown to Seattle to visit her because she had been assigned to Saigon, we got married and she received a telegram the next day that if the rumor is true she had gotten married she must resign immediately.

Q: What year was that?

BARBIS: That was in 1957.

Q: I have a couple more questions about general Korean matters before we go on. Both in Seoul and on the desk in Washington in the State Department and later on you worked very closely with the Army and the Pentagon, were there sharp differences between State and Defense in that period in terms of how to handle our relationship with the government in Seoul, or were we pretty well seeing things together?

BARBIS: We were fortunate. A good part of my tour there was with Ellis O. Briggs as ambassador and CINUNC, the commander of the UN forces and also the commander of US forces, was General Maxwell Taylor. Taylor and Briggs were very close and worked very well together. On the local scene at that level there were no problems at all. Obviously there were problems between the embassy and the military command over status of forces type questions, where we would always try to be sensitive to the Korean reaction and our military colleagues were more interested in protecting the interests of the soldier. But, the main sort of standoff between State and Defense that I recall at that time was over military officers, army and navy, shooting off their mouths frequently, as we saw it, on issues of broader, specific [issues] that just didn't make sense to us from our perspective. But, I think that was a broader problem, because even now we have that kind of difficulty, although we have established a much better coordinating mechanism.

Q: In the latter part of the fifties you talked about Syngman Rhee and his response to one situation in the assembly, the other thing I guess that was occurring in that period was the economic situation. Was there much recovery taking place, or were things still pretty affected by the war damage?

BARBIS: We were making a tremendous effort through the office of the economic coordinator, which was pretty much the USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development] [office], and then there was also an agency of the UN, the UN Korean Construction Agency, UNKCA. The only visible thing that I recall was a fertilizer plant we built outside of Seoul. But, I can recall at the time I left Korea talking with my friends and colleagues who were lamenting that they will never be off our back, we will have to support this country until eternity. But we were proven wrong. We did, I think, establish the foundations which later permitted Korea to build on that and have the economic miracle they have had.

Q: But it really wasn't visible when you left?

BARBIS: When I left in 1956 it was not visible. As I said, we could point to this one concrete thing, a huge plant, but the country was still in very bad shape. There was an awful lot of reconstruction that had to be done. If I can jump ahead, I didn't return to Korea until 1980-81, when I went there with General Meyer, the chief of staff of the army, and it was a different country. We did a lot of flying around and just looking down you could see the difference. Houses with tile roofs, whereas before they had thatched roofs. Divided highways from the north down to the southeast, down to Pusan, and all over the country. New railroads and rolling stock, etc. The transformation in that 23, 24 years was just astounding.

Q: You mentioned in 1953 you were originally assigned to Pusan and by the time you got there the embassy was already in Seoul?

BARBIS: Yes. The embassy was already in Seoul and there were only a few officers who transferred up and we just had an office in Pusan. But, in Seoul we didn't have an embassy building or anything. We had taken over two compounds that had belonged to the Japanese. Compound I was where the ambassador's residence was, the DCM's house and the PAO's [public affairs officer] house. The offices were in some of these low buildings. I remember there was one building where the ambassador and the DCM were, another building where the administrative people were, and I have forgotten where the political section was then. The economic section was in a bungalow and people had to come through my office to go to the economic counselor's office or go to see the agricultural attaché because we were literally on top of each other. But, soon after my arrival we moved to an old Japanese bank building that was much more like an office building and we were all housed there together.

Q: Before the Korean war started in 1950, did we have an embassy in Seoul?

BARBIS: No, because Korea was part of Japan. I think we had a consulate in Seoul in those days. So, we owned no property or anything. There was nothing that we could take back. But, we just took over some of the Japanese properties.

Q: So you had a total of about six years involved with Korea, your two years in Seoul and then approximately four years on the Korean desk?

BARBIS: Right. And, when I was told I was going to Chiang Mai, I had heard about it from some colleagues and knew it was isolated somewhere up there in the Thailand, Laos, Burma, China area, but I didn't know much more about it. My wife knew even less and burst out in tears when I told her. But, it turned out to be a wonderful experience for both of us.

Q: Before we go on to that, did you learn Korean along the way?

BARBIS: The Korean I learned was very elementary. By no means could I use Korean other than to break the ice by saying, "hello," "thank you," and "How are you?" I don't even remember if I took formal lessons, but certainly there was no big language program before I went there.

Q: When you were given this assignment to Chiang Mai, did you get language training there?

BARBIS: We got language training of a sort, early morning at the FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. It was just the two of us. This was very useful, especially for Pat. I had two excellent, Foreign Service National assistants who were always with me and spoke good English, so I had no difficulty communicating with people, whereas Pat was thrown into the Thai environment a lot more.

Q: So, in May of 1959, you were initially the only American officer in Chiang Mai?

BARBIS: When I first got there I had an American secretary, or administrative assistant, and there was a vice consul and a BPAO from USIA. So, there were four Americans at the consulate.

Q: And you were the consul?

BARBIS: I was the principal officer.

Q: Had this post been open for a while?

BARBIS: The post had been opened back in 1950, not as a consulate performing consular duties, but as a special purpose consulate. In fact, we did no visa work whatsoever. Anybody who came to us for an immigrant or tourist visa application we referred down to Bangkok. That whole area of north western Thailand is one with nomadic crossing of borders by hill tribes. The Meo, who figured so prominently in Laos, who we now call Hmong, were one of the tribes. [Various tribes] were up in the mountains cultivating opium. So, our interest was two fold. One, just to monitor what was going on in that area in terms of cross border movements with political implications, and secondly, the drug trafficking that was occurring, although, it wasn't until I left that drugs became a primary target of focus and we even established a DEA [Drug Enforcement Agency] presence in Chiang Mai. But, when I was there, it was myself, my vice consul, the branch public affairs officer, and the administrative assistant.

Q: Obviously this is a key city in a region that impacts several countries, but was our main interest in what was going on the stability of Thailand or were we looking at Vietnam? You went there in 1959, which was pretty early days for Vietnam interest.

BARBIS: Our focus was more international than it was national. Thailand, throughout my association with that country, was a pretty stable country and throughout their history they have had stability. They are not the kind of people who rebel. It is kind of surprising in a way, but they bend like the bamboo that they are famous for. So, there was an interest in that, but most of the domestic political center was Bangkok and still is, I guess. It was what was happening across the borders that could lead to instability. For example, the Shan in Burma were very much in arms against the central government and Chiang Mai was a headquarters of the Shan in exile. One of my closest friends in Chiang Mai was Sou Souk, who was a prince of the Shan nation and who had married a Thai woman and lived in Chiang Mai, but who had contacts up in the Keng Tung area of Burma and was an excellent source of useful information for us. But, it was that, the Shan, and the remnant of the Kuomintang troops that had withdrawn from China and settled in the Burma/Laos border area [that were sources of instability]. We had helped evacuate Kuomintang troops to Taiwan back in 1959, but some of them had stayed behind, gone into the opium business to support themselves and were still a military force and no doubt received some support from Taiwan. One of the main things I did in my two years in Chiang Mai, was to observe the evacuation of remnants of the remnant. We still left some remnant there, they didn't all come out. We were involved in the sense that we brought pressure on them to do it and also facilitated it, I presume, although the Chinese air force established a presence in Chiang Mai with those big bladder fuel things because at that time there were no refueling capabilities there. They would come in with these DC-3s and DC-4s and these guys would come out of the hills and be flown off to Taiwan. I would be at the airport every day to see what was going on trying to take a count, talking to the Chinese air force colonel who was a resident liaison guy. A wonderful guy with excellent English. His name was Johnnie Tong. I will never forget him. We will get to that later because we celebrated the completion of his mission at a Chinese restaurant in Bangkok with much [fanfare].

Anyhow, every day I would go to the airport and then back to the consulate and get on the single side band radio and talk to Stapleton Roy and give him a report of what was going on. Stape was the political officer in Bangkok and to this day whenever we meet we recall our communicating two or three times a day by a single side band radio. But that jumps ahead because that was a very special episode of my two years in Chiang Mai.

My main activities were to learn as much as I could about what was going on in terms of not Thai political activities because there weren't any to speak of, but in terms of the tribal groups, the Shan and the KMT [troops].

Q: Were you interested in what was going on in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam?

BARBIS: Less so. Not at all with Vietnam, [we were on the opposite side of Thailand], it being the northwest corner. [We were] much more [interested in] what was going on along the Burmese border. I would occasionally go up to the Mekong River, northeast of Chiang Rai, which is [another] major town directly north of Chiang Mai and closer to the border. Obviously there was a lot of smuggling and that kind of activity going on across the Mekong in that area, but at that point I was not involved with Pathet Lao activity, there wasn't any to speak of in that general area at the time. It was later when I came back and got involved with Laos that I spent more time on that issue.

Q: Was the Thai military quite active in the Chiang Mai area?

BARBIS: There was a regimental headquarters there. The officials I dealt with primarily were the governor of the province, a heavy drinker, a little man, a wonderful guy with a wonderful wife who became a good friend of Pat's; the mayor of the city and a Harvard graduate banker of Chinese origin; [the other], who knew everything, was an art collector, a banker, and sort of the renaissance man of Chiang Mai. So, it was sort of a broad group. There was a guy with tattoos on his beer belly, who would come down from up country to Chiang Mai to see us and tell us what was going on with the Shans.

Q: He was a Thai?

BARBIS: He was a Thai no doubt involved in cultivating or trafficking opium. I don't know.

Q: Was there much of an American community or missionaries?

BARBIS: Mostly missionaries. But there was also an American presence beyond the consulate. We had two MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] officers, a full colonel and a lieutenant colonel, or major, who were advisors to the regiment. And then there was one AID representative, Dr. Butler, who was more in the agricultural area. And then there was a missionary group that ran a hospital with a wonderful Scots doctor, who took care of us. In fact, on our way to Thailand we stopped in Chicago, before stopping in California to say goodbye to my folks, to visit my brother and coming down the steps of his apartment Pat had fallen and apparently injured her back. This started giving her real trouble and she was hospitalized at McCormick Hospital, which was very primitive.

Q: Where was McCormick Hospital?

BARBIS: In Chiang Mai. For traction they tied sandbags on her ankles. But, things were not getting any better and I talked with the doctor in Bangkok and he arranged for the Attaché's plane to pick Pat up with the embassy nurse and fly her to Bangkok where the hospital flight, which flew from New Delhi to Clark Air Force Base, took her on to Clark Air Force Base where she was hospitalized for about a month. She came back on crutches because while she was there, after she was released from the hospital, she broke her ankle. They had to put her in a cast. She stopped off in Hong Kong before returning to Chiang Mai and was hobbling when she arrived.

Q: Did you have children at that point?

BARBIS: At that point we had only been married less than a year. We had no children while we were there. So, Pat was involved very much with...there were some interesting other Americans, private Americans, the Young family, Harold Young and his sons Bill and Gordon. Their family had been in that area even before the war or during the war. They started out as missionaries and then became hunters. Harold helped organize the zoo in Chiang Mai. They really knew all the languages and the area very well and were well known throughout both to Thai and to others. Pat used to go and visit them. One of their pets was a baby cub, a tiger cub. One day it bit her on the behind.

This was kind of primitive you know. For meat we would get buffalo meat. You didn't have beef. We had to boil our water. There was a man who had been assisted by AID and had developed a vegetable garden so we could get some nice vegetables and all kinds of marvelous fruit. We had banana trees on the property. Chiang Mai had been a principality and the Thai government rented to us, and still does, for one dollar a year, I don't know whether the rent has gone up since I left, a compound which had a lovely two story house, with teak floors and ceilings. My predecessor didn't like teak and he had painted it black, so the first thing Pat did was to blow torch all the paint off and restore the original teak. Bathroom facilities weren't great, so she supervised the construction of a modern bathroom with a Chinese contractor. I will never forget, he had a fingernail on his little finger out to there.

Q: About ten inches?

BARBIS: Yes. They communicated through an interpreter, of course. So, it was quite a challenge for her. Her first post had been Korea, her second post was this sub-country town in Thailand where elephants would frequently walk by our compound. The compound had three buildings on it. In one corner was a beautiful pavilion, all open, which was our USIS library. Then there was our magnificent teak house. And behind it, what the ruling prince had used for his concubines, or dancing girls, a bungalow with four rooms and a nice veranda where the receptionist sat. So, Pat was in charge of training the cook to boil the water properly, to learn to tenderize buffalo meat and things like that. As a result we ate a lot of Thai dishes. We got very fond of a Thai dish that [the cook, Thong, prepared]. And the kitchen was a separate building and Pat helped modernize that, too. Electricity was erratic so we had our own generator whenever city power went off. We had a wonderful mechanic who took care of the cars and did a lot of the maintenance work and as soon as the lights went out, Seeboot would run and kick in the generator, so we always had electricity.

Pat got involved in raising orchids and even won prizes, which put her in contact with the local community. How I got on to the Youngs, Ruth Young, the wife and mother, ran a program at the local school for English teaching and Pat became a volunteer English teacher there. So, running the house, teaching English, raising orchids and raising Siamese cats... there are not all that many in Thailand but there was a retired British consul there, Mr. Wood, a man in his eighties or nineties, married to a Thai lady, who when he retired from the Colonial Service stayed on in Chiang Mai. They raised pure Siamese cats, and that is how we got involved in it. Every few months, when we would have a litter, I would load a basket with kittens and take them to Bangkok and hand them out to people at the embassy who wanted a Siamese cat.

So we had those activities, plus any official ceremony, that the consuls, and there were only three of us, the American and British consuls and the Burmese consul general, would attend. School would open and the monks would be there to chant and the consuls would be there to sit with the mayor and governor and chief judge, etc. So, we were part of the official community of Chiang Mai.

Q: How large roughly was it at that time?

BARBIS: Oh, 15,000-20,000 at most. It was one of the principal towns of Thailand outside of Bangkok, certainly [the largest] in the north. [But, close to town], there was farm land with people living out in the fields.

Q: Was there much industry?

BARBIS: Well, cottage industry. Waxed, paper umbrellas, which are still a tourist attraction because they paint these very colorful designs on them. Silver, the silver village was a very popular place. When I went back in 1980-81 there was a whole center, sort of American style, with beautiful gardens, exhibit rooms, etc. and you could still go and see the silversmith tapping away and making a beautiful vase out of a piece of silver. The other cottage industry was celadon. This banker I mentioned, his wife sponsored or promoted two things cotton weaving, sort of like Jim Thompson in Bangkok and the silk industry that he promoted and created, and celadon, trying to bring back the old Thai pottery craft. Also lacquer painting on blocks of teak wood, and we have some of those pieces.

Q: When you went back in 1980-81, the Thai economic miracle was probably well underway. Twenty years earlier you probably saw very little sign that that had begun.

BARBIS: Exactly. Of course, it was two decades later or more. Chiang Mai was essentially a village even though the population was larger than a village. A river went through the center of town. On the other side of the river was the Railway Hotel, sort of colonial type, up on stilts, open verandas, little cottages. There were no bathing facilities, a Shanghai jar in every room. I can remember going there for meals. There was quite an Indian community there and I remember the Indian community leader had a dinner once and we had to cover our bread with plates because of all the flies. It was an interesting situation. The only other restaurant, you would go in and the dog was always there and the floor was all dirt.

When I went back in 1981, the hotel where we stayed, the Orchid Hotel, was one of the most luxurious hotels I have been in. Teak everywhere. A restaurant of French cuisine. In fact, I ran across a picture just last week and showed it to Pat and told her this is where I had dinner at Chiang Mai, could you believe it. Very fancy like in any modern city. There were several hotels with modern air conditioning. Completely transformed. They had joined the 20th century. I didn't see any elephants parading around when I was back that time. There were a lot of cars, a lot of activity. A market place open 24 hours where you could buy a shirt, shoes, hats, furniture, you name it.

Q: When you were there a consul, how often would you go to Bangkok?

BARBIS: Once a week somebody would act as courier from the embassy staff and bring the pouch up. And I guess, once a month or every six weeks I would take the pouch down, both in order to consult with the embassy and deliver whatever I was sending and collect whatever they were holding, but also to do shopping. The only commissary where we did our food shopping and other household things was in Bangkok, and that was always a problem because they had to pack it and ship it by train or get it on the plane if you could. And they only flew these DC-3s that didn't have much room. But in the back there was a little compartment where you would find chickens and goats and some of our commissary supplies.

Q: You would usually fly when you went to Bangkok?

BARBIS: Yes. The first trip I made to Bangkok was right after we arrived there when the director of Point Four and the political counselor were making a tour and I joined them and we drove from Bangkok down to west central Thailand where we were building a dam and where Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson was involved in some kind of a dedication ceremony. I think Bechtel was the contractor. Now it is a dam that provides a lot of electricity and a lot of other good things to the country.

Q: Did Ambassador Johnson come up to Chiang Mai some times?

BARBIS: I think Alex came up towards the end of his tour for a farewell call and brought Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman with him, and Mrs. Johnson. That was a busy time for us, of course. I think that was his only visit. Other officers came up. Len Unger, for example, the DCM, came several times. And other officers would come up.

To continue with the trip with the political counselor and Point Four officer, we flew back with Ambassador Johnson who had the plane. I never drove all the way from Chiang Mai to Bangkok. When we first arrived we flew directly to Chiang Mai, because my predecessor had already left and they didn't want a gap. The only way we could get up there was with the British Air Attaché's plane. He flew us up and dropped us. And, then, as I said, the following week, Tom Naughten and John Guthrie arrived and I left and here was Pat with her limited Thai and no English speaking servants in the house. But, she adjusted very quickly and got things organized for us.

Q: You started to mention something that happened after you had been there about five months.

BARBIS: Oh, my kid brother in Chicago died of a brain tumor and I flew home for his funeral leaving Pat there alone. At that point, the vice consul who was there when we arrived had left and his replacement had not come. Anyhow the embassy sent an officer up who stayed at the Railway Hotel, to sort of act in my absence. This was interesting because it brought out, and I hope this has changed, that the wives in the Foreign Service were not always treated well in terms of being recognized as part of the team, although they have always been, especially in a post like Chiang Mai. While I was gone for those two weeks, Pat was not treated as though she was the consul's wife, or that she had any official standing. She was completely ignored. And this happened in other posts where the wife was not given the same treatment as the husband, who was the officer. Of course, now we have a lot more female officers and I would hope we are much more appreciative of the role the wife of a Foreign Service officer plays.

Q: I would certainly hope so, but I think there are probably times even now when things don't happen the way they ought to.

BARBIS: Yes.

Q: Certainly in that period it was common.

BARBIS: Like the day we were married or the day after getting this telegram that "if rumor true, resign immediately."

Q: Is there anything else, George, that you would want to particularly reflect on in terms of Chiang Mai, or have we pretty well cover your two years there?

BARBIS: I would only make some comments that maybe have more general applicability. A special post like that, we have a number around the world, is a special challenge because you are on your own and isolated. We had one-time [encryption] pads, if you have ever had that experience. I would get telegrams about some cultural group visiting Rangoon, "limited official use" so naturally it was encoded. There was no need for that to be encoded. I think now we have simpler decoding machines at isolated posts like that. But, that was always a pain, to get a call in middle of the night because an urgent telegram had come in and then to find it had nothing to do with Chiang Mai.

Q: We certainly have cut back on consulates and special purpose posts that we have for budget reasons, etc. Did you feel that it was pretty valuable, important to have the American flag flying in Chiang Mai in those days?

BARBIS: I think very much so and we will come to that when we talk about Bordeaux as well, because that has been closed. Chiang Mai has been elevated to a consulate general, as you know. And the name when I was there was one word, Chiang Mai, and now they have split it into Chiang Mai.

And, this was my third post and here I was principal officer. I hope I did well. I think I got a promotion out of my Chiang Mai experience. But, you do need an officer with some experience because he is America to many, many people and his presence is important which was why we consciously accepted any invitation that we got to anything, be it Buddhist monks, etc., simply because it was noticed. If the British consul was there and I wasn't, people would talk about it. And, it was also important, I think, that we developed a close relationship with the Burmese consul general who was a military officer and was there for obvious reasons similar to mine. It helped to show the Thais that the Burmese are not your enemies, we can have our differences and work together and live together. And, he had good relations with the Thai officials. They put on a good front and behaved properly in that respect.

Q: You mentioned much earlier that the Shan were quite active in Thailand. Were they seen as a kind of rebel force?

BARBIS: Well, not in Thailand, in Burma they were very much a rebel force and at times they controlled large parts of the Shan state. I think they are still a problem for the central government. And, in addition to the Shan, the Karen, on the western front have been in rebellion, in a dissident state for many years.

Q: There were also Chinese elements you mentioned.

BARBIS: The Chinese had been pushed out and came into an area that was pretty close to the Laos/Burma/China border. There were not KMT troops in Thailand, itself, but very active up near the border. I guess because of the weather or terrain the PRC [People's Republic of China] never tried to eliminate them completely.

Q: So the ones that were evacuated to Taiwan were brought to Chiang Mai because that was the closest airfield?

BARBIS: Yes.

Q: So, the Shan would be active on the western border of Thailand and the Karen along the western part of the frontier.

BARBIS: Yes. The only Shan I met was retired essentially.

Q: Today is October 23, 1996. George we have been talking about your experience as principal officer in Chiang Mai from 1959-61. I think we pretty well completed that assignment, but would you like to talk a little bit about the role of the Foreign Service National employees in a post like Chiang Mai?

BARBIS: In a post like that, especially in a post like that that is isolated, a special purpose post, you are dependent, especially if you haven't had prior experience of being a principal officer on your local assistant. In Chiang Mai, we have had over the years, and I regret to say I don't know whether he is still living, an outstanding Foreign Service National whose wife taught me and my predecessors, and I am sure my successors, Thai. He was an unusual man, very well informed, contacts all over the place, and loved to go on field trips. It was always a joy being with him and having him assist in opening doors.

This may be off the record. I remember one of my first trips we went to this little village and called on the local officials and had dinner and then returned to our rooms and as soon after turning the light off to go to sleep there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and there was this young lady there and I couldn't understand her, my Thai not being very good. But apparently this was the custom in Thailand and maybe in other Southeast Asian countries where you sort of took hospitality to the extreme. I managed to convey to her that she should go to room number such-and such, [where someone] was able to dismiss her. He told me the next day that the chief or whoever the host was for that visit had been perplexed that this young consul wanted to be alone.

Q: I would like to ask you about one other American position at your post, was there a USIA officer, was there an America House or public programs in addition to what you did in contacts?

BARBIS: There was and it was a very important function. Initially, when I arrived there there was also a vice consul-the consul (principal officer), vice consul and the administrative assistant on the State Department side. We also had co-located with us a branch public affairs officer from USIS, with a cultural center, which was the pavilion, open air, in front of the residence, which the previous occupier, the last reigning prince of Chiang Mai, used for entertaining. That is where his dancing group, which was housed in the buildings in the rear of the compound where our offices were, used to stay. We had books there and various events, movies, occasionally a leader grantee or entertainment group. It was a popular place for Thai, especially young Thai, to come. We didn't have the resources ourselves to promote English language classes, but there was a separate group of ladies, including my wife, which in cooperation with one of the local schools offered English language classes.

Q: You left Thailand in 1961, I suppose the summer?

BARBIS: That's right. And this gives me the opportunity to mention something that I think has broader application too in terms of life in the Foreign Service. I had two family emergencies during my two years in Chiang Mai. We arrived in May and this must have been in September, I got word that my kid brother, who lived in Chicago, had died of a brain tumor, so I returned home on emergency leave to be with my parents and attend the funeral, and then return to Chiang Mai. The following year I had bad news again that my father had been diagnosed as having leukemia and hoped that I could come home and spend some time with him. So, I returned for a month or so. Both trips were made at my own expense and I am glad that I did it. I returned to Chiang Mai and completed my tour. As it happened my father died a month before I was eligible for home leave and we decided that we would not return for the funeral.

But, I think that points out even in this day of rapid communications and transportation, one of the unfortunate parts of being in the Foreign Service. I had good support from my colleagues, from my ambassador, U. Alexis Johnson, Len Unger, the DCM and a colleague, very kindly took me in for the night because I had to fly down from Chiang Mai to catch a flight to Hong Kong and from there to fly home. This was the pre-jet period so it was a long trip. Friends took care of me in Bangkok that first night, which was very comforting. But, I just mention that as something that many of us have experienced. I think we do better now in terms of facilitating people. I don't know whether we pay for trips back, but in any event we have addressed that problem as best we can.

Q: The world is smaller but it is still a long way from home and family, particularly for emergency, crisis situations.

BARBIS: I think I mentioned this earlier and made a mistake, it was during that second emergency trip, when an acting consul was sent to Chiang Mai and my wife suddenly became a non-person. I think this needs to be acknowledged. I think we have come a long way in recognizing the role of the spouse in the Foreign Service and we have made great progress in that respect and in accepting them as part of the team. Well, they were always part of the team but they were two for one and sort of anonymous, whereas they get some recognition now and they deserve it because I don't see how a Foreign Service officer can be effective, especially in a situation such as Chiang Mai was, without a spouse to help you enter the community, become part of that community so that you have some standing and some role and some influence.

Q: Yes, and I think also it very much enhances your position not only as a family person but a person with a normal life.

BARBIS: Exactly, and I can still remember how one of the things my wife got involved in, in addition to the English classes, was growing orchids. She participated in some contests and won prizes and was cited in the local weekly newspaper with her picture for having won a prize for whatever type of orchid she had raised.

Q: And that was a talent, skill that perhaps she developed there that she could continue elsewhere.

BARBIS: Exactly. She had has that to enjoy for many, many years since then.

Q: You went in 1961, perhaps by jet, home to Washington. What kind of job did you have there? You had been on the Korean desk in a previous period. Were you also a desk officer this time?

BARBIS: We did fly home by jet. My initial assignment was to the Iranian desk, although I had had no contact with Iranian affairs since my first tour there some years before. This was a very interesting time. I remember one of the main problems I was given to deal with as one of the desk officers was the problem of Iranian students coming to this country and then wanting to stay here for the rest of their lives, whereas our feeling was they should go back and contribute to Iran which was in desperate need for young, talented, knowledgeable people in its own development.

Q: They wanted to stay because of economic opportunity, jobs, professional...?

BARBIS: Exactly.

Q: Not because they were necessarily opposed to the Shah?

BARBIS: There were some who were anti-Shah and for political reasons wanted to stay, but I think it was primarily an economic motivation that kept them here. The opportunities here were just so far greater than anything they could have in Iran, and especially after they acquired a US university education which prepared them for a different world and a different kind of economy than Iran had at the time.

Q: Did somebody have a program to encourage them to return, or were you just generally aware of the situation?

BARBIS: We were aware of it and did what we could, primarily working with the Congress and trying to get provisions written into the legislation which would require that students return for at least a certain number of years to their country of origin. But, I think that problem continued even later and became more complicated as the political situation changed.

Q: Were these students on Fulbrights and other government programs or just students in general who were here on their own?

BARBIS: Just students in general, I would say. There were good programs like the American Field Service, which brought high school students and I think that program still continues around the world, but a lot of them were here on their own. There were a lot of affluent Persians at that time who could send their children here to study.

But, that job didn't last long because I was affected by another reduction in force program in the government and the position I occupied was abolished. So, suddenly I had to find a job. A friend ran into a friend and mentioned that I was looking for a job and I ended up in INR [Bureau of Intelligence and Research] in the Far East region [RFE], assigned as the analyst for Thailand and Burma. The Ne Win coup in Burma occurred my first weekend there and Dr. Spinks, who headed RFE, called me in and we went to the safe, which I didn't know how to open yet, opened it and looked in the biographic files. This was soon after the responsibility for biographic files and reporting had been transferred from the Department to CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. But, that was no excuse, the file on Ne Win was empty. I knew even less, although I lived near the Burma border and one of my main interests in Chiang Mai had been to follow [cross border] developments and activities, I did not follow the Burmese political situation in detail. So, I had very little background that qualified me to write the brief for the Secretary on this coup. But, somehow with Dr. Spinks' assistance we managed to produce a paper that was acceptable.

Q: Had you ever been to Rangoon?

BARBIS: I had never been to Rangoon. The closest I got was the border in northwestern Thailand.

I was there for several months when the analyst for Laos was coming up for transfer, Bob Barrett, and he suggested that I was the logical person in the office at the time to succeed him. Of course, Bob was anxious to find a successor so he could move on. In any event, I became the Laos analyst. I think I dropped Burma but kept Thailand, but I was primarily on Laos which was heating up at that time and becoming an important issue in American policy. In that job I worked very closely with my counterparts in the army intelligence service (AIS) and, of course, at the CIA.

It was some months later, maybe more than a year, after I had become pretty knowledgeable and pretty deeply involved in Lao affairs and I can remember having to go in on weekends frequently. There was one particular time when Dr. Spinks took me up to brief Secretary Rusk on a Sunday afternoon and he was kind of relaxed, having a high ball with his coat off, etc. He had a big map on his desk and I was showing him how some of the intelligence reports had been exaggerated and tried to give him a true picture of the situation, which was threatening but not at the critical stage that some reports were suggesting. For this I was indebted to a major in army intelligence who kept me very well informed on the details of the order of battle and all that kind of thing. In any event, I remember to my horror as I was moving around and pointing things out on the map I hit and almost upset Secretary Rusk's high ball. Fortunately I retrieved it before it spilled all over the map.

Q: This was the period of the Kennedy Administration and there was tremendous interest in Laos, as well, of course, in Vietnam.

BARBIS: Exactly. Laos, as you recall, was the one issue that President Eisenhower alerted President Kennedy as being at the top of his plate when he took office in 1961. I found out through my CIA counterpart and colleague that Governor Averell Harriman, then Assistant Secretary for Far East was looking for some one to be in charge of Lao affairs. The incumbent, Chuck Cross, was moving on to the War College. Harriman said it had to be somebody who really knew Laos and that they had picked me, even though I had never served there. Meanwhile, though, Mr. Harriman had moved on to become Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and Roger Hilsman, who had been my boss in INR, had become Assistant Secretary for Far East. In any event, I moved down and replaced Chuck Cross at the time when Laos was the issue before the new administration.

Q: So you were officer in charge in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Responsible only for Laos?

BARBIS: [Yes, officer in charge of the Lao Desk], responsible only for Laos. I had two officers under me, one who had been there for some time. One was a Foreign Service officer, a senior political officer, and very knowledgeable about Laos and Southeast Asia generally and a young Civil Servant officer who followed mostly the economic side of things. So, we made a pretty good team. And then Miss Kanold moved on and somebody else replaced her. So, there were three of us on the desk.

Q: The desk was part of what office?

BARBIS: The Office of Southeast Asian Affairs which encompassed everything from Burma to the Philippines. What we define still as Southeast Asia.

Q: Did you travel several times to Vientiane?

BARBIS: Surprisingly it was such an active desk that I didn't, until one day Marshall Green who was deputy assistant secretary, was defending the budget at one of the Foreign Affairs Committee meetings or subcommittee meetings and was questioned on the point of officers in charge not knowing their countries or not having served in their countries for which they were responsible. Two cases came up, one, Laos and another one the Philippines.

Q: Where the officer in charge had not been there.

BARBIS: Like me he had not served there or been there yet. I guess I had been on the job for some months or maybe a year at that time. Well, as soon as Marshall got back to the Department he set in motion trips for both the OIC Philippines and OIC Laos to go. I did go for a month which was very valuable because although I knew Ambassador Unger very well, it was good to see him on his own turf and charged with a wonderful team. His political counselor was Bill Hamilton and we used to refer to Ambassador Unger as Mr. Inside and Bill Hamilton as Mr. Outside. The ambassador doing all the sensitive, internal high level negotiating, etc. with the prime minister and ministers, and Bill out circulating a lot and having excellent contacts. Anyhow it was a wonderful experience working with those two people.

I went out with my successor in INR and we traveled all over the place including spending a night on the Plain of Jars with some of the troops confronting the Pathet Lao, who were trying to extend Vietnamese influence, Communist influence.

Q: We didn't have any contact directly with the Pathet Lao ourselves, of course.

BARBIS: Well, we did. Because of the Geneva Agreements of 1961, which created a "neutral" Laos, you had this strange situation where Souvanna Phouma, the prime minister, was sort of the compromise, a coalition government in which the Pathet Lao participated, although there continued to be fighting around the country which then spread and the whole thing was overturned and then you have civil war going in which we tried to support and assist the royal Lao government.

My trip was after the breakup of the coalition government. We traveled down in the southern region, the Ho Chi Minh trail, the Fifth Military region, and spent some time there and there was fighting down there quite extensively.

Q: The Bureau for Far East Affairs was very active in those days. You were part of the office that was also dealing with Vietnam and Cambodia and Thailand.

BARBIS: The Office for Southeast Asian affairs had responsibility for Vietnam, South and North, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Burma. It was a very active office and the bureau, itself, was very active and very deeply involved. Roger Hilsman by that time had been replaced by Bill Bundy, who was a very capable, activist type and was the older brother of the national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy. So, as things heated up in Laos, I did get involved at higher levels, always as the working level guy, the expert, if you will. I can remember one time, in fact, when U. Alexis Johnson, who was then the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, took me to a White House meeting, which was co-chaired by the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. We sat around the cabinet table. I remember I was sitting in the seat of the Secretary of Agriculture, next to U. Alexis, and at some point I was called upon by Secretary Johnson to give a report or to comment on the situation on the ground. But, it was interesting, at one point the President who had not joined us, did come in accompanied by Adlai Stevenson, who was our Ambassador to the United Nations at the time. I had never seen the President up close that way, a very imposing tall person.

Q: This was President Johnson by then?

BARBIS: Yes. I jumped ahead because I should say that during the Kennedy years, before the President's assassination, he was personally deeply involved in Laos and the Laos desk had daily contact with Mike Forrestal who was on the NSC staff along with his colleague, Cliff Alexander, covering the Far East. In fact I guess I spoke with Cliff or Mike almost every day, and frequently Cliff would come over to the desk to consult with us.

I did not have the experience that one of my predecessors had, who was the officer in charge at the time President Kennedy came into office and that was to have a call from the President. As I understand it one of my predecessors did get a call and didn't believe the President was calling and hung up. The President called back and said, "This IS the President." That may be an exaggeration but something like that did happen.

Q: Certainly at the time you were there, you were very aware from your contacts with Mike Forrestal and Cliff Alexander that the government was very interested in what was going on?

BARBIS: Yes. And, this was before Vietnam had become the issue in Southeast Asia and Laos was the focus of all our attention. But, as things were changing in Vietnam, Vietnam started becoming the main issue, and our involvement started to become openly greater than it was in Laos, Laos became peripheral. But, in that initial period I remember we used to say, "Thank God Kennedy is President," because those of us who were working on Lao affairs at the time were deeply committed to the Geneva Accords, which were quite controversial domestically on the political scene. After all, here we were at the height of the Cold War, etc. and the Geneva Accords on Laos provided for a neutralization of the conflict and confrontation there which was indirect, but nonetheless was taking place. We tried, or so I believed at the time, to honestly try to make those agreements work. In the end they fell apart largely because of things the communist side did. The Pathet Lao, supported and directed by Hanoi, did things to which we had to respond and as a result the solution some years later fell apart and Laos is now communist.

Q: Some Foreign Service officers who worked on Vietnam in a little later period did a lot of soul searching and there was a degree of controversy and of not being comfortable at times with US policy. You did not feel any of that in the time you were working on Laos?

BARBIS: No, because I think we were driven by our commitment to try to make the Geneva Accords work and we thought we were doing the right thing. The right thing being as I recall seeing it, isolating Laos from any kind of conflict or power struggle in Southeast Asia. It was a peaceful, innocent country that didn't deserve to be torn apart by a civil war of great brutality. So, we were doing things that later became known as the secret war that some people would be critical of, and dealing with reporters was a problem for me frequently...I remember I had a pretty good relationship with Friedreich Smith, who later became quite an outstanding journalist and still is.

Q: He was with the New York Times?

BARBIS: Yes and still is. He was young, brand new, my age so we could communicate easily and comfortably. Although he would press, he respected my need to protect classified information so I don't think I ever gave any secrets away. It was a little tricky because we were doing things that we didn't want the press to publicize. All of that came out later, but at the time I was doing it without any moral questions or disagreement with what we were doing because I believed my role as OIC Laos was to make sure that I followed our policy which was to try to make the Geneva Accords work.

Later, as we became more and more involved in Vietnam, and as Vietnam began to drive our policy not only with respect to Laos but also with respect to Cambodia, I can remember sitting around with my Cambodian colleague and sort of bemoaning things that were happening that were Vietnam driven that we didn't feel comfortable with. A feeling that what we were doing in Vietnam was not based on an overall strategic plan or vision of what we were trying to do but was more getting dragged into situations because of what happened on the ground to which we had to respond which committed us and got us more and more involved and then before we knew it, we had half a million troops there.

The need to react and the domestic pressures were great. That was the time of the doves and the hawks, with the hawks pressing for more aggressive action to counter the Vietcong. Our feeling was that we had enough to do dealing with Laos in my case and Cambodia in my colleague's case. We didn't know all the ins and outs of Vietnam, although we participated in meetings and in other ways kept up-saw the traffic, etc. But, our impression was that it was sort of an incremental involvement rather than a planned, deliberate, strategic approach.

Q: Going back to Laos again. Did we see the support for the Pathet Lao coming primarily from China or from the Soviet Union or did we not make really a distinction, that it was the communist bloc?

BARBIS: As I can best recall we saw Vietnam... Hanoi... as being the main agent of the communist movement, if you will, in directing things in Laos but with support both from the Chinese and the Soviets. The Soviets certainly were providing a lot of material support, the Chinese also were playing a role, especially up in the northwest. We had a lot of exaggerated rumors and stories about the Chinese building airfields right up there in that corner where Laos has a common border. Nothing ever came of that, although I guess some people would argue that they did build a road, although I don't know for what purpose. They were able to get supplies and reinforcements and whatever they needed through quite easily without modern transportation.

Q: When you were in Chiang Mai you traveled to the Laotian border, of course, [did you enter Laos]?

BARBIS: Only [viewed it] from across the Mekong [River]. We would go by road to Chiang Rai, which is just north of Chiang Mai, and then by land rover up to the Mekong where there was a little village, [Ban Houei Sai], and looked across into Laos. That was an area of Laos that was fairly sparsely populated. There was not much Pathet Lao activity there during the time I was in Chiang Mai. Most of the Pathet Lao being along the North Vietnamese border in northeastern Laos and, in fact, one province was pretty much under their control for most of the time that I was involved.

Q: Laos certainly has a long frontier with Vietnam. When you traveled in Laos did you go up into the north at that time?

BARBIS: Well, the closest I got to the north was this little overnight visit to the borders of the Plain of Jars. This might be interesting. We did have a covert role with what we called the Meo at the time and who later became known as Hmong. The leader of the Meo was a man called Vang Pao, who now lives in Montana, I believe. I happened to visit an outpost of his forces on a mountain near the Plain of Jars where there was a small, simple clinic and they had brought in a young Meo boy who had stepped on a mine. They had their first operation since this clinic had been opened and they amputated the kid's leg, I guess. Bernie Kalb, of CBS news at the time, was there with a camera crew. I wish my memory was a little clearer to tell you more about it, but it was an experience that I will never forget. In the middle of nowhere there was this wooden structure with surgical and other equipment and this poor teenager. It was one of the grimmer and gorier parts of my trip through Laos. It is also a reminder that already in the early 1960s, American television was already in places like Laos bringing the story home to American living rooms. I never found out what Kalb did with the footage. I saw him at an Asia Society event some months ago and went up to him and recalled this. He didn't remember that particular event.

Q: Let me come back to the Geneva Accords again. They were signed in 1961?

BARBIS: They were signed in 1961.

Q: Was Averell Harriman ...?

BARBIS: He was the head of our delegation. That was when Bill Sullivan came into great prominence because Bill had been officer in charge in Burma and Harriman identified him as a bright young expert on Southeast Asia. He jumped Bill over all kinds of more senior officers and made him in effect his deputy. Whenever the Governor would come back to Washington for consultations he would leave the mission in Bill's charge, which caused a lot of heartburn. I had a friend in the delegation who was an FSO-1 and Bill was an FSO-4. So that created some problems, but ability sometimes prevails. And, with patronage by someone like Harriman, it overcomes all obstacles.

Q: I was really getting at his role, not so much then, because you weren't directly involved in those negotiations, but the time you were in the intelligence bureau and then the Far East bureau, he was always kind of around?

BARBIS: I met Bill Sullivan before going to Chiang Mai because when I was preparing to go to Chiang Mai and was being briefed, etc., I had a desk in the same office where Bill's Burma desk was. I can remember his going off to...

Q: George, we were just talking about Bill Sullivan and your relationship with him. Why don't you just finish up on that. This is post Geneva Accords on Laos.

BARBIS: That is right. Because of the centrality of Laos in the Far East bureau, certainly, at that time the desk officer worked very closely with the director of the office of Southeast Asian affairs, but also with the front office. I had almost daily contact with the deputy assistant secretary who was overseeing this. For most of my time that was Marshall Green. Then it was Bill Sullivan and then for a brief time before moving on to my next assignment, Len Unger. That was when I developed a very close working relationship with Bill Sullivan, even when he moved up to the seventh floor with Governor Harriman, because he continued to be interested in things in Laos. He then was named ambassador to Laos and invited me to join him as his political counselor. By that time I had more than two pretty intense years on Laos affairs and I felt that maybe I didn't really want to continue that pace by going to Vientiane. This may have been a mistake but other personal things that happened proved that it was probably a good thing I didn't go.

Q: Let me talk a little bit more about Laos, itself, and the work of the desk besides trying to uphold the neutral status under the Geneva Accords. There obviously were political/military things going on. You did the normal backstopping of the embassy, I suppose, and were the main contact for the Laotian embassy in Washington. What about the economic side? Were we giving a lot of economic aid?

BARBIS: Laos was and is a very poor country with limited resources and people lived a very bucolic, in a way, peaceful life there until they got involved with these ideologies and these military activities. There was no way that the country could survive economically were it not for our assistance. We kept Laos afloat. One of the mechanisms was a large AID mission there. A lot of it was on the agricultural side helping them to develop and improve their agricultural production, etc. But, an important effort on the economic side was dealing with the country's foreign exchange problems. That was a constant struggle for the desk, to which I am indebted to my economic officer, Gene Bruns, who subsequently left the Civil Service in the State Department and I think is still teaching at FSI as an expert on Southeast Asia.

Q: He was a Foreign Service officer and entered the Foreign Service with me. But, he didn't stay with the Foreign Service very long and, as you say, moved to the civil service.

BARBIS: I had forgotten that. When I got to know Gene he was a civil servant and then went on to get his PhD and is still teaching Southeast Asian affairs at FSI. But almost exclusively he spent an awful lot of time on this foreign exchange operation that we created with allies and friends. It involved a lot of negotiating, pressuring and trying to raise money to keep the country afloat.

Q: You say with allies and friends, who were some of the other countries?

BARBIS: Well, the French always had an interest, not always in agreement with us, although basically our policies coincided in that we, initially certainly in the 1960s, were trying to make the Geneva Accords run. But, we also had help from the British and the Australians and I guess the Germans.

Q: Was Japan actively involved?

BARBIS: Ray, I can't remember. I presume they were.

Q: It may have happened later because certainly Japan is very involved later on in Southeast Asia.

BARBIS: Yes, very much so.

Q: You say the desk, the bureau and the State Department were very much involved in the foreign exchange fund, etc. There was the Agency for International Development, did they tend to opt out of that?

BARBIS: Oh, no. This was working in close cooperation and coordination with AID. We were not, as in ARA [Bureau of Interamerican Affairs] where I believe Brazil was the pilot country where AID and the State Department were joined in one staff, but we did work very closely with AID. In my case, the officer in AID who was sort of the counterpart of our director of SEA was a very close personal friend from my Korea days, Tom Niblock, and we had a car pool together so we talked Laos all the time during office hours and not. So, that also contributed to a very close working relationship between the two agencies.

Q: And was the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, quite involved or not so much?

BARBIS: Not so much in my period. It was pretty much the US underwriting politically, militarily, if you will, economically, financially, the whole thing.

Q: Wasn't there a Mekong Basin development project of some sort?

BARBIS: That was towards the end of my association with Laos and involved my friend Tom Niblock from AID, who became Eugene Black's right hand man on the Mekong Basin development project which was a World Bank project. Tom spent many years after I moved on to War College and my European assignments involved with Mr. Black in that. But, in my days it was the beginnings of Black's vision and his trying to develop this magnificent concept, and I am ashamed to say I don't know what has become of it.

Q: That was involving Laos, Thailand and...?

BARBIS: And Cambodia, too.

Q: You were on the desk close to three years. Is there anything else you would like to reflect on that particular period?

BARBIS: Well, two things that might be of interest, one dealing with the bureau, itself, and one with being in Washington at the time of President Kennedy's assassination.

Because of my role of being responsible for Laos, I got to work, as I mentioned, very closely with the assistant secretaries, especially Bill Bundy when he was assistant secretary. We had weekly meeting with our counterparts from CIA, for example. The OIC Laos and the head of the Vietnam Task Force always sat in on those because the subjects usually were Vietnam and Laos. At one point Bundy turned to me and my colleague, Larry Pickering, who was OIC Thailand, to do something outside our immediate areas of responsibility and look at the region and what we needed. I guess it was more Vietnam oriented. In any event, we did the first draft of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. I am not sure what we wrote was in the final resolution, but it was a contingency thing that Mr. Bundy had us do.

Q: This was after the incident?

BARBIS: No, this was months before the incident. It was sort of anticipating something like that, so that we would be ready to react if we had to.

I was also involved, with others in the bureau, in changing the name of the bureau from the Far East Bureau, which it had been for many, many years, to East Asia and Pacific Affairs. This was sort of a belated recognition of where Asia is in the world.

Q: The Southeast Asian Treaty Organization. Was that something that you devoted much attention or thought to?

BARBIS: Only peripherally when I was in Chiang Mai, because Bangkok, of course, was the center of that [issue] and we had a SEATO office in the embassy and I knew the guys who were there. Other than frequently working SEATO language into papers and things like that, [the desk was] not deeply involved with SEATO.

Q: You mentioned being in Washington on November 22, 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated.

BARBIS: I remember vividly, as many Americans do, where I was and how I heard. Gene Bruns and I had gone to Fort McNair to have lunch with my predecessor, Chuck Cross, and the former OIC Thailand, Ed Masters. I don't know if we took a taxi back or Chuck drove us back, but I remember as we drove up to the diplomatic entrance and left the car, people were gathered and talking about it, that Cronkite had just announced that the President was dead. We rushed back up to FE where we had a TV in the visitors lounge and everybody from the staff was collected there. I remember Mr. Bundy spent more time in that room watching the news, etc. than he did in his office. It was a traumatic thing for all of us as it was for most Americans. People still remember and think about it because there was an awful lot of enthusiasm and admiration and affection for President Kennedy as a leader who knew what he was doing. Especially in the State Department, he sort of inspired young people, especially, but everybody [in general]. In my case, I had not had direct contact with the President but with his office at least. I had sort of a personal feeling that he was on the right track in Laos and we had to do what we could to make it work.

Q: He was on the right track in terms of his policy and attitude and perception and you could feel that there was interest.

BARBIS: Exactly. As I said before, I think we used to say, Gene Bruns and I, we can sleep easier tonight because we know the President is worrying about it, too.

That pretty much wraps up Laos.

Q: You then went to the National War College [NWC] in 1966-67.

BARBIS: Yes, I was in the class of 1967. Our 30th anniversary comes up next year. I saw a classmate at DACOR [Diplomats and Consular Officers Retired] a couple of weeks ago and we were wondering whether we would do what many classes do and that is have a big reunion to celebrate the anniversary. We will wait and see.

That was a wonderful experience for me. So many of us have been through [the NWC] that I think maybe we don't need to dwell on it, except to say, it was my first close association with the military, although on the Korean desk in INR in particular and also in FE I worked closely with military officers, but I was never exposed to that large a group. I am still impressed with the talent and quality of people at my level at the time, lieutenant colonels and colonels, lieutenant commanders and captains. And admiration and envy, too, because the approach of the military to education and training was so far superior to ours. We have caught up now, and this institution is a wonderful thing in testimony to that, but at that time, in the mid-sixties, etc., if you wanted to do graduate work in economics, etc., you couldn't get a degree. I don't know at what point we finally wised up and started allowing officers to get a degree when they went to Harvard, etc., for graduate studies. Whereas I met officer after [military] officer who had Ph.D.s on service time from institutions like Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Berkeley, Stanford, etc. Although there were some officers who sort of lived up to the stereotype of the military in terms of narrowness of view and very conservative, black and white thinking, etc., most of them were outstanding in comparison with us, even, and we like to think of ourselves as pretty outstanding. The military, and as we will talk about it later in my last assignment at the Department of the Army, were very fortunate to have the kind of people who chose that as careers.

Q: In addition to your previous Department assignments you also probably were aware of the military in places like Seoul, Korea, Chiang Mai, and maybe even in Tehran.

BARBIS: Oh, yes. Even in Tehran we had a MAAG there when I was there. But as a neophyte there, I guess I didn't have as broad and wide an interest in contacts as I had later in Korea, certainly, where working with the military was part of doing business. Even in Chiang Mai I had two MAAG officers, a lieutenant colonel and a major, with whom we had very close relations, who worked with the local regiment.

Q: At the National War College, about how many State Department Foreign Service students were there with you? About a dozen or so?

BARBIS: As I recall between 12 and 15. We had some outstanding people in the class from the State Department, USIA, AID, Treasury, and CIA. But the predominance of course was the military. But, having military and civilian together in a course that tried to address that issue of how we work together, was wonderful. They carried it even further by creating the National Defense University. I have nothing but admiration for the military's approach to education and training of officers, so that almost every senior officer, with few exceptions, everybody who gets a star is really a star.

Q: What they were trying to do with the military was to get them to think not just as a navy officer or air force officer, but in the national interest recognizing the importance of working together with the civilian agencies as well, on a joint basis within the defense establishment.

BARBIS: Exactly. Two of my classmates became chiefs of staff of the army. One became chief of naval operations. One became commandant of the coast guard. So, we had some outstanding people.

Q: So, you went from Fort McNair, the National War College, to be principal officer of your own post for a second time. Where was that?

BARBIS: That was Bordeaux, France.

Q: Bordeaux, that sounds pretty nice.

BARBIS: That was a very cushy, if you will, post. A very pleasant post to be at. My introduction to Bordeaux was my call on Ambassador Chip Bohlen, who was then Ambassador to France, and we had a nice chat during which he gave me my marching orders. Unfortunately, he moved on and I didn't get to know him other than that one meeting. He certainly was one of the models in the Foreign Service over the years.

Q: Why don't you briefly describe what Bordeaux was like in terms of size and what your consular district was like? And, what were your marching orders from the Department and the ambassador?

BARBIS: Bordeaux, I believe, was the first consulate that our young republic established which gave it a very special standing in France. It was responsible, it is closed now, for all of the southwest of France with Bordeaux as the seat of the consulate and the other major center Toulouse which was inland, and extending all the way to the Pyrenees and the border with Spain. A lot of Americans resided there, either married to French spouses or who had just stayed on retiring there.

Bordeaux, of course, had passed its prime as a center of commerce and everything else. France is a very centralized country but what made it interesting for me was the Mayor of Bordeaux, and that is quite an institution in the French system of government, [who] was Chaban-Delmas. [He was] a World War II underground hero, the youngest brigadier in the resistance, I think, before he was even 30 years old, but [also] president of the National Assembly, which gave him a national role. I developed a good relationship with him, he knew who I was and I could see him when I wanted.

Q: He usually came on the weekends?

BARBIS: Like most French politicians, many of them are mayors of their home town and have to return every weekend like clock work to be with their constituents and keep that contact up. Chaban-Delmas, of course, being one of the leaders of the governing elite, spent an awful lot of time in Paris too, but he did not neglect his duties as mayor. He was a very popular mayor. He was mayor at the time that I left, two years later, and had just been appointed prime minister. I guess I can say, not that I predicted he would be prime minister, but I certainly had written reports that I didn't need to write because people in Paris knew what was going on in France as a whole, as well as we in the consulates.

I guess I should say that being in charge of a provincial post is both an interesting experience and a disappointing one because whenever you would go to the capital, to the embassy, people were very busy. They were involved with their own duties and responsibilities and although they were polite and friendly and hospitable, etc. you were an outsider. And, although the ambassadors from time to time would call all the consuls-at that time we had Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille, Nice, and Strasbourg, five consulate Generals in France-for meetings with the ambassador and the country team, still you didn't feel as though you were really part of the team.

Q: You were not in the center, you were on the periphery.

BARBIS: Exactly. Because the center of our relationship was officially in the capital between the government, the cabinet, the parliament and the embassy. And, although I think we played or could play a useful role in giving a different perspective, etc., our main role, as I saw it, was to project a good image of America in that community. We arrived in France at a time when nationalism was at its height...de Gaulle had announced the year before that NATO would leave, and was pretty much gone by the time we got there in 1967...and there was a lot of anti-American feeling, but that always exists in France. It is in the French national character to be against things. At the same time there was a tremendous amount of goodwill, admiration, affection, partisanship for the United States. The University of Bordeaux had a sister relationship with the University of California, Berkeley, so we had University of California students doing their year abroad at Bordeaux and vice versa. So, the president of the University of California came to Bordeaux while I was consul general there to visit the University of Bordeaux. The Rector of Bordeaux University had a dinner for him. I was at a round table with the Rector's wife, as the hostess, and the president of the University of California. He had been, and I can't recall his name, controller of the Defense Department. The Bordeaux Rector was a man of an older generation remembering as a boy World War I. He paid tribute to the role of the United States during World War I and was very emotional about it. Tears were rolling down his cheeks. All of a sudden I panic and said, "My God, the president of the University of California hasn't a clue what he is saying." It wasn't being translated or interpreted and the president didn't speak French. So, I quickly turned the menu over and started scribbling a summary of this very emotional tribute to America that he was saying, and passed it to the president, who was then able to respond in English. Some weeks later I got a letter from him on University of California stationery thanking me for saving the night by telling him how to respond. I mention this because there were many thousands and maybe even millions of Frenchmen who remembered not only World War II but World War I. Of course, all of that is leaving us. More and more Frenchmen don't have any memory of our role in those two wars and what we did to help the French people to regain their independence.

Q: And they also don't have the presence of an American consul in their city. The embassy is very busy, has many things to do and quite naturally pays most of their attention to the government in Paris, paying little attention to what is happening in the consular districts. So, we are losing that as well, that presence.

BARBIS: Some people argue that that presence isn't important. But, having lived there and seen how people react to you, I think it did serve a useful purpose.

Q: Could we talk a little bit more about the reporting and other aspects of the useful purpose? Toulouse is, of course, the aircraft center. Was that something that you paid much attention to?

BARBIS: I would always go to Toulouse on a regular basis to call on the prefect, on the mayor and the various officials that were around. I remember going through the mockup that they had of the Concorde and feeling it was not very large; my head was bumping against the ceiling.

Q: And you are not that tall.

BARBIS: And, I am not that tall. I am not quite six feet. So, I thought it was going to be close quarters and pretty tight and friends who have flown on the Concorde have confirmed that. Certainly that was a big development for them. This was at a time when we were still trying to build an SST or had given it up because it was so expensive.

Q: Didn't we have Americans involved there because the engine was partly American?

BARBIS: That's right. I don't remember having contact with any American engineers or others in connection with the Concorde, but Motorola did have a plant in the Toulouse area and I remember having frequent visits with them because there was some controversy over semi-conductors and our being in that market, etc. But, again, any commercial dispute or issue of that kind would be handled by the commercial section in the embassy and not by the consulate.

Q: Southwest France, of course, is adjacent to Spain and the Basque country. This was still the period of Franco. Did you get involved with Spain at all?

BARBIS: I visited Spain several times and had close contact with the Spanish consul general, but no involvement in the political issues there other than to report occasionally on Basque developments since that was the heartland of Basque country on the French side along the Pyrenees.

Q: More on the French Basque area rather than Spain's.

BARBIS: Yes.

Q: You were there in France from roughly 1967-69. That was a time of great turmoil on the campus of the University of California in Berkeley, your alma mater, which had a sister relationship with Bordeaux University. It was also a time of campus unrest in Paris, I think too.

BARBIS: All over France. There was a general strike. We were completely isolated. Americans during that period who were traveling through Bordeaux couldn't get gas, couldn't change money and we would try to help them with that. There was no mail, no traveling going on to speak of. We weren't getting any pouch or anything. It was a pretty serious period of turmoil in France, not only with some violence, but also in that everything came to a standstill.

Q: Were there demonstrations or public expression of concern about what we were doing in Vietnam at that time?

BARBIS: No, there were not. I remember Nureyev and Fonteyn were supposed to come and participate in the May cultural program that Bordeaux annually sponsored and we were all looking forward to this with great anticipation. The night of the performance we went down to the center of Bordeaux where they have this grand, magnificent opera building, and there was nothing but a mob in the square in front of it. Of course the performance was canceled and the Royal Ballet had to leave town because they couldn't perform. So, it was a critical time for France.

So, we were affected by that. I had a vice consul whose parents were visiting and they couldn't leave the country. We finally managed to send them out by road to Spain and they were able to return to Boston that way.

Q: How large an American staff did you have?

BARBIS: There were initially the consul general, a consul, and a vice consul and later just a consul general and a vice consul, just two American officers. We had a consular section that the vice consul supervised of about four people, one who was full time on commercial activities, two on administrative. So, I guess total about ten or eleven, including a driver.

Q: You mentioned that the NATO headquarters had already been moved out of France and the French were not integrated with the military structure. Were there US military ship visits to Bordeaux during your time there?

BARBIS: No, never had a ship visit while I was there. I did have good relations with the local military people. They had several senior people. The equivalent of Redstone, the French missile development center, was just south of Bordeaux. It was a very secret operation and I remember when I left the Department being briefed by Ed Beagle, who was a long time political/military man in WE [Office of Western European Affairs], telling me to do my best to try to get in. Well, I got to know the physicist who was the director of it, but he never invited me to visit the installation itself, so they kept their secrets in that respect.

Q: Sensitive subject I'm sure.

BARBIS: Yes.

Q: Okay. Is there anything else we should say about Bordeaux? I assume you had some good meals.

BARBIS: A lot of good meals.

Q: You probably didn't have the pressures of the Laos desk.

BARBIS: No pressures, one of the reasons they sent me there, I guess. One interesting thing personally, was that you were entertained a lot by various chateau people, etc. and it was always embarrassing because they would produce these magnificent wines and I happened to have been born in a year of a great vintage and frequently they would serve wine from that year. We tried to serve American wines, which was kind of foolish so we gave it up, primarily because our commissary in Paris did not have a good selection, despite the fact that Mr. Bruce had been through there and had written books about wine and suggested wines that we could offer that would be acceptable. Since then, of course, California wines have reached the point of competing with Bordeaux wines.

Q: You were from California, but [maybe the Bordeaux assignment was] a bit too soon. You should have been posted there a little later. Well, I think we will stop at this point George and then next time move you out of Bordeaux to the United States Mission to the European Economic Community in Brussels where you were a political counselor. That should be very interesting.

BARBIS: It was.

Q: It put you back on a larger stage.

BARBIS: It did, and sort of center stage in many ways because that was the period of the first enlargement of the community.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Today is October 29, 1996. George, we pretty well completed your assignment as principal officer in Bordeaux and your next assignment, I believe, was as political counselor at the US Mission to the European Community in Brussels, in 1969. How did that assignment happen?

BARBIS: It all came about because George Vest was the DCM at USEC [U.S. Mission to the European Community] at the time when I completed my two years in Bordeaux. George and I had taken early morning French together before he went to Brussels and I went to Bordeaux and we became good friends. He got to know my wife, Pat. George sold me to Bob Schaetzel, who was the US representative, the ambassador. The USEC mission was a special club and you had to be part of that to get assigned there because some knowledge of the community was essential. I went in cold, not only without any European Community or Common Market, as they still called it, background, but also I went as political counselor to a mission that was essentially concerned with economic questions and relations of the United States and the Europeans. But, an important part of that, even though the Common Market or, to go further back, the EURATOM Community, brought the six then nine together, increasingly the Community was moving in a political direction. The United States support for the Community, you will recall, was always because we primarily hoped that a united Europe could assume a greater share of the responsibilities in Europe in maintaining peace, stability and prosperity and our role could be diminished. But, it took a long time for the Europeans to get around to that and it started as a very informal arrangement, consultations in the political committee, as they called it then. But, it was the beginning of what now is the European Union and which someday hopefully will be an even closer integration of the European states, although enlargement beyond the present membership is going to create complications and difficulties. But, to go back to your question, that is how I got involved and in fact in my first efficiency reports Ambassador Schaetzel in reviewing would always make the comment that "although I had no background, I had done a terrific job."

Q: How many member states were there when you went, initially there were six?

BARBIS: Yes. My main preoccupation for a good part of my tour in Brussels was with the initial enlargement negotiations which were Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark and Norway. The first three joined and Norway declined in a referendum to join.

Q: Could you tell me a little bit about the mechanics of political consultation during this period? You mentioned the political committee, but we were not actually a member so you didn't actually attend those meeting, but how did you consult in advance and how did you find out afterward what happened?

BARBIS: It was all done very informally in Brussels and to a great extent we relied on embassies in the six countries, and then the nine, to do the reporting. Essentially this political cooperation was in the foreign policy area, meetings of foreign ministers trying to reach not common positions initially, but consensus, understanding, close coordination of positions, etc. So, my role was primarily through the Commission's officials who dealt with this question and in particular with the chef d'cabinet, to the key commissioners and also other members of the senior staff, the secretary general, the late Emil Noel, with whom I became close friends. Our role was more to keep people informed of some of the administrative aspects of when meetings were going to take place, where and what the subjects were, which my section could get through its contacts in Brussels. But, for the main substantive kind of positions of governments, etc. part of it we relied on the embassies, including Brussels, which dealt with the Belgian delegation, of course.

Q: I assume you would deal with the permanent missions based in Brussels?

BARBIS: Yes. Each member country had its own embassy accredited to the government of Belgium and in addition had a permanent delegation assigned to or dealing with European Community matters and in which the ambassadors would represent their countries when Council meetings took place. The actual day-to-day operation of the Community was conducted by the Commission, by the Eurocrats, if you will. I forget now the number of commissioners at the time, I'm sure it has grown, but as I recall, the British, the French, the Germans each had two commissioners representing them and the other countries only one. Each would have an area of responsibility for trade relations, for finance, for agriculture, etc. USEC was structured the same as any embassy with political and economic sections and a USIS section. We would divide responsibilities correspondingly. Since agriculture was such a key area in our relations as well as in the Community's preoccupations, the Department of Agriculture had its own people there as part of our mission.

Q: Some of those issues, particularly the common agriculture policy, had enormous political significance in each of the member states, particularly in countries like France. Did you get involved in the political dimension of trade issues, agricultural issues?

BARBIS: We did because all of these issues would come to the table in Council meetings which was the political section's responsibility to report on. So, I was fortunate to have some very talented young officers working for me. One in particular, who went on to become economic minister, both in Paris and in London, would go to these meetings which sometimes wouldn't break up until four or five in the morning. I wouldn't go myself, but Bill would call me around seven in the morning and say, "This is what they decided an hour ago," and then I was in a position to report that at our staff meeting early in the day and then get out a reporting cable based on input from all the sections depending on the subjects that were discussed by the Council.

Q: This officer would not exactly attend the Council meetings but would get a briefing immediately after it ended?

BARBIS: Exactly. There were always briefings and he had good contacts and would talk to members of the delegations and also officials of the Commission and be able to get a pretty good reading on what had been discussed and decided and what positions governments took. And, of course, if it were a critical issue involving the United States, soybeans, for example, which was controversial at that time, or chickens, etc., the various embassies would report to us in advance so that we had a pretty good understanding of national positions.

Q: And afterwards they would often report as well getting...?

BARBIS: And, people returned because frequently...there was an agricultural Council meeting, ministers of agriculture would come to Brussels and when all of these delegations from capitals returned, the embassies did an excellent job in following up and reporting.

Q: I know the European Union had a system of rotation of the presidency by some alphabetical order. Had that started in this period, so that a country would be the president...?

BARBIS: The council.

Q: The council on all subsidiary organs for six months?

BARBIS: Exactly.

Q: So, our consultation with that country would be particularly important?

BARBIS: Very key, both with respect to Commission activities, European Economic Community activities, but also in terms of the informal, at that time, political consultations.

Q: You say it was informal?

BARBIS: There was no structure yet. This all started through the initiative of Steven Donvion, the Belgian Commissioner.

Q: And who had been Belgian foreign minister.

BARBIS: Well, at that time he was more on the economic side, but a rising star in the Belgian political world and European too, because he was a very strong Europeanist. He pushed this idea, because the progress on the political side of the Europeans had been slow, and still is from an American point of view. It has taken them almost 30 years to get to where they are now, with more structured and institutionalized procedures. It was difficult to jumpstart on a formal basis, it had to be a gradual process where people got used to these consultations. They would deal with issues of common interest in foreign policy matters, bilaterally with some countries, but also in the UN they began coordinating their positions and eventually ending up with one position on certain issues. But, national sovereignty was still very important, still is, and that suggested that a gradual, moderate approach had more chances of succeeding, which I think they have. They have made a lot of progress in that respect.

Q: You mentioned the role that embassies played before and after Council meetings and generally making sure that our views were shared at the national level as well that we got different insides from various perspectives. Did you visit the various EC capitals? Obviously your responsibility was broader than just Brussels.

BARBIS: I did in some cases, not all. For example, early on in my tour we had a meeting in Bonn of political counselors from USEC and also from the member countries, where we all met. This was very useful because we got to know each other and I was taken around to the ministry of foreign affairs, of course, and to agencies of the federal government dealing with Community matters. But, the area in which I did spend more time was in London once the enlargement negotiations began. That was very useful because I was exposed for the first time there to the very informal relationship our embassy has traditionally enjoyed with the British government where people at my level, FSO-3 at the time, in the political section of the embassy were on a first name basis with the secretary for defense or the foreign secretary or leading members of parliament. I can recall being taken to parliament one day by the officer responsible for dealing with the Conservative Party and another day - I remember Jack Sulser was the one who was following the Labor Party at the time - and I was introduced to all kinds of people I had read about in the newspapers in cables. All was done very informally. They were willing to talk and give their views, etc. So, that was a great experience and helped me a lot in our approach to our reporting on the enlargement negotiations, which, in the case of Britain in particular, were not easy.

Q: No, they had many obstacles and lots of difficulty. But, generally the United States was supportive of the enlargement?

BARBIS: We were supportive as part of this-I guess it was a small group in our country who had the vision of a united Europe who believed in, worked with, and supported Jean Monnet and his efforts, sort of the patron saint of the European movement right after World War II. As a newcomer, what impressed me was how in some ways we were more European than the Europeans in trying to help them. But, I think it was done with moderation. We didn't beat people over the head, but everybody knew that we supported their moving towards closer and closer economically, in trade and certainly politically. Our interests were primarily political in some respects, although the stakes on the economic side were very high, and still are. Obviously our interest is a little more mixed on the economic side, where to protect our own interests sometimes we got into some real tough hassles with them.

Q: I was in the economic section in Rome at about the same time and I can remember making representations, having lots of discussions about soybeans and aspects of the common agricultural policy. It seemed like at times we were certainly representing US economic interests, agricultural interests. My recollection is that at the same time we always were supportive of the idea of European integration and bringing the economies and the political systems into closer harmony in the belief that that would be to our advantage not only in avoiding another war in Europe, but in advancing our economic interests as well.

BARBIS: You have described it very accurately, I think. One area that didn't get much publicity where I played a role was in assisting in the creation of a United States Congress/European Parliament link, which has grown over the years and is still going on. The initiative came through a visit of a CODEL [congressional delegation] and one of the staffers on that CODEL, Cliff Hackett, who worked for the subcommittee on Europe, House Foreign Affairs Committee, under Ben Rosenthal of New York, came to me. I had not known Cliff. He was a former Foreign Service officer with USIA. We met and he came to me with a proposal which I took up with Ambassador Schaetzel, who grabbed it and we ran with it. The proposal was to start exchanges between members of the Congress and the European Parliament. Initially it was pretty much a one-way street. CODELs would come to Brussels and then we would go to Strasbourg, where the Parliament was located, and also to Luxembourg, where it was located certain months of the year. There were two driving forces behind this. I have already mentioned Ben Rosenthal, who was the chairman, and Don Fraser, who was a congressman from Minnesota at the time. Both were outstanding. And, a lot of other prominent members of the congress with a deep interest both in the economic side of our relations with Europe, but also the political.

Ambassador Schaetzel, who was ideal for heading our mission at that particular time, having the background and knowledge of the Community and having been involved with the earlier European Atomic Energy Community, gave it his full support and pretty much left it up to Cliff and me. Cliff worked with the Congress and I worked with the Commission and the Parliament. We would have at least two, sometimes three, visits a year from a CODEL of eight or ten headed by the two gentlemen I mentioned. I think this has evolved into a two-way exchange that takes place now. It is serious. People discuss issues, present papers, but more importantly it brings people into direct contact which creates better understanding and as a result better cooperation.

Q: Now this period in the early seventies, the European Parliament was not elected was it?

BARBIS: No, it was not, and I must say it was not a very influential body. In fact, its main power was the power of the purse, but that was seldom exercised and in some ways it was seen as something that they had to have but really didn't pay much attention to and it certainly didn't have much influence. It has grown since then in influence and in the role it plays. But, at that time they would gather in Strasbourg and sometimes the representative, say, of the British Parliament, would be... members were chosen by the various national parliaments. Later it became a matter of elections which they placed regularly and where you get a number of prominent politicians leaving the national scene and going into the European stage.

Q: You mentioned that the European Parliament met in Strasbourg. When it was in session, would you go down to deal with it, or was that done by our consul general in Strasbourg?

BARBIS: No, we were very protective of our role with the Parliament and with Council meetings, which didn't always meet in Brussels but sometimes in Luxembourg. We would always send an officer from the political section to cover those meetings of the Council. There was also an officer on my staff who had responsibility for the Parliament and whenever the Parliament was in session, he was in residence in Strasbourg, or that one or two months a year when it was in Luxembourg, in Luxembourg. He would make frequent reports back to me. If it was something where it was important to have a larger US presence, I would go down. I would always go and accompany a CODEL, be it the congressional group that had the exchange with the Parliament or individual CODELS where a congressman or a senator came with an interest in the Community and wanted to see the Parliament.

Q: But if it was a matter involving the Council of Europe based in Strasbourg, that would not be handled by you but by the consulate general in Strasbourg?

BARBIS: Yes, by the consulate general in Strasbourg. We only dealt with the Brussels based organization.

Q: I have to ask you a little bit about your relations with the other US government people in Brussels. There was the embassy as well as a NATO mission. Did you have informal liaison with them?

BARBIS: We had very close relations. With NATO the relationship was primarily between me and my staff in the political section, and the political advisors which was the counterpart section. My counterpart initially was Larry Eagleburger, who knew and had a previous relationship with Bob Schaezel and [in whom] Schaezel had a direct interest. So, we did many things informally together where Larry and I would meet, sometimes the two of us, sometimes accompanied by a colleague from the section, and draft something jointly for Schaezel or participate in a dinner where we had a purpose of discussing certain issues. In this, it was great to have an ambassador like Schaezel who took a direct interest. I think our relations not only with USNATO but also with the embassy were very close and excellent.

Q: I think the negotiations had started for the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was culminated in Helsinki in 1975. Was your mission involved in that?

BARBIS: We were not involved in that. That all began at the very end of my five-year stay in Brussels. I went there in September, 1969 and left in 1974.

Q: Was Ambassador Schaezel head of mission during all that time?

BARBIS: No, he was there most of the time and then Joe Greenwald succeeded him. They were two of the best ambassadors I worked with. I don't see Ambassador Schaetzel much now, but I do see Joe from time to time.

Q: His background wasn't quite as strong in terms of European integration from the earliest period, but very strong in the trade-economic side.

BARBIS: Exactly, and Joe is a fast learner. He had a lot of background. He was not someone who had devoted a good part of his career to the Community or the European unification process as Schaetzel had, but was a very knowledgeable and experienced ambassador on trade issues and was very popular in Brussels, as Schaetzel had been.

Q: I worked for a while in the late sixties in the economic bureau in the Office of International Trade, and I think there was a little bit of a feeling at times, not so much on our part, but particularly on the part of some of the other agencies, including the Office of Special Trade Representative, which had just been established, that the mission in Brussels and the office in the European Bureau that backstopped European political integration, was sometimes more interested in Europe and bringing it together than it was in US economic goals. Did you sense that at times?

BARBIS: We were certainly aware of that and from the perspective of the groups you are speaking of, certainly that was understandable. But still, I think, the mission did its damndest to represent US interests. Perhaps in our approach we preferred to be more gentle than aggressive than some people would have liked. And within the mission too, the Agricultural Department representative, a very capable guy, who had been there longer than I-it was characteristic of that mission where officers tended to do longer tours, not just two or three years-he always on agricultural issues certainly defended the Department of Agriculture position very, very strongly.

Q: The length of tours were partly due to the fact that the work was interesting, challenging and Brussels was a good place to live. But, was there also a feeling that contacts with the Commission and knowledge of these sometimes very technical specialized issues was also important?

BARBIS: Absolutely. I think you can't stress enough the importance of that. First of all, we were dealing with a very complex situation [with numerous] technical aspects and once you learned it you couldn't afford to lose an officer and then have to train a new one. So, it made sense and most officers were willing to stay for more than three years. It made sense and I think it served the interests of the government.

Q: Ambassador Schaetzel was there for seven or eight years, wasn't he?

BARBIS: I once knew exactly, but he was there for a long time.

Q: Was George Vest the deputy throughout your assignment?

BARBIS: No, George Vest had already moved to NATO as DCM and Manny Abrams came up from Rome, where he had been economic minister, to be our DCM and then Art Hartman took his place. Art had worked closely with Schaetzel in the Department on European questions previously.

Q: His background goes back even earlier working with Jean Monnet in Paris as they were putting together what became the OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development].

BARBIS: Yes. And we were all just delighted, thinking it was the right move, when they took him away from the mission and made him assistant secretary for Europe. He had the right background at the right time to be in that key spot.

Q: Are there any other major issues that you were involved with while in Brussels that you want to talk about?

BARBIS: I think we have pretty well covered it. The role of the political counselor or any political officer in a mission like USEC was sort of unique, but it was, to use an over worked word, challenging and interesting and I was fortunate to work with people who helped me learn and fit into the team that we had there and be in a position to make a contribution which I like to think I did.

Q: Multilateral diplomacy does not involve trying to guess who is going to win the next election or the strength of a political party.

BARBIS: Or forecasting who the next prime minister is going to be.

Q: But, it does certainly involve some very fundamental issues of interest to the United States as well as those that have an impact beyond whatever the borders are.

BARBIS: And, of course, as the Community became the Union and as it expanded and is going to continue to expand, it is a completely new ball game, a new landscape, compared to the five years that I was involved.

Q: But, some of the considerations are still pretty basic. Just yesterday the European Union took a decision in response to something that the United States had done in the Helms-Burton Act restricting trade with Cuba. And there always is a little bit of that feeling that they have to respond to what we are doing or what somebody else is doing. Is there a positive impetus that one feels in terms of when you were there of Europe coming together or is it that they recognize that together they have a little bit more clout and strength than they do as nine or six individuals?

BARBIS: My response would be a little bit of both. I think certainly there is quite a bit of the latter because in dealing with the United States the Europeans have always had admiration, affection, self-interest in maintaining good relations and at the same time a resentment given the place in history that Europe has held in the past over the centuries, that they are being left out and left behind more and more. So, united a lot of them would see that it would put them into a better and stronger position. At the same time, I think, wide spread in Europe, especially among young people, there is a very strong current of believing in the unity of that family of nations.

Q: And as they travel, trade and interact increasingly with each other, that probably has been strengthened.

BARBIS: Exactly, although there are still pockets of resistance and opposition. Although in joining the Community, the British didn't lose their famous breakfast, but there still are a lot of Brits who are not happy with the Community, as we know.

Q: They want to protect sovereignty, culture, language and all the attributes of nationhood.

BARBIS: Exactly. Whenever something is agreed to by the Council and the institutions of the Union to move even further down the road toward union, people resist it and oppose it and try to slow it down. And, I think that process will continue. It will be one of fits and starts with some very difficult questions looking at the future and further enlargement.

Q: You have talked a little bit about your contacts and the importance of the Commission as the point of continuity, preparation of action papers, etc. Was there the sense while you were there that the Commission was a pretty vital and exciting place? One has the impression at times these days that it has become very large, very bureaucratic, very top heavy with these people in Brussels and an obstacle in some ways to integration.

BARBIS: I think there is considerable truth in that. I went back to Brussels for the first time a year and a half ago and was just astounded at the office buildings that have risen to house the staff and the personnel of the Commission. When I was there, the main building was just a block away [from where I lived] and [I] always walked by it on my way to USEC. Although the Commission had buildings all over the place, sort of like the State Department in previous years, and with the enlargement they had to obviously provide more space for personnel on the Commission staff, but it is just astounding. All of Brussels, it seemed to me on a tour that a friend took me on, seems to be Commission buildings. But, there are those who are very critical of the Commission, but the thing wouldn't work without it. I think they have come a long way in creating a body of European civil servants and although they are much maligned and criticized when people's interests are effected by decisions made in Brussels, I think they have contributed to the progress the member states have made in bringing together this new entity.

Q: Besides the member states and their delegations, and the delegations that come from capitals for Council meetings, there obviously are many other countries in Europe and beyond besides the United States who have a great interest in what was happening in the European Community. I assume you had contact with countries like Canada and Japan, but how about countries on the fringes of the EC of those days, some of which later became members, were they all represented in Brussels as well?

BARBIS: Yes, they were and followed Community developments very closely. I or my colleagues, except if a particular issue was coming up, really didn't have the time or the opportunity to have close ties with them. Certainly, countries that later applied for membership or that had applied for membership had close ties with us and we were exchanging views and information on a regular basis, but our main focus had to be on the Commission, the activities of the Council and what the European Community, itself, was doing. There was just too much to do. There were certainly opportunities to do more of that and maybe they are doing a lot more of that now, but I'm out of touch. I presume the staff at USEC is pretty much what it was, certainly no larger, so that would put certain limits on how much contact and association is possible with non-member countries.

Q: You mention that the negotiations for enlargement were going on at the time with Britain, Denmark, Ireland and Norway. Were you pretty involved in following those closely?

BARBIS: Very much so. We had frequent contact with the four applicant country delegations in Brussels and they were quite open in sharing with us their views and their concerns and where the negotiations were going and how they were going. It was a pretty open environment in terms of communication between us and the people involved.

Q: Was there a feeling at that time that that next step in enlargement was kind of it, or was there kind of an assumption that there would quickly be another round of enlargement?

BARBIS: Well, I think the member states were certainly aware of the great interest and desire of others to join and the pressure [to join] that. To sort of contain [pressures to join], the Community did have a series of agreements with countries like Greece, Turkey and Cyprus and others, of association where the country in question was not be considered for immediate membership but was on the road to becoming a member. Some of them like Greece did become members, others have not made it yet although they would like to and are constantly pressing for commitments to come into the Community.

Q: But in the period you were there, the early seventies, for essentially political reasons, their internal political system, countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal were kind of ruled out, I suppose as potential members?

BARBIS: Oh, yes. At that time the Colonels were running Greece and both Spain and Portugal were not flourishing democracies yet and certainly that was a consideration. Through these association agreements, I think, the Community sought to contain greater pressures insisting on sort of a preparation stage that qualified for membership to precede it. But, once the three countries you mentioned shed their authoritarian leadership and moved in the direction of democracy, that made it easier for the Community to address membership for them. Although, in all three of the cases, the Community had to be concerned about the economic readiness of the candidate countries to become members, and that is something that they watch carefully. They have to since national interests are affected by responsibilities to the Community in terms of social programs and other programs of assistance to new members that are less advanced economically. So, they have to keep that as a very important criteria of membership. How new members are going to integrate or would integrate into the overall Community without doing more damage than bringing strength.

Q: At that time I assume Austria was ruled out because it was neutral, even though later on it did become a member. Was Ireland the first non-NATO country to become a member? How important was NATO membership in terms of joining the Community?

BARBIS: That created complications, especially as the political side of things evolved, but I don't think it was a criteria that the Community considered important. At the time you had two parallel groupings in Europe. You had the Community and you had EFTA [European Free Trade Area], where many of the neutrals were members. Although the two groups dealt with each other, they were separate. There was no desire at that time, at least, as I recall, on the part of most EFTA members to become members of the Community and certainly the Community was moving cautiously in enlargement and started with the four we mentioned, although only three decided to join in the end.

Q: Of course, the European Free Trade Area was strictly limited and didn't have the integrated goals of the European Community.

BARBIS: It certainly did not it was strictly...

Q: George, we have been talking about EFTA and the differences between EFTA and the EC. Have you pretty much covered that or is there something else that should be said?

BARBIS: I think I started to say something and I've lost it.

Q: Let me ask you something else. Secretary Kissinger, I am not sure he had become Secretary of State while you were in Brussels, but one of his innovations for the State Department personnel system was something he called GLOP (Global Outlook Policy), a belief that it was good to bring officers from Latin American to work in Europe, that they would have fresh insights or at least questions, and it was good to break up the cozy little China club, European Community club, etc. Was any of that talked about while you were still in Brussels or did that come afterwards? How did you react to it in terms of your experience as an outsider in that Community framework?

BARBIS: I think it started while I was still in Brussels. Secretary Kissinger brought it all up as a result of talking to an officer in Mexico City who didn't know anything about China or didn't know anything about NATO, and that made the Secretary think that something was wrong with the Foreign Service. I don't know what happened to GLOP, whether it is still a hot program or policy.

Q: I don't think it is and, of course, we have moved to open assignments so what happens to an officer's career is much more up to the officer.

BARBIS: Well, I started my career, as we have discussed here, in Iran and then went to the Far East and spent a number of years working in that area, and then for reasons we don't need to go into I went to Bordeaux and embarked on the next to the last phase of my Foreign Service career for twelve years on European affairs. Of course, I had background about Europe, both because of my having spent the war years in Greece, but also my academic studies, etc. And, Bordeaux was no problem, I was able to fit in. Going to Brussels and joining in the USEC staff, of course, required adjustments and learning. I wouldn't put it in the GLOP context because the focus of USEC was primarily, as the name of the mission suggests, economic and trade, but certainly the political aspects were there and relatively important. Although it was different from reporting as a political officer from Seoul, Korea or from Thailand, being a political officer definitely made it possible for me to do the job, having had that political experience.

Q: I assume we would share views and consult and get reaction on occasion to something going on in the Middle East or Vietnam or perhaps in the UN. Would we be discussing issues like that or were they mostly issues related to Europe?

BARBIS: I think it is fair to say the political consultative process had not moved that far along where we got into those areas at USEC. Although, after all we were dealing with foreign service professionals, both on the Commission staff and in the various country delegations and so naturally in our contacts we discussed issues beyond the Community. But the focus was the Community.

Q: One more question about the composition, the make up, the kind of people who were working in the Commission at that period. Were they mostly people who had been seconded, had come for relatively short periods in Brussels, or were they people who were planning to make a career of work in the Commission?

BARBIS: The majority, I would say, were the latter and I think, although a lot of the people that I knew and worked with have since retired with the Commission, some have spent their entire careers there. For example, a young Frenchman, with whom I became close friends-his wife's family was from Bordeaux and we lived next door almost to her parents so we became close friends. He started his career after university with the Commission and he is still there now. At one time he was here in Washington at the Community's office in a senior position. Later he was the head of a delegation in Tokyo and now is back in the Commission in Brussels. Jean Pierre will retire from the European Community when he reaches that point.

Q: At that time the Community had an office here in Washington and I guess in some other parts of the world, Tokyo, perhaps...

BARBIS: [Washington] was the first one and then gradually they started establishing offices everywhere.

Q: To what extent were you aware of the Community's office in Washington? Were they doing more or less the same thing you were or were they much more interested in providing information on what was going on in the Community and to some extent consulting with the State Department and others?

BARBIS: During my years the presence here was a smaller one than is the case now. Now, in fact, the head of the delegation, to show how they have attached more and more importance to it, is a former prime minister of Denmark, or was, I don't know if he is still here. At the time that we are speaking of in the early mid 1970s, it was a small office and a German was in charge of it. His principal associate was an American who handled the public affairs aspects. They may still have Americans working for them, I don't know. Their role started as one of selling the Community or explaining the Community to the American public and in particular to the US Congress. There was a very strong emphasis on congressional contacts, etc., but also in dealing with agencies of the government, the State Department, USTR [U.S. Trade Representative], Commerce, Agriculture, Atomic Energy Commission, etc.

Q: Let me ask one other question about the Commission, the Eurocrat. I assume that these people, even though some of them made it a career or were in the process of making a career in the European Community, still were very much French, British or Italian, and the national characteristics were quite apparent. There hadn't yet become a European personality or had there?

BARBIS: It was certainly moving in that direction. The people I got to know best, French, Italian, from all member states, almost, were committed Europeans. They saw it as the future and were committed not as a Frenchman, or as a German, but because they believed in the idea of a united Europe. Now, that isn't true of everybody and I should clarify that not everybody was a professional Eurocrat. Many of them were there for a short period and moved on to other jobs. This was true especially in the case of the personal staff of a Commission member where frequently the foreign office would assign someone to be the chef du cabinet. Lord Soames at one time was a British Commissioner. Roy Jenkins was from the Labour Party when he was a member of the Commission. And Commissioners came and went. They were not as permanent. Some stayed longer than others. But, that cast kept changing depending on the government at home and the circumstances.

Q: Was there ever the sense that a government was sending somebody off to Brussels to kind of get rid of him, get him out of the capital for a while?

BARBIS: I don't think that that was the case. I think they saw it as too important to do that, but there may have been cases. I think increasingly it has become more important to the member state governments.

Q: Was there ever an effort to instruct, to try to make sure that a Commissioner or somebody else on the Commission took instructions, took orders from the capital?

BARBIS: Well, certainly they would try to influence them. I think it was a delicate matter, though, and they were all on the same boat so people were careful in that respect. Who the president of the Commission is is always important and it started with a Belgian, Mr. Jean Ray, who was there for many, many years. And then there was an Italian and lately a Frenchman and now a Belgian, again.

Q: Five years in Brussels was not bad either, I guess?

BARBIS: No, it was an interesting time. There were interesting people and it was a pleasant country to live in, although it has its problems. We found it an interesting experience and look back on it with fondness.

Q: And overall, I guess any political counselor position really has this attribute, that you really need to get out and get to know people and talk and encounter a variety of people and points of view perspectives.

BARBIS: Although our world was a pretty limited one, the world of the Commission and those associated with the institutions of the Community, and I guess one regret would be that although we traveled on a personal basis around Belgium with our children and got to see some of the country, we really didn't spend as much time with the host country people, although we did have friends who had nothing to do with the Community, through my wife or the building where we lived, or our children we got to know people outside that circle, but our main association was with Commission people, member state delegations and other missions like us with an interest in following what was going on. We had very close ties personally with the Swedish embassy counterpart, for example.

Q: And while you said you had good relations of course with the American embassy in Brussels, still you had to be a little sensitive that their area of responsibility was the Belgian government and generally what was happening in Belgium itself.

BARBIS: Exactly, so we didn't get into that. The rules had been pretty much set by the time I got there in 1969 where it was known what the turf of USEC was and I don't recall any jurisdictional difficulties with the embassy in Brussels. Once in a while there might be a problem with Embassy Luxembourg wanting to play more of a role when the Council or Parliament met there, but I would always call on the embassy when we went to Luxembourg and share with them anything they were interested in.

Q: Of course the embassy in Luxembourg was very small. There is only so much you can report on what is happening in the country of Luxembourg and its participation from the beginning as a charter member of the European Community was pretty important.

BARBIS: Very important to them and they had good people representing them.

Q: Well, after a couple of years in Bordeaux and five years in Brussels you came up for reassignment. Before we go on to where you actually went, I am curious to ask whether there was any thought in your mind of going back at this stage of your career to either Korea or Thailand or Southeast Asia where in an earlier period you had spent a pretty large chunk of time in the field and in Washington?

BARBIS: Obviously, after three or four years one began thinking about what next. I was fortunate whenever the ambassador went to a chiefs of mission conference he would talk to colleagues and come back and suggest this or that, but we didn't really get serious on that score until 1973, when I had been there four years already. Joe Greenwald came back from a chiefs of mission conference in London where he met the ambassador to Ireland, a political appointee, and came back and told me that Ambassador Moore would like to interview me if I was interested. At that point I hadn't really focused on it but I went over and met him in a hotel at Heathrow Airport and had an interview.

Q: This was for the DCM job?

BARBIS: Yes, for the DCM job in Dublin. At the same time I got a call from Athens from the political counselor there with whom I had worked in the Department during my tours on Korea and Laos, and she, Elizabeth Brown, said she would be moving on and would I be interested in replacing her in Athens? Would I object if she threw my name in the hopper? I did not object. So, when the time came to leave Brussels there were these two possibilities because the Dublin one had moved along, but not to a decision on the ambassador's part, and the Athens one had become more concrete. When I returned to Washington the Dublin assignment was more alive because they wanted me there almost immediately so that the man I would be replacing could move on to wherever he was going. This posed some problems for us because we had some medical things we had to take care of and I didn't want to be separated from the family which would have been required if I went to Dublin, so, I had to turn down Dublin. Athens then became more definite except the person I was replacing didn't have an onward assignment yet and until she got an assignment they couldn't write my travel orders. So I completed my home leave.

Q: When was this?

BARBIS: This would have been the summer of 1974. After the Colonels coup in Cyprus, which was in July, the Cyprus Task Force was formed and I got a call calling me back to Washington earlier than my expected arrival to participate in that. Only, when I got back in town they disbanded the Task Force and they didn't need me. So, I never did work on the Cyprus Task Force. But, since my Athens departure was up in the air I went to be the European Bureau representative at the United Nations General Assembly the latter part of September, whenever the General Assembly began. I did that until I departed in December to go to Athens.

Q: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about that experience at the General Assembly, if we could?

BARBIS: I had been to the General Assembly on visits. I remember when I was in graduate school in Washington at SAIS, Francis Wilcox, the chief of staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who also taught at SAIS, the international organizations course, took the class to New York to visit the UN for several days. I remember part of that was spending time with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Then, I had been up there for the Korean question when I was on the Korean desk and had visited friends, etc. So, I knew my way around the building at least.

But, you are thrown into a completely different world that you have no familiarity with and you don't know the people. You may have some knowledge of some of the issues, but not all. You are representing the Bureau which means everybody on the delegation thinks you are an expert on every country in Europe, which I wasn't. It was awkward in the beginning because there would be votes coming up on the floor or in committees and you were asked to give a reading on how the Europeans were going to vote. Well, that kind of information comes through contacts and it takes a while to develop contacts. Fortunately you have a permanent staff with the delegation that is very knowledgeable and very helpful except that the pressures of time didn't permit them to sort of take you by the hand and lead you around. They did as much of that as they could. You were pretty much on your own and on your own resources. So, in that respect there were times when I didn't feel that I was really up to doing what I should be doing. But it was an interesting experience since I was a supporting player rather than a leading player and I did get to know the people I worked with, which made it a lot easier.

Q: There were also representatives of the other geographic bureaus?

BARBIS: Exactly. Each bureau over the years developed its own practices with respect to bureau representatives. The African bureau provided for transportation for the officer to come back weekends to Washington, while the European bureau did not.

Q: And your family was in Washington?

BARBIS: My family was here which meant that whenever I could I tried to come down late on Friday and go back Sunday night to be there Monday. I remember Thanksgiving, I was the duty officer or something, and it was a lonely Thanksgiving and a rainy day in New York City.

Q: Was your role primarily to have contact with and solicit the votes from the European members of the United Nations, and/or were you involved in European issues that were before the General Assembly?

BARBIS: It was more the former. You were sort of an errand boy in a way. The issues were handled by the permanent members of the delegation with very close contact with the Department. They were on the phone constantly and people would come [up] from Washington. So, your participation in substantive issues was minimal, or at least that was my experience. In some cases, I could see where the representative from the bureau was very well informed and plugged in, either because he had served in the UN before or because he knew more of the delegations having worked on Africa for a number of years, and sometimes there would be a bureau representative who would get involved more than I did. But, in my case it was pretty much to convey messages, to ask questions and get reactions, to follow the debate or speeches in the UN and write summaries and things like that.

Q: The Cyprus issue was very much a subject during that General Assembly of 1974, but you were not really all that involved in that?

BARBIS: I was not. I met the Cyprus representative, but I did not get involved in those issues, which is unfortunate as it would have been useful for me to have been more engaged since I did go to Athens after the General Assembly.

Q: This was still very much in the Cold War period. Were you also involved in doing these various things with the Soviet delegation and other Eastern European delegations?

BARBIS: No, I did not have any contact with them. They were pretty much in the purview of the officer responsible on the delegation.

Q: So, you were dealing mostly with Western European countries?

BARBIS: Right. And strictly in a supportive role. I took my marching orders from John Howison and Harry Thayer, the deputy, and assisted the other officers on their staff. It was an interesting experience. It was awkward for me from a family point of view and if circumstances had been different I would have enjoyed it a lot more.

Q: Another thing that those bureau reps do to some extent is contact back with the bureau in Washington. Did you do much of that? Had you actually worked in the European bureau in Washington?

BARBIS: I had not worked in the European bureau but I had worked with the European bureau because both Korea and Laos had a heavy involvement of Western European governments. I would occasionally get a phone call from Washington but when they wanted something they would deal with the officer following Western Europe in the delegation, not with me. I felt that was strange. I don't know how it is done now but it was pretty much, "All right you will be our rep, here is your ticket and travel orders, goodbye." There was not much support really, although if I called any desk obviously they were responsive and helpful but you are pretty much on your own and have to find your own way and hope that you get some support and help from the people in New York.

Q: Certainly in your long period in Brussels at USEC as political counselor you had had a lot of contact with the regional political office, RPE, so you really knew the bureau and what they could do for you on European Community issues.

BARBIS: But, again, you had the feeling, and I guess it depends on the bureau and the representative of the bureau, that you were a body that was provided because it was required rather than here is somebody we can really work with and use and have him do something for us. So, I did my best but it wasn't a shining performance.

Q: But, it did get you to the time when the job in Athens was open.

BARBIS: Right.

Q: When did you actually go to Greece?

BARBIS: I arrived in Athens on January 2, 1975.

Q: What was the situation in Greece at that time?

BARBIS: This was some six months after the fall of the junta, after the Cyprus tragedy, as the Greeks saw it and a period of great resentment [against] the United States because we were blamed for allowing what happened to happen. We were blamed for what the Colonels did, that we egged them into it, which was nonsense, but more importantly that the Turks invaded Cyprus and we didn't stop it. My going to Athens was in a way not an easy decision, especially after the events on Cyprus because of my Greek background. In fact, when Ambassador Kubisch interviewed me for the job, he put that question to me. Will the fact that you have an association with this country affect your performance? I had to tell him very firmly that I was born in this country and always considered myself an American and although I had pride in my parents' heritage and a certain affection for Greece, especially since I had lived there as a boy, certainly that would not be a factor in how I performed as a representative of the US government. And he accepted that.

I also saw by going there under these difficult conditions, because we were aware of the anti-American feeling that resulted from the years of junta rule and the Cyprus situation, as someone who spoke the language, had lived there, who knew the Greek character and what Greeks were like that I could make a contribution that some other officers would not necessarily be able to make. And, although there had been a practice not to assign officers with a family relationship to that country, we were getting over that fortunately. The one drawback in my going to Greece was that in the Greek eyes, a Greek-American was always considered CIA because the CIA did use Greek-Americans and it became known. But, I think I was probably the first substantive Greek American officer the embassy had had, although the administrative counselor was a Greek-American from Brooklyn when I went to Athens, but I don't think we had had any other Greek-Americans. I think there had been someone right after the war in Thessaloniki and he was too biased towards the Greeks and that gave a bad name to Greek-Americans. This had happened in other countries too, so the Department had an unwritten policy of not sending hyphenated Americans to the country from which their parents or maybe themselves had come initially. As I said we have gotten away from that now and is no longer a factor. In my case I never had the feeling that Ambassador Kubisch or Monty Stearns, the DCM, or any of my colleagues at the embassy saw me as a partisan of the Greeks or as a covert mole or whatever.

In fact, and I will come to this later perhaps, when an editor whose magazine was publishing a story that I was the CIA station chief contacted an American journalist to check that with her, she said that this guy was as American as apple pie, you are out of your mind and stupid if you print that story. This was after the station chief had been assassinated. The Greeks who are very conspiratorial types in any case, it is sort of built into their culture, are always looking for something like that. So, it was a story that was widely believed, but by people who didn't know me. Anybody who knew me I don't think felt that way. But this journalist told this guy she knew me, knew my office and was in it all the time and knew very well I was what I was said to be. So, that was a negative thing, trying to sell that story on the basis I was of Greek descent. But my main point, I guess, is that I felt that I was in a unique position during that difficult time in US-Greek relations to make a positive contribution. And, I did get a superior honor award for that almost four year assignment, which suggested that maybe I did accomplish what I personally had hoped to accomplish.

I will give you another anecdote to show you the climate and my position being Greek-American. I remember at one of the first dinners that my wife and I were invited to at the DCM's house meeting for the first time the minister of commerce of Greece, John Butois, who himself was married to Mary, a Greek-American from Chicago. He quite openly was unhappy with US policy over Cyprus but also attacked Greek-Americans as representing the US government. John and I became good friends subsequently. But he was very insulting at that first encounter. I think maybe he told all of this to my wife. But on another occasion he said something to Ambassador Kubisch. "Why do you have this Greek-American on your staff?" Kubisch rose to my defense and said, "He is not a Greek-American, he is an American and represents the US government." So, I did have that kind of support. I only mention it to show you that in the minds of many Greeks it was otherwise.

At the same time, many Greeks, especially in the government, accepted me for who I was and treated me that way, although they always preferred to speak to me in Greek. I remember the foreign minister before he became prime minister. [He] had great affection for me for some unknown reason, used to call me the eagle which in Greece is the highest praise you can give a young person. I didn't feel I was that talented but I was accepted in the diplomatic community and in government circles as a sincere, hardworking representative of the American embassy.

Q: But you were to your knowledge probably the first to break this unwritten policy and if that was the case you opened the door for some others who subsequently served not only in Greece but in other places as well.

BARBIS: I don't know if I would go that far, but there is something to that, yes.

Q: You were in Greece during the war and returned to California. To what extent had you visited or kept up, followed things in Greece over the 30 period between the time you left in 1945 and going back in 1975?

BARBIS: The last time I was really intensely involved was as a graduate student when I did a paper on the Greek occupation and liberation in World War II. Subsequently, when I went to the Far East and then Bordeaux and Brussels, I really wasn't involved. The other contact with Greece, other than sporadic correspondence with some cousins, was when Pat and I took a two-week vacation in Greece from Brussels and that was in the early seventies. So, I was aware of the situation there but not in any great detail. I didn't have the time, really, to follow things.

Q: And your Greek language ability was there.

BARBIS: It was there. As my wife's Greek teacher said, "He speaks very good Greek, but it is a Greek of some decades ago." Not ancient, but she could tell I had learned it when they spoke differently. I wasn't up to date, but I did modernize myself in those four years though. It was a great advantage to be able to speak with great fluency. But, fluency doesn't always mean you are a fluent translator or interpreter. I am better as a translator than an interpreter but I remember when we had a dinner at the residence for the foreign minister and his senior officers from the ministry of foreign affairs got up to give a toast and he insisted that I interpret for him because he wanted to give it in Greek. I must say I was very uncomfortable because I didn't think I did a great job. In fact, afterwards, Ambassador Kubisch asked [the foreign minister] how I had done and he said, "Not as well as I thought. I would give him a B-."

Q: That is the trouble when you interpret for somebody who really does have some ability in English. And, you also had some other Greek speakers there.

BARBIS: Well, Monty was still there and he is one of the best we have.

Q: Let's talk a little more before we go on to the political situation in Greece and US-Greek relations, etc., about the structure of the embassy. You have mentioned Ambassador Kubisch and the DCM, Monty Stearns. What kind of staff did you have in the political section?

BARBIS: I had what I guess you would call a medium size political section. Myself, and three officers, a total of four. We divided responsibility the traditional way, I guess. I was in overall charge, and then one of my colleagues followed the domestic political, foreign relations, and labor. Political/military was separate, because we were engaged in base negotiations at the time and there was a one man political/military section directly under the ambassador and DCM. Bob Pugh, and later Mort Dworken, and I became good friends and worked closely together.

Q: Who were some of the officers who worked in the political section?

BARBIS: Initially there was Jack Collins, Peter De Vos, who went on to become ambassador several times and still is, and Towny Friedman. I have been very fortunate the two times I have been political counselor, in Brussels and in Athens, to have at least one extremely talented officer and all the officers who worked for me first rate. But, Towny Friedman stood out in his insights and understanding of the Greeks, his speaking Greek, etc. The political section is a team and when you have a good team it reflects on the leader of the team as much as anybody.

There were a number of other officers in the section while I was there but the three officers I remember best are De Vos, Friedman and Terry Grant. Grant did pretty much the labor work, Towny and Peter did most of the political, domestic and foreign.

We would start the day with the four of us sitting down and going over what we wanted to do and what we had to do. We worked very informally and closely.

Q: You had strong Greek, maybe a little rusty at first, but the others you mentioned had learned their Greek at the Foreign Service Institute. I assume Greek was pretty important in Athens during that period?

BARBIS: Yes, and not only important because of the need to communicate, but also important in establishing a rapport with people who were always pleased to see that you could speak Greek. Both Friedman and De Vos had learned quite good Greek and could use their Greek in their work. Terry less so. Both Peter and Towny had initiative, drive, and went out a lot. Some of the later leaders of the Greek political world were people I met through them. They were younger and the post-junta members of parliament were new politicians, like Milton Ebert, for example. I remember Peter had the first contact with him and...

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History interview with George M. Barbis. It is December 7, 1996 and I am Raymond Ewing. The interview is being conducted at the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. George, we have been talking about your assignment to Athens, which I think began early 1975. We talked about the staff you had and the circumstances under which you received the assignment. Why don't we start out by talking a little bit more about the ambassador who was in Athens at the time you arrived.

BARBIS: Actually, Ambassador Kubisch was there. I remember the evening we arrived, January 2, he very graciously invited Pat and me to the residence for drinks and I was introduced to my first crisis of my tour in Athens, at that point as an observer since I had hardly been there more than twelve hours. What had happened apparently, as I recall, there had been an incident involving a marine who had harassed a young Greek girl. I think Monty Stearns, the DCM, was there, the security officer, the public affairs officer, etc. So, while I sat with my wife and Mrs. Kubisch on the couch, as we had been visiting before these other members of the staff had arrived, they discussed how they were going to deal with the issue. I won't go into the details because I don't recall them.

I had met Ambassador Kubisch, as I may have mentioned at our last session, in Washington while he was preparing to go to Greece, leaving the post of assistant secretary for Interamerican affairs. While I had been waiting to get my travel orders I had been assigned to the inspectors under Ambassador Little doing people on out-of-department assignments, supplemental evaluations. In any event, that was when I first met Ambassador Kubisch.

I think Monty Stearns had already gone to Athens as DCM and chargé d'affaires. Monty I had known since my days on the Korean desk when the NEA [Bureau of Near East and South Asia Affairs] public affairs office was across the hall from us. I remember meeting him for the first time back then and subsequently over the years.

I don't think they could have picked two better people to lead the embassy. Monty, of course, had a lot of background. He was a Greek language officer, had served there in the late fifties, early sixties, knew Greece well, had all kinds of contacts, etc. So, he was a good person to go back during this period where, as you recall in 1967 a group of Colonels overthrew the democratic government, the elected government, and established in effect a rule by the Colonels. We took a lot of heat from that since many Greeks, who love to come up with conspiratorial theories, blamed us for what had happened, some even accusing us for having engineered it all, the CIA, etc. We can go into that aspect of US-Greek relations if you think it is of interest.

Jack Kubisch as far as I know had no prior involvement with Greece. I think his last overseas post had been as DCM in Paris. He had been in the Foreign Service and had left the Foreign Service. I think his last post had been as AID mission director in Brazil. He then went into the private sector but had returned a few years previously. But, by temperament, personally, physical appearance, everything else, he was the ideal man to represent us, in my view, at that time. We were very fortunate that we had someone like Ambassador Kubisch.

Q: He did not speak Greek?

BARBIS: He did not speak Greek. And, I don't think he had much background other than the pre-arrival orientation and briefings he had in the Department. His task was, and therefore the task of all of us, to try and overcome this hostility or disappointment that the Greeks felt towards the United States and US policies, not only as a result of the seven years of rule by the Colonels but also, and more recently and more deeply felt by the Greeks, emotionally and otherwise, the events in Cyprus in July 1974. That was when we had the turnover in leadership of our embassy. Ambassador Tasca, who had been there during this period, had left. Monty had come in as the new DCM/Chargé until Kubisch arrived.

So, the assignment he was given and which the rest of the mission shared was to overcome this hostility, this negative attitude towards us, welcoming the return of democratic government and doing what we could to assist them in their own efforts. Constantine Karamanlis, former prime minister, who had gone to and remained throughout this period of the junta in Paris, France, returned in triumph immediately after the fall of the Colonels and unanimously the country rose in support of Karamanlis to be their leader.

Q: Were elections held?

BARBIS: I believe the elections were held before I got there. When I arrived there was a new parliament in which the New Democracy Party, which Mr. Karamanlis had founded, a conservative party, with overwhelming popular support was governing. He had a difficult task, one of restoring constitutional government and healing the bitterness and animosities resulting from the junta. One of the first political events was to hold a trial of the junta leaders, who were all condemned to prison and were in prison all the time I was there.

Q: Could you talk a little more, George, about the operation of the embassy? Ambassador Kubisch didn't speak Greek so when he would meet with the prime minister would you go with him and interpret or would there be an interpreter from the embassy?

BARBIS: The only time I went as the interpreter was when we had group meetings. When the Secretary of State or Under Secretary of State or some high ranking visitor from Washington came, I was always the note taker in those meetings with the prime minister. The prime minister had an outstanding Greek diplomat as his special assistant, who did a lot of the interpreting. And, of course, Monty Stearns was always also there with the ambassador. Although Karamanlis knew some English, he never used it in official meetings. The ambassador and Monty dealt primarily with the prime minister's office and the president of the republic, largely a ceremonial position. A very respected jurist, Constantine Tsatsos, was the first president after the reestablishment of the republic. My dealings were mostly with the ministry of foreign affairs, and because of my background, [my] language, as I got to know Greek officials, I did have a direct relationship with many ministers other than the minister of foreign affairs. And, actually I didn't have much contact with the first minister of foreign affairs during the period I was there. The ambassador and Monty dealt with him. But, I got to know other ministers, education, culture, commerce, etc.

Q: And I suppose members of parliament?

BARBIS: And members of parliament. Of course it takes time to establish these relationships, but after being there a year or so I did have good contacts with political leaders. I had very energetic and innovative young officers, Peter De Vos and Towny Friedman, who were very good about introducing me to their younger, lower-level contacts and not always lower-level. For example, I remember at one point dealing with the minister of interior, whom Peter De Vos had first met before he became the minister. We went to see him to discuss [pending] elections that were scheduled. As a result of Peter having known him my having established by then a reputation of having a Greek background, we had a very frank and very informal discussion with the minister who gave us all the time we wanted and answered every question we had. Unfortunately, he died a few years later. He was one of the strong supporters of Prime Minister Karamanlis. Also I was able to establish a good personal relationship with [the man] who had served at the Greek mission to NATO where he had met and become good friends with James Goodby, who was a good friend of mine. I was able to bring greetings from Jim and that facilitated my establishing a good relationship.

And also, because of my family background, the president of the parliament at the time was an elder statesman who came from the same region that my father's family came from. Two of my father's brothers had been active in local politics and knew this gentleman well and he always welcomed me for informal chats and so forth.

And finally, a rising star in the background of Greek politics, a man who had been active with the Liberal Party and with the father of Andreas Papandreou in the early sixties, Constantine Mitsotakis from Crete. He was a pariah in the Greek political world at this time because he was blamed for at least indirectly making it possible for the junta to stage its coup d'etat in 1967. At that time there was an issue between the Papandreou government, Andreas Papandreou, who we will talk about; but his father George Papandreou, the grand old man of Greek politics and of the Liberal world, was prime minister and found himself in a clash with the king over who had control over the armed forces. Mitsotakis, who I believe then was minister of coordination in the Papandreou government, broke with the leadership and voted in effect in support of the assertion by the king that this was his prerogative, had always been, etc. In any event that led to the fall of the government and then the coup by the Colonels and all the rest. So, Mitsotakis fled to Germany and spent all the junta years there because the junta went after him due to his opposition and criticisms of the junta. Basically, Mr. Mitsotakis was a democrat. In exile, he established a close relationship with Karamanlis in Paris and in fact Karamanlis was giving signals that he intended to bring Mitsotakis back with him once democratic government was restored. He would, in effect, become a very prominent person in the conservative party, which didn't exist at the time but which Karamanlis was going to found.

However, when the junta fell and the political world of Greece called on Karamanlis to return to lead the country, the later minister of defense, with a strong anti-junta record during that period, went to Paris to escort Karamanlis back. When he realized that Karamanlis intended to bring Mitsotakis back with him, he rebelled and made it clear that this was not acceptable to the leadership, that Karamanlis had to come alone, which he did. Mitsotakis did not return until later but very quickly was seen as a man who eventually would emerge as a future leader.

Q: And he did.

BARBIS: And he did, as you know. But I established a relationship with Mitsotakis that proved to be very rewarding to me because we became good friends and he is an impressive person. We would meet once a month or every two months, just the two of us, for lunch at his private apartment across from the Olympic stadium, or near by, and he would fly in from Crete red snappers and we would have a meal of nothing but broiled fish and Greek wine and talk about the political situation. He taught me a lot about the background of the junta and the resistance to the junta primarily from outside the country where Karamanlis was in Paris and Andreas Papandreou who had been imprisoned but released thanks to our intercession. Papandreou had been an economist in the United States. He taught at various universities and ended up in the fifties as head of the economics department at Berkeley. So he knew people like Walter Heller and Kenneth Galbraith, etc. They brought pressure on President Johnson to do what he could to get their colleague and friend out of jail. Johnson did succeed and Papandreou fled to Sweden where he established his Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK).

Q: Let me just clarify some things. Mitsotakis at the time you are talking about had no position either in the government or the parliament?

BARBIS: He was not in the government or the parliament and it took most of the years that I was there for him to be rehabilitated. He first become an independent and then was elected to parliament. He was then brought into the government as minister of coordination, and then minister of foreign affairs, and I guess after I left, as prime minister. I saw him as prime minister when he visited Washington sometime in the early eighties.

Q: I remember him as foreign minister in about 1980.

BARBIS: Well, he had been before because I think George Rallis was foreign minister when I left. But, in any event, it took Mr. Mitsotakis a number of years and he played it very shrewdly by not provoking, because there was an awful lot of animosity and hostility towards him because of his role in the Papandreou government. Although there were others who had participated in that event, people who abandoned their party in order to support the opposition, they were rehabilitated.

One of the first exchanges that the political section had was in support of USIS. We had an excellent PAO and an excellent cultural affairs officer, Al Ball, with whom I worked very well. This helped me a lot because this was how I established many of my contacts with the parliamentary leadership. There was a group of deputies going to the United States to visit Washington and to travel around the country. It became somewhat controversial in that the escort/interpreter for the group was one of my predecessors, Daniel Brewster, who had been the political counselor at the time of the junta and then was the country director for Greece. He was anathema to the anti-junta people and to the more liberal people, those left of center, if you will. A crisis arose almost immediately when it became known in Athens that Dan was the interpreter/escort. I remember talking with Dan and also with the leader of the group we had chosen, who later became president of the parliament, an old time politician who had been with that Mitsotakis group in 1967 but had been rehabilitated. In the middle of the night I talked with the president of the parliament to tell him what had happened, that this had all broken in the Greek press and there was quite a furor over it and we were prepared to do what he wanted us do, if he thought we should replace Dan. I made it clear that our preference was not to replace Dan because we thought he was unfairly charged.

Dan still has some unfavorable views about him for his supposed role at that time. At the time we did what the law said and cut off military aid as a result of the junta actions. Dan Brewster was country director at the time. It wasn't until several years later that that embargo was lifted. This was never taken into account in discussions about American policy towards the junta. I guess what we suffered from there, as we have in other countries, was the emphasis or priority we always put on stability and order in situations of domestic political turmoil in other countries. This seems to many people to pit us against the forces of liberalism and progress and in support of the more authoritarian, dictatorial forces. This is something we have suffered from and still suffer from around the world in our relations with other governments.

In any event, that was a very fortunate thing and I may have had the idea of inviting a group of parliamentarians. There were three parties on the Greek scene at the time. The New Democracy, headed by Karamanlis, who was prime minister; a moderately liberal party, which was small; and then PASOK, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, head by Papandreou, which was critical of us even then.

Q: Were there members from PASOK who went on this parliamentary delegation?

BARBIS: I believe we invited them but they didn't go. There were two members from the liberal party who were good friends of mine, but especially close friends of Towny Friedman's, who did go. I believe they are still in the parliament. So, the delegation was four New Democracy and two from the liberal party. I am pretty sure we did invite PASOK, but PASOK sort of gave us the cold shoulder and wasn't welcoming contacts. John Day, who was desk officer for Greece later, had a very good friend who was very close to Papandreou and later became foreign minister in the PASOK government. He had suffered, been tortured and seen his son tortured by the junta and was very bitter towards us. I got to know him and his wife fairly well despite this emotional feeling they had about official Americans, thanks to John Day. I would meet with him on the quiet because he certainly didn't want it known that he had any contact with the political counselor of the American embassy.

Q: PASOK's problem with the American embassy, with the United States in general, was a combination of our failure to prevent or overthrow or undermine the junta leaders during the 1967-74 period plus our failure to stop Turkey from invading Cyprus?

BARBIS: Exactly. There was an anonymous view about our guilt on the Cyprus issue throughout the country.

Q: Before we talk more about that and relations generally with the United States, I would like to talk a little bit more about PASOK. You were at the California University at Berkeley. Was Andreas Papandreou there at the time?

BARBIS: He hadn't come yet. I think he was still in Minnesota or Harvard.

Q: So, you didn't really know him?

BARBIS: I remembered him vaguely because when I went to Greece in the thirties, to Athens College, he was a controversial figure even then. He, of course, was eight to ten years older than I because he was a senior, I think, when he was expelled from Athens College. The accusation against young Andreas Papandreou was that he was a Trotskyite and Greece was under a dictatorship at that time, another colonel called Metaxas. However, because of his father's standing in the Greek political world, through the intercession of political leaders and friends of his father they got Metaxas instead of throwing him in prison, to exile him, and that is how he came to the United States.

Q: After he had been expelled from the college?

BARBIS: Well, I can't remember but I doubt the college would have expelled him unless the government brought charges against him and forced them to do so. Maybe they just arrested him. I don't really remember.

He came to the United States, got his doctorate in economics, joined the navy, and met his wife Margaret. The story is they met in a dentist's waiting room, fell in love and got married, etc. Then Papandreou made his mark in the United States in academic circles as an economist and finally headed the economics department at the University of California.

A little bit of additional background involving Mitsotakis and Karamanlis. When Karamanlis was prime minister in the late fifties, he invited Papandreou, because of his standing in the academic world as an economist, to come back as a consultant to the Greek government.

Q: To set up an Institute of Economic Research and Study?

BARBIS: Exactly, and to advise the government. Although they were political opponents with his father, I think Karamanlis actually discussed it with George Papandreou. This lasted for a short period, two years or something like that, and then Papandreou returned to the United States. Then George Papandreou became prime minister and invited his son to come back and join his cabinet.

Q: This would have been in the early sixties?

BARBIS: Yes, early sixties. There was a rivalry in the beginning but this is when the animosity between Andreas Papandreou and Constantine Mitsotakis arose because Mitsotakis was the economic czar, if you will, the minister of coordination, in the Papandreou government, and yet here was the son advising him on political issues.

Q: To come ahead to the period when you were political counselor. Andreas Papandreou was in Sweden during the junta period. Did he come back immediately after the junta fell?

BARBIS: He came back, like everybody else. He had been active both in exile and otherwise in PASOK, the movement that he had founded in exile, and emerged as a growing challenger to the traditional parties, one headed by Karamanlis and one a liberal party but both basically conservative, whereas PASOK was definitely based on socialist precepts and principles. The interesting thing about PASOK in that early period of my tour was that they concentrated, and I can't give you numbers, their representation in the parliament was not large, in creating an organizational structure throughout the country, which may have been stimulated by Andreas' American experience. You could go to small towns and even villages and see the green symbol of PASOK. They brought American organizational skills to bear, or so it seemed.

Q: So, even in the early days, after 1974, it was not just an urban, labor based party?

BARBIS: No, they made a tremendous effort to establish a network throughout the country, unlike the traditional parties. And, that is in fact how they emerged as the leading party, having won elections and are in power today.

Q: In this period from 1975-79, did anybody in the embassy see Andreas Papandreou much? Did Monty, the DCM?

BARBIS: The strangest thing is as close as the Stearns and the Papandreou couples were, they did not have contact in that initial several years of Monty's return to Greece. I talked about this with Monty and I won't go into that part because I think that belongs to his oral history. I remember Monty telling me how close he and Papandreou were. They were roughly the same age; Monty may have been a little younger. They had known each other when Monty as a young Foreign Service officer had married Ambassador Riddleberger's daughter (he was ambassador to Yugoslavia, Greece and Austria). Margaret and Toni, Mrs. Stearns, became good friends. They remained in touch. I remember Monty telling me of being in correspondence with them when he, Monty, was in Laos. But, when he came back...I would frequently go with Monty to national day receptions, which usually took place around noon at the various embassies. Frequently Papandreou would be there too. He studiously avoided Monty. But I think it was at the Soviet embassy once where Papandreou got caught in a corner and came face-to-face to Monty and had no choice but to acknowledge him and expressed great surprise..."Monty, I didn't know you were here!" I remember about the same time, the Stearns and we lived in a suburb of Athens, and there was an American style supermarket there called Alpha Beta, A&B, Toni ran into Margaret Papandreou at the supermarket and was greeted with the same kind of phony "Gee, I didn't know you were here, Toni, we must get together." Subsequently, of course, they reestablished their relationship, perhaps not on the same basis, but very closely, when Monty was ambassador and Papandreou was prime minister.

But, it was interesting that PASOK had no desire to have contact with us and here their leader had been a very close, confident, almost, with someone like Monty. Well, you will have to read Monty's book to get the full story.

Q: Papandreou had been an American citizen and spent years there.

BARBIS: Yes, but I guess it was Monty and Toni had embarked on their married life when Papandreou came back from Berkeley and Monty met him and dealt with him officially and on a personal basis as well and became fairly close.

Q: Let's talk a little bit more about some of the other opposition parties in Greece at that time. There were, of course, a communist party or two. Did the embassy have any contact with them?

BARBIS: We knew them, of course. I didn't have any direct contact with the KKE leadership. We did have some contact with the other communist party which I can't describe in precise terms. They had an outstanding leader who was respected by Greeks across the political spectrum as a man of honesty and integrity, but a communist. This was still the time of the Cold War and we were a good scapegoat and they weren't shy about blaming us for everything.

Q: But a lot of what they and PASOK were blaming us for was peculiar in a sense to Greece.

BARBIS: Yes, very much so and that is something we should talk about, I think. Again, Monty could talk about it more because he was there in an earlier period as well. The American role in Greece in the post World War II period has been very controversial. The Truman Doctrine was in Greece. Greece was in the middle of a civil war and we talked a little about that in the years of German occupation and immediately after the liberation of Greece when all the political factions reached some kind of an armistice and the communist guerilla ELAS, national liberation army, laid down its arms, although they didn't turn them all in, and the civil war resumed in the late forties when the British withdrew their primary role in Greece and turned it over to us. We jumped in with quite a bit of treasure and assistance and support, political and moral and otherwise, to the extent where General Van Fleet is credited as much as anyone with the defeat of the communist side in this civil war. That reflected in a way a deep involvement of the United States in Greek affairs, which was seen by the Greeks as being even greater than it actually was. But, it was pretty pervasive throughout the country, which depended on us for economic assistance as well as military assistance. After Cyprus, there was a background to which most Greeks could point or recall to justify or confirm that we were the ones behind everything that had happened and it was something that was very hard for us to overcome. And, a lot of us were not proud of some of our actions in the 1947-74 period. I knew we were deeply involved; I followed the Truman Doctrine activities, and had also heard about how the CIA was pretty active and well-known to the Greeks as being involved and active.

Q: Greece joined NATO and US bases were established.

BARBIS: Yes, that is right and they later became a political issue domestically and with us. The point I am trying to make is that one of the things I did when I went back to Greece in 1975 was to try and catch up with events. I didn't go back to the fifties, trying mostly to become more expert in what had happened in the sixties, etc. I was shocked to learn that until the return to democracy under the Karamanlis government, and certainly up to the junta years, I hope not after the junta came into power, we in effect had a veto over who got promoted to be a Greek general. We had a seat on the general promotion panel. Looking back on it now, I am not sure I remember it correctly, but I know it made such an impression on me that I still remember it. Whether I am remembering it in a distorted way, which is possible, but in any event that made me feel even more that I had a role to play, a small one, but still one that could be useful since I understood how Greeks interpreted things like that.

Q: So you could see your role as being very supportive for Greek democracy and for Greek independence?

BARBIS: Exactly. And, I think others shared this with me, certainly my fellow political officers did, seeking a diminution in American influence, if you will. The Greeks always looked to us and one of the reason why Cyprus was such a traumatic thing for them was they saw...

Q: George, we were just talking about how the Greeks saw what happened in Cyprus in 1974 and the US role or failure to play a role as a betrayal from the country that had given all this support and assistance and had been so involved in Greece in the post-war period.

BARBIS: Exactly. And this was personalized very directly with the Secretary of State. One of the first things we saw in Athens when we got there in January of 1975 were effigies of Kissinger hanging from telephone poles and signs, "Murderer, wanted dead or live." And, to this day, most Greeks have very strong feelings against Mr. Kissinger because they blame him.

The Turkish invasion of Cyprus was not the first time that Greece and Turkey had come close to conflict and they actually did in Cyprus because the Greeks sent some troops there. There were some Greek troops there all ready, but the Greeks also reinforced those troops. So, there were clashes involving Greeks and Turks on Cyprus. But, when this had happened previously, I guess the best example is when President Johnson was president and the Turks were getting ready to attack the Greeks...and I should introduce here that it is not just Cyprus that was an issue between them, perhaps from a self interest point of view even more important was the whole question of the continental shelf and the Aegean, rights thereto and etc., but we can come to that later. But, in this previous occasion when war threatened, we intervened directly and in effect dictated to the Turks, "You better not do it," and they backed off. This time, when the President sent a letter to Prime Minister Ecevit, the Turks in effect said, "We listened to President Johnson, but now we are going to do it our way." And, their way was to send in troops and to divide the island as it remains today. The Greeks have always seen this as a violation of international law, the UN Charter, and have never understood how and why, despite repeated Security Council resolutions, etc. that the world community has allowed the division and the occupation, as they see it, of northern Cyprus by the Turks to continue.

Q: In the early period that you were in Athens, beginning in early 1975, I am sure that Greek political figures, the average Greek person, felt exactly the way you just described it, but how did they feel about what precipitated or prompted the Turkish intervention, namely, the coup against Archbishop Makarios which was clearly supported from Athens and led to the downfall of the junta in Greece?.

BARBIS: Certainly, privately, some Greek friends would acknowledged the culpability, the fact that all of this was provoked, but with the backdrop of their dispute over the Aegean and the continental shelf, etc., with the conviction of many Greeks that Turkey was out to take back territories that the Greeks considered theirs, they wouldn't excuse anything on that basis and they would simply say, "Well, the CIA put the junta up to it." This was widely believed that we were behind the coup, which is illogical, but nonetheless people believed it.

Q: Did they believe that was a factor because of our unhappiness with Makarios, a leader of the non-aligned movement, partner of the communist party in Cyprus, etc.?

BARBIS: That certainly would support their conspiracy theory and give it some rationale, but the feelings were very strong that we could have prevented it but we didn't. Obviously they didn't leave the junta leaders blameless. But, certainly the blame was on us more than anything. To this day I disagree with my wife on one issue about our years in Greece. She was exposed to this in a more raw way than I ever was dealing with officials, etc. She feels that to this day there is a very strong anti-American feeling in Greece, and there is, but at the same time there is a very great body of Greeks who do recognize the contributions the United States has made to Greece's independence, prosperity and progress. But, undeniably there is this deep seated sense of bitterness and disappointment that we let them down and they would always make that comparison-we stopped it in the sixties, why couldn't we and why didn't we choose to stop it in the seventies. And, they even see in incidents that occur-violations of their airspace, etc.-some American involvement or culpability that we sided with the Turks, etc. And, especially in the context of the Cold War, they recognized and criticized what they saw as preferential treatment we gave Turkey because the role it played in the confrontation between East and West.

Q: I would like to ask you a couple of questions about the Greek perception of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State in connection with the Cyprus events of 1974. To what extent did the Greeks feel that because Bulent Ecevit, then Turkish prime minister, had actually been a student of Henry Kissinger's at Harvard, there was a personal relationship going back to before they were in position of prominence in their respective government that perhaps that was an element in the lack of communication or the lack of forcefulness on our part or the Turkish unwillingness to listen to us, if, in fact, we sent a letter from the President or tried to dissuade them from moving?

BARBIS: They were just down on Secretary Kissinger no matter what you said about him and if that information was known about the prior relationship of Ecevit to Professor Kissinger, certainly that would only reinforce them. I think they saw him as an evil, Machiavellian, anti-Greek influence who saw Turkey as more valuable as an ally in dealing with the issues of the Cold War and the Soviet Union, and therefore behaved this way. There was nothing anybody could do to convince them otherwise.

Q: The other thing that was happening that July and August of 1974 was the culmination of the Watergate process and the resignation of Richard Nixon as president and the role that Henry Kissinger was playing as a close associate of Nixon's that may have preoccupied him somewhat from whatever else was happening in the world.

BARBIS: But, they certainly would not look for any excuses to explain or excuse what they saw as Kissinger's role in this whole affair. It is something that they believe deeply and there is no logic to it. Perhaps with the passage of time we will have some success. It reminds me of incidents in other countries. Korea, for example, where my friend General John Wickham is still seen as having been involved in events that led to the killing of many students in Kwangju. I participated in getting General Wickham's side of the story out, that he had no control over the Korean forces, etc. that went there. As UN commander there were certain things he could do and certain things where he had no influence. We never have been able to dismiss that conviction of many Koreans that the US bore some of the responsibility for those events. Well, in the case of Greece, it is even more wide spread and more deep seated and over a longer period of time because of this very close relationship we had as a result of the Truman Doctrine and the circumstances of political developments in Greece, the civil war, etc.

Q: For whatever it is worth, I tend to share your view that there is a reservoir of good feeling and appreciation to the United States for what was done in the Truman Doctrine period and the subsequent period and the role we were seen as playing as the leader of democracy in the world, but also because of the very large number of Greeks who have come to live in the United States over the years that there is a bridge between the two countries that is there at a person to person, family level.

BARBIS: Exactly. There are very strong ties and in any showdown, I think we would stand shoulder to shoulder. Certainly the role of the Greek American community in this country in support of Greek interests as they see them is very strong as we know. The arms embargo against Turkey being the most dramatic example of the influence of the Greek lobby. And, I must admit I believe I am more detached on this than most of my fellow Greek Americans. I do not feel and have not been involved and I'm sure have created some unfavorable impressions on people who are partisans out there. I don't consider myself a warrior for the interests of Greece in the American scene. Whereas the Greek lobby, even somebody as balanced and outstanding as Senator Sarbanes...when two Greek Americans get together they will talk about what the Turks have done lately. Well, that is not where I start my discussions about what is happening in Greece.

Q: In the period when you were political counselor in Athens, 1975-79, and against the background of everything you have just said, it was obviously a rocky, difficult, challenging period for the American embassy, for the United States, dealing with all of these things that had happened. And, you, as kind of the senior Greek American in the embassy, were you seen either by those in Athens or by Greek Americans who would visit, as somebody who could be their advocate or might see things the same way that they did? Was it sometimes sensitive for you?

BARBIS: Surprisingly not. When you had organized Greek groups come like AHEPA (the national Greek American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association), which is a national organization going back to the mid-twenties in this country, their leadership would always come and I would accompany them. When Archbishop Iakovos came I would be the embassy support and liaison for them. Sometimes they embarrassed me. Once the AHEPA was there and I had managed thanks to a friend to get them an appointment with Karamanlis, but before I could give them the confirmation that they had an appointment at such and such a time, on such a date, they had gone off to Crete. My friend said he had to do some fast talking to avoid the wrath of the prime minister.

One thing that I did dread was that I would be put into a difficult position, either from the Greek side or from the American side, and seen as being a partisan, but I think I escaped that. I think I lived up to what I told Ambassador Kubisch when he asked me that question.

Q: Maybe we should move a head a little bit and talk about how the embassy, how you were involved in this period of trying to overcome some of these difficulties and problems. It seems to me there are three categories and you can pick which ever one you want to start with. One is the whole area of the bases, the defense relationship, Greece's situation in NATO during this period. Second is Cyprus and the third is the continental shelf, the Aegean and other issues relating to Turkey, including in terms of the United States the relationship with Turkey, the arms embargo, and the subsequent decision to ask Congress to appeal that. Are these kind of the three main areas that the embassy and you were seized with throughout your period?

BARBIS: Yes, I think that is a good description of our main challenges across the board throughout that four and a half year period that I was involved. Subsequently, of course, as PASOK emerged as the legitimate government, etc., there was also building bridges with them, which I didn't participate in because it happened after I left. However, I am sure that was an issue when Monty was ambassador there. And, we did establish good working relationship with PASOK despite the many differences we had, especially in the second Papandreou administration, I think. There are still some issues that never got resolved like terrorists that they wouldn't turn over to us and things like that.

We did a number of things which were sort of standard in our business. Contacts was the most important way to try to correct the record, get our views across. All of us had good contacts with members of the press, many of whom were friends, many of whom were critics.

Ambassador Kubisch played a very important role in that he came up with an idea which we discussed in the country team context because it involved certain risks. This was the idea of his meeting regularly on a background basis with Greek journalists. Some of us had some reservations that this might be exploited or distorted or turned into a weapon against us instead of creating better understanding and getting our views across, but he was determined to do it. He did it in a masterful way and it worked out in a very positive manner. It was something the journalists actually looked forward to and if they were excluded they tried to find a way to get included.

Q: How often did he try to do that?

BARBIS: Well, every six weeks, two months. We didn't overdo it in order not to diminish its value. He was quite open with them in discussing issues. This was useful also during the period of base negotiations, of course, to give them without going into the details or classified aspects of it some sense of the cooperative way in which the two sides, despite differences, were approaching this.

Q: On the base negotiations, there was, of course, a political/military officer, who was not a part of your section. I assume he did most of the negotiation together with the ambassador and DCM, and also involving questions about Greece's relationship with NATO?

BARBIS: He would have contacts with people dealing with the negotiations, but Bob Pugh and then Mort Dworken working directly for the DCM and the ambassador would be a member of our negotiation team and the embassy officer carrying documents back and forth and discussing them, etc. I was kept informed, but I don't think I attended one negotiation session. It had been established that way and neither the ambassador or the DCM saw any reason to change it.

Q: Well, why don't we leave that subject aside for the time being. Obviously it was terribly important in terms of our relations with Greece and you kept informed.

BARBIS: And I participated in discussions about our position and what we were trying to do, our strategy. I certainly had an opportunity to make inputs into that. Kubisch always wanted my views of anything because of my special background.

Q: Let's talk about the general context in terms of timing. During the 1975-6 period, I believe, we were involved in intense negotiations with Greece for a base agreement partly because we had already reached one with Turkey, which needed to have the approval of congress to be implemented. Is that more or less the way you remember it?

BARBIS: More or less.

Q: And then Carter was elected in 1976 and one of the first steps he took was to send to Greece, as well as to Turkey and Cyprus, a mission headed by Clark Clifford. Were you involved with the Clifford mission?

BARBIS: I was involved in the sense that Ambassador Kubisch on a Saturday or Sunday morning had a mini country team meeting. The DCM, myself, the economic counselor, the public affairs counselor, the Defense attaché; ½ spent several hours with Mr. Clifford and his people briefing him about the Greek perspective, the Greek aspect of this, before they went to Cyprus.

Q: Tell me how the Greeks perceived the Clifford mission. Carter, of course, was seen in his election campaign in some of the statements he made as pro-Greek and the fact that he sent this mission headed by Clark Clifford so soon after he was inaugurated were the Greeks expecting that this would lead to a pro-Athens tilt?

BARBIS: We were taking an active role but it was an even handed one, and I think they were not happy about that. They would have preferred to see a more pro-Greek stance on our part, which we couldn't afford to do, of course.

Q: That was certainly the case during the Ford administration, although maybe then they saw the administration's view as pro-Turkish since it was against the congress enacting the embargo legislation. But there was a feeling when Carter came in that things were going to change. They say that the church bells rang in Greek Cyprus when the election results were announced. And, they were disappointed weren't they?

BARBIS: They were very much disappointed that it didn't turn out that way. It was another case of our letting them down.

Q: They did meet with Clark Clifford?

BARBIS: Yes. I don't know of any case where they refused to meet with any of our special envoys.

Q: Could they have done more to be persuasive?

BARBIS: I would be the note taker in meetings with Karamanlis who would start in a very calm and measured way with the fundamentals, sort of run through the history of Greek-Turkish relations, US-Greek relations and, of course, put the Greek version of it of how they had been treated badly, that the Turks could not be trusted and they were out to undermine Greece's interests. Anybody who came away from such an hour or hour and a half meeting would be impressed with the presentation feeling the Greeks really had a case here. But, then when you would sit down and look at our interests and put the picture together with our relation with Turkey, etc., we kept coming down to even handedness, which made sense to us but didn't to the Greeks, and still doesn't.

Q: You could not undo what had happened in 1974 and the acts of omission that we had done could not be easily undone. It was a matter of dealing with the present and the future. The Clifford mission came in early 1977 and the next major development was in 1978 when President Carter decided to ask congress to lift the embargo on Turkey with the idea of trying to do other things related particularly to Cyprus but also to Greek-Turkish relations. Warren Christopher, Deputy Secretary, came to Athens and others too. What do you remember of this period and the role of the embassy and how the Greeks saw that US activity? Were they suspicious or doubtful or did they just basically think we had been doing things wrong for some time and we were still doing things wrong?

BARBIS: You put your finger on it with your last comment. I think throughout this period, and probably through to today, there is that feeling on their part that we are putting our interests first, which we see in a completely different context from their view of our interests or the role we should be playing, and are guided by that. And that is overwhelmingly influenced by the importance we give Turkey in the overall US national security picture of the eastern Mediterranean. And, although they appreciated visits like that and would listen and engage in dialogue, they obviously were not happy with the American approach.

Q: How about Cyprus in particular? Other than Cyprus as an issue, a demonstration of Turkish aggressiveness and unwillingness to withdraw from a position they have taken, did you find in your contacts, both official and others, a lot of interest in the Greeks of Cyprus or is it more a cause, a demonstration of what Turks are capable of that motivated them?

BARBIS: You have put your finger on a very interesting issue. At the same time that Cyprus was sort of a predominant issue [standing alone], it was not an issue, they really didn't give a damn. It was in the context of relations with Turkey that Cyprus had its greatest value to them. Sure, there is a sentimental feeling that these are brothers or cousins but they feel they are a little different, and not necessarily in a favorable way. I guess it is part of how human nature can be contradictory, but Cyprus to them became an issue that only reinforced the Greek fears of what Turkey is really up to. The Greeks feel that the Turks consider some of the Greek islands in the Aegean are Turkish. There is nothing but suspicion that the Turks are up to no good when it comes to Greece. They are out to undermine Greek independence, territorial integrity and every thing else. They confirmed all of this by what they did in Cyprus.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to visit Cyprus during this period?

BARBIS: I did. I visited Cyprus when Bill Crawford was ambassador there and Ed Dillery was the DCM. Ed invited us down. It was an eye opener for us. At that time, this would have been 1976, you could see that the difference between Greek Cyprus and Turkish Cyprus was just stark. Bill took us up to his weekend villa in Kyrenia. We were friends with two marine archeologists who had brought up the items from the sea that are in the museum there and they asked us to go and check the humidity meters and things like that because they were concerned as to whether the Turks were taking good care of it. But the prosperity you saw on the Greek side and the barrenness of the Turkish are in the north, the contrast was so strong.

Q: I haven't been to Cyprus in twelve years and in your case probably it is twenty years. I think we can both imagine that the disparity has grown dramatically and the gap has widened even further. Against what you said before about the Greek interest in Cyprus as a sign of the Turkish threat, demonstration of what Turkey has done and can do, Cyprus, itself, has particular problems. Was there much interest in the foreign ministry or the Greek political front in how to find some way for the two Cypriot communities to live together, to find a means to a settlement? Or, was it more a case of doing nothing unless Turkey would withdraw its invading force and allow the situation to return to something closer to what it had been before?

BARBIS: Despite what I said before, there is a very close relationship between the two governments of Cyprus and Greece and whenever there is a change of Cyprian government the first thing a new Cyprian president does is make a trip to Athens. There are conferences and communiqués of cooperation and solidarity, etc. My conclusion, after my experience there, is that even the more open minded Greeks on this issue see nothing but evil on the Turkish side. The Turks have a hidden agenda and you just can't trust them. So, I don't think there has been an attempt on the Greek and Greek-Cypriot side, unless it has happened in the years since I left, to come up with compromises that would be reasonable to most people that could lead to some kind of a resolution. The feelings are so deep, the unwillingness to compromise so great that it is hard to see any such attempt. I see no evidence of a Greek academic coming up, as we have in this country, with a different point of view or solutions in the papers. The solution there would be that the Turks agree to everything that the Cypriots had denied them.

Q: Against that background, and taking account of what we said earlier about Greek perception of the United States and its role in 1974 and perhaps in 1967 as well and maybe in other period too, any US initiative to advance compromise proposals or reasonable suggestions as far as Cyprus was concerned, was probably doomed to fail even before it was launched. Is that a fair statement to make?

BARBIS: That would be where I would come out.

Q: Well, you recall that I was involved in one such effort in 1978, not long after the congress approved lifting the arms embargo on Turkey. Some proposals were presented in Cyprus, but also in Ankara and Athens as well. Were you there at the time? Do you remember much about the Greek reaction to that initiative?

BARBIS: Was this the Nimitz plan?

Q: Yes, it was.

BARBIS: Many Americans felt that that was a lost opportunity. I think some Greeks felt that also, looking back because there has been no progress really, no movement. And their less emotional frame of mind would agree too that maybe they should have given that a chance. But, at the time, I think people were so fixed in their positions and the conviction that no matter what you proposed the Turks will not live up to it.

Q: And, in a sense, all of that was reinforced by the Carter administration's effort with the congress to get the congress to lift the embargo and the congress finally agreed to do that. So in a sense that just reconfirmed that we were not as even handed as we liked to say we were.

BARBIS: Not the honest broker that we like to think of ourselves as. No, there is too much suspicion and emotion and lack of trust to see any compromise. I think there was some hope when Vassiliou came on the scene. Maybe the hope was more on our side in our governmental circles that he was going to be able to work out a settlement of some kind.

Q: That was in Cyprus and well beyond the time you were there and the time I was involved too. Let's go back a little bit and talk more about the Aegean, the continental shelf issue. Were there some developments there while you were there? I think there was a Turkish ship that did some drilling.

BARBIS: Well, of course, there was the Bill Schauffele episode.

Q: Let's talk about that.

BARBIS: That is where how important this issue is came right out because of an unfortunate choice of words that he made in his confirmation hearings.

Q: That would have been the summer of 1977 and he had been nominated by President Carter to replace Jack Kubisch as ambassador to Greece. Do you remember what happened?

BARBIS: Well, I remember that he was asked about the dispute in the Aegean and he made some reference, and I don't remember the exact words, but whatever it was it implied that he didn't agree with the Greek position but agreed with the Turkish position. As a result the Greeks would not give him agreement, or he withdrew because of all the furor.

Q: I think he eventually withdrew because of all the furor. I think agreement had been granted before he went before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

BARBIS: Oh, okay, I had forgotten that detail.

Q: But it also meant that there was no ambassador. I think Kubisch had already left.

BARBIS: Kubisch had left, Hawk Mills was the chargé for a long time. Then, finally, Bob McCloskey came in 1978.

Q: I think you indicated to me before, not on the tape, that McCloskey was a good choice.

BARBIS: I thought he was a good choice. Of course, I had known him and did what I could to welcome him and support him. In fact, he asked me to extend my tour for a year, for his first year, which I agreed to do and stayed with him.

Q: How had you known McCloskey earlier?

BARBIS: He was in the press office in the fifties when I was on the Korean desk and Korea was an issue that he had to be briefed on. He would come up to the NEA public affairs office and drop by my office frequently too. Over the years we had bumped into each other. But, this was the first time I had served with him.

Q: He had served briefly as ambassador to Cyprus. I say briefly because I think most of the time he was supposed to be in Nicosia he was actually working with Secretary Kissinger, as press spokesman, on that shuttle business in the Middle East. But he did not speak Greek?

BARBIS: No, and I think Bob came there at first with no great sympathy for the Greeks, but changed quite a bit during that year we were together in appreciating their views. I think he read them well and some things he liked and some things he didn't like about them. I think we had a good team under McCloskey as well.

Q: He had certainly a range of experience at very high levels in the US government and was obviously well thought of by the Department and others.

BARBIS: Oh, yes.

Q: You had a number of congressional visits while you were there. I suppose you got quite involved with each of these visits?

BARBIS: I did. The one that I handled myself was when Senator Eagleton came with his assistant, a former FSO, Brian Atwood, who is now our administer of AID. I spent, I think, really three full days escorting the senator and Brian to various calls on Greek officials and politicians, and briefing them. In fact, he was kind enough when he returned to write a letter praising Monty Stearns and my support to his CODEL because we both spent quite a bit of time with them and briefing them. He became a member of the Greek lobby, I guess. He always was very sympathetic to the Greek point of view.

Q: Let me just ask a little bit more about the Greek perception of the Greek lobby or those members of congress who had opposed strongly the junta during the period of 1967-74 and then those who had taken the initiative to get legislation against Turkey after what happened in Cyprus in 1974. You have talked about the general attitude toward the United States and Secretary Kissinger, but I suppose there was a different attitude towards these people?

BARBIS: There was a different attitude towards those people and certainly whenever Congressman Brademas or Senator Sarbanes visited, they were welcomed as good friends and defenders. And, I think that is how they treated Eagleton, too. There were these discriminations about individuals and certainly it is that impersonal, Kissinger based foreign policy that the Greeks had ...

Q: George, we have been talking quite a bit about your assignment to Athens from 1975-79. I would like to go back towards the beginning a little bit and just talk about the atmosphere for the embassy in terms of anti-American feeling that existed after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Greece's withdraw from the military side of NATO. Of course, the return of democracy to Greece was a very good sign. But, how was it in terms of threats to the embassy, terrorism, demonstrations, etc.?

BARBIS: I have said some things about the general atmosphere when we arrived in Athens on January 2, 1975, and the general hostile environment, triggered most recently by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, but with the background of several years of the military junta. US-Greek relations after World War II were very intense and interrelated. Our involvement there was pretty deep. And this on a foundation of very close relations going back to the founding of our republic when it was even proposed in Philadelphia that Greek be the official language of the new country. There was in the revolutionary years a great philhellenistic movement in this country, Jefferson probably being one of the leaders in that. And then through the years this relationship from a distance continued with quite a migration of Greeks to the United States, in the late 19th century and early 20th century, which is when my father came here. Greeks who came here kept up their ties with the old country and especially during World War II and the post-war period made a great contribution in sending money back, in promoting Greek causes here. I remember learning when I came back that my father had been very active in the Greek war relief effort as were Greek communities throughout the United States. And then with the civil war in Greece and the Truman Doctrine and our involvement in supporting the restoration of the legitimate government's position, this is when we really got closely involved and when the dependence of Greece on the United States was considerable.

Q: It was also one of the early battlegrounds of the Cold War.

BARBIS: Exactly. The beginning, in a way, of the active confrontation with the Truman Doctrine when the British, who had had primary influence in the eastern Mediterranean, said they just couldn't afford it any more and President Truman asked congress for us to step in and replace Britain both in respect to Turkey and Greece. At the time, of course, the immediate threat was in Greece where there was an active guerilla movement, or insurgency, and both through our economic aid and our military assistance the government of Greece prevailed in the end and peace was restored. But, even in the subsequent period their dependence upon us was considerable and most Greeks felt that nothing happened in their country unless the Americans approved of it.

So, with this background it is not difficult to see why after the junta years and then the Cyprus invasion the Greeks felt let down by us, that somehow we were involved in promoting or allowing the Turks to do what they did and even before that that we had allowed the colonels to run the country. And, feelings were wide spread, even among people who basically were still pro-American and who had a lot of respect and affection and even family ties with America. I think it struck my wife even more since she had never encountered anything like that. She had no background about Greece other than through my family. And, even to this day, she comments on the hostile environment that she encountered.

My reaction to this wasn't quite as strong because I could understand why they felt the way they did. But, I think, Pat to this day thinks that there was a very intense anti-American feeling. Certainly this was the impression anyone would get in the public area and the Greek government didn't hesitate to demonstrate its unhappiness, etc. with some of our policies with its withdrawal from the military activities of NATO.

Q: Were there security precautions, threats to you or others in the embassy, in the 1975 period?

BARBIS: There was a constant drum beat in the leftist press against us with negative stories, etc. Every year since (I can't remember the exact year it took place) the uprising of the students at the Polytechnick, the Greek MIT, in protest against the junta, which had led to some student deaths and a lot of bloodshed, the anniversary was fixed in the minds of the leftists, who took the lead in promoting this as an anniversary to be remembered and demonstrate about. There would be a parade through the center of Athens, pass the American embassy and it would disperse some distance from the embassy. The first year we were there, 1975, the demonstration turned violent and the demonstrators actually broke through the [police] lines and did quite a bit of damage to the ground floor of the embassy building, which was primarily occupied by the consular section. This really shook us all up and security started to become a very serious concern. It started an argument between the embassy and the administrative security world of the State Department [which wanted] to put up fences and posts, stringent security controls, etc. Like all embassies by then, 1975, we had marines at the door, people had to check in, be identified, etc. But, this [proposal] was to take it even further by putting up a fence. Most of us felt that this was wrong, and I think this argument [goes on] throughout the world [within] the Department of State. How can an embassy representing the government of the United States turn itself into a fortress? But we had to do that for a good reason. It wasn't something we did lightly or did without some considerable discussion.

Q: The embassy in Athens is on one of the major boulevards of downtown Athens and it was built with a very open feeling of a plaza.

BARBIS: There were a lot of trees and openness with a big courtyard. The word openness is the main argument of those who opposed these more severe security measures. But, in the end we did improve the security there. This anti-American campaign even got personalized. Just before Christmas, December 23, 1975, a senior officer of the embassy was assassinated. We had all left the ambassador's residence where the Kubisches hosted an embassy Christmas party for families and all of us had taken our children. When we got home the phone was ringing and I ran in and answered it. It was Monty Stearns, the DCM, advising me that Dick Welch had been killed as he got out of his car to go to his house. As a senior person, I recall Dick did have a chauffeur, so they were no doubt waiting for him, ambushed him and he had been taken to a hospital nearby and Monty asked me if I would go there. The kids right away realized something unpleasant had happened and that my wife and I had to go some place, but we pacified them, put them to bed and we took off. Fortunately I knew where this hospital was. It wasn't one of the well known hospitals to the foreign community. As soon as we got there we found out that Mr. Welch was dead. So, Pat took Mrs. Welch in our car and drove her to her home while I stayed behind to assist in talking to the hospital officials, etc. and in keeping the ambassador and the DCM informed because we didn't know whether this was an isolated incident directed only towards Mr. Welch or whether it was something that was directed towards the leadership of the embassy. So, the ambassador and Monty were at the embassy dealing with the Greek government at senior levels and trying to keep people informed, calm, etc.

This was the first of several assassinations of Americans that followed after I left. However, there were other incidents while I was there of threats to Americans, mostly in the form of burning cars of Americans. Our cars were easily identified because we had diplomatic plates and the military had military plates that were easily recognizable.

Q: In addition to the military attaché & 1/2 people in the embassy community there was an air force base.

BARBIS: We had an air force base at the main Athens international airport, part of which was devoted to the US Air Force and from which we had regular flights in the eastern Mediterranean on different kinds of special missions, etc. So, it was a big eye sore to many people.

Q: As a result of the assassination of Dick Welch and these other threats and burning of cars, I assume security was even further stepped up not only at the embassy building but in terms of your personal...

BARBIS: People were told to vary your routes, etc. It wasn't, however, until early summer of 1976, when a Greek leftist publication identified me as the successor of the alleged head of the CIA station in the embassy in Athens that the thing became very personal in my case. The leftists had gotten a hold of that book by the former CIA guy, Agee, which was published in East Germany, which had many foreign service officers listed, primarily any of us who had served in INR. So, I was in that book. Whether that led them to conclude that I was in fact CIA, I don't know. But, anyway they published an article.

Q: Or because it was assumed or known that the Greek Americans assigned to the embassy in Athens often were connected to CIA as opposed to State Department?

BARBIS: I think a combination of all things.

Q: As you said before you were probably the first State Department Foreign Service officer in a political or economic section job.

BARBIS: Well, for whatever reasons or because they just wanted to make mischief, I heard about it before the article was published when an American journalist called me and told me she had been approached by the editor of this publication and told that he was going to publish this. She tried to argue him out of it, arguing that she knew me and what I did and there was no question but that I was the political counselor. But, they went ahead and published it anyhow. This led naturally to a meeting with the ambassador and the DCM, Monty Stearns, in which they said, "Look, with no effect on your career, you have a choice. If you want to leave and not expose yourself and your family to any threats, you can leave and we will see that you get another assignment. Talk it over with your wife and if you decide to stay we will have to of course increase security for you."

Right after Dick Welch had been assassinated, all the senior officers of the embassy had Greek uniformed policemen posted at the entrance to their homes on a 24 hour basis. This continued for some weeks. The ambassador, of course, had security as most chiefs of mission did around the world, up to and including follow-on cars, etc. What they told me was that I would have to have something similar if my wife and I agreed to stay on, which we did. We had only been there a little over a year and had more or less gotten our feet on the ground and were beginning, we thought, to make some contribution of the US effort of promoting US interests and better US-Greek relations, so we stayed on. This entailed for the rest of my tour not having the freedom of moving about as most people liked, but always having to take into account that I had to be accompanied by a bodyguard. And, other officers around the world have had similar experiences, unfortunately some paid for it with their lives, but it has been a fact of life as the memorial plaque in the lobby of the State Department demonstrates so dramatically. The number has increased considerably in the last three decades or so.

Q: It certainly has been a fact of modern American Foreign Service life throughout the world. It is not easy on a personal, family basis to deal with that because it feels very suffocating and intrusive.

BARBIS: It is very intrusive, invades your privacy, is disconcerting to children who don't understand and it is quite a burden on our spouses, I have to say, it certainly was in the case of our family.

One of our main efforts in those years immediately following the restoration of democracy in Greece, was to improve US-Greek relations. To try and overcome this hostility, this feeling of being betrayed, of having been let down, that the Americans did not live up to the high standards of friendship, support of allies that the Greeks felt was due to them.

Q: I would like to interrupt you there to say it is very important that we cover this side of it and maybe you could also think in terms of the end of your tour in 1979 and to what extent there had been progress in this direction and what were some of the things that had been done or not done.

BARBIS: As I mentioned before this was one of the main objectives of the embassy in our work in Greece, to try and overcome this unfortunate situation which in our eyes was unfair and not accurate. But, it was not easy to do because there was a lot of emotion involved in this and even Greeks who traditionally had always been identified with the United States were often critical. We did have a past of close relations that we were trying to return to. A lot of our effort was trying to explain how the facts didn't justify the charges made against the American government's performance in the summer of 1967 when the junta overthrew the government and established a dictatorship. But all of this fell on deaf ears. Cyprus was even more difficult to try and explain away. It was just fixed in the minds of the ordinary Greek, fueled by the press, which we considered often irresponsible and not objective in any way, and no doubt exploited by our adversaries in the ideological struggle that was going on around the world.

Q: Let me inject a question at this point. The charges against the United States that were heard in Greece [regarding] 1967 and Cyprus were certainly echoed, if not reinforced by the Greek-American organizations, AHEPA, etc. As a generalization I think one can say that they were somewhat ambivalent or divided about what happened in 1967. Some welcomed the colonels, or at least understood why the military had acted at a time of disarray and confusion and were not as opposed to the Greek military government as some people perhaps in Greece were. But, I think there was a unanimity view in the Greek-American community about what happened in 1974. I am just wondering to what extent those views in the United States were reflected back into Greece and how the embassy could deal with that?

BARBIS: Your analysis is 100 percent correct, Ray, and I think you have expressed it quite accurately and completely. The support the Greek cause was getting from Greek-Americans was very much publicized there. Whenever Congressman Brademas and Senator Sarbanes visited Greece they were lionized. There is no doubt about it. And I now from my own contacts with Greek-Americans here in the United States know that the feeling here was very intense.

Q: Let me ask sort of a variant of my previous question. How would you describe the relations in this period between the embassy in Athens and other embassies in the area, particularly the embassy in Ankara and maybe to a lesser extent, the embassy in Nicosia, and with the Department of State in Washington? In the early part of your period, the Ford administration was perceived in Athens as trying to deal with the problem of Turkey and, perhaps also the problem of Greece, but was certainly a target of criticism by the Greek government and the Greek people. When the Carter administration came in did that change the atmosphere?

BARBIS: Certainly there was a great expectation when Carter came into office that there would be a more pro-Greek stance on the part of the United States government and there was some disillusionment or disappointment when that turned out not to be the case. One problem we faced as [embassy] officers representing the US in Athens, was not to appear to be apologists for the Greeks. So, we tried to be as balanced as we could in our reporting, although inevitably, I guess, any embassy will tend to try to present the views or the positions of its host government in its efforts to promote better relations in as clear and as favorable light as they could. I don't think we went overboard in that respect. Also, in order to maintain our objectivity and our American perspective, we did try to have as many of our officers as possible visit embassy Ankara and embassy Nicosia. This helped a lot both in having our officers get a better understanding and perspective of how the Turks felt and how the Cypriots felt. When I went to Cyprus I didn't meet only with representatives of the government and Greek-Cypriots, but Ed Dillery saw to it that I also had contact with Turkish-Cypriots and that I went into the Turkish occupied part of Cyprus and got an appreciation of the situation there.

Q: Did you have a chance to visit Turkey?

BARBIS: I visited Turkey from Athens at least twice, both Istanbul and Ankara, and spent quite a bit of time in Ankara and had an opportunity later, when I was no longer involved in Greek affairs, to visit both Greece and Turkey as advisor to the chief of staff of the Army.

Q: Right after Carter was elected and inaugurated in early 1977, he sent Clark Clifford on a special mission. I think he stopped first in Athens, as I recall.

BARBIS: He stopped in Athens and it was a weekend as I recall, as many of those visits are. We spent several hours at the ambassador's residence with the country team meeting with Mr. Clifford and his group and giving them our assessment of the situation and how we saw it from Athens. And, of course, they also met with officials of the Greek government. I presume that we took Mr. Clifford to call on Prime Minister Karamanlis, but I can't recall specifically.

Q: Another sort of major event with the Carter administration was a year or so later when the administration decided to go to congress and ask for a lifting of the arms restrictions on Turkey. How was that seen in Athens or by the embassy? As a betrayal or disappointment or let down?

BARBIS: To many Greeks it only confirmed what they had concluded for other reasons already that Turkey was more important to us strategically in the context of the world ideological struggle, and that we were willing to sacrifice our friend, loyal ally, faithful supporter through the years of World War I and World War II, whereas look at the Turks and their behavior in both occasions, because of other interests to forsake our relationship with Greece. One very prominent theory at that time was that Turkey was going to be one of the stalwarts in the Middle East in opposing any expansion of communist influence.

Q: The Turkish government has always had very strong staffs at the Turkish embassy in Athens. Did you have a fair amount of contact with the Turkish embassy in Athens?

BARBIS: Not really, as political counselor, and the embassy as a whole, we had contacts but didn't do anything ostentatious or give any basis for the Greeks to claim we were conspiring with the Turkish embassy, but our relations with the Turkish embassy were certainly cooperative and friendly.

Q: One other thing I don't think we have talked about yet, is the whole question of Greece and Europe. It was after you left, I think, that Greece decided to apply for membership in the European Community, and you, of course, had worked in Brussels previously. Was that a subject of much interest at the time that you were there?

BARBIS: One of Karamanlis' main objectives was to bring Greece into the European Community, as it was known then, and one of his prize accomplishments as prime minister was the successful negotiation of Greece's entry. The Community was not enthusiastic about bringing Greece in for economic reasons, for some of the same reasons they are not terribly enthusiastic about making Turkey a member. And it was strictly the economic imbalance between members of the Community and countries like Greece and Turkey-what would their contribution be in contrast as to what would be their benefits. One of the great benefits Greece has had from its membership has been in the social area and the assistance and subsidies, or whatever you want to call them, through the social fund which has been a net advantage for Greece. But, what was strongest in support of Greece's admission in the eyes of the Europeans, of course, was the fact that Western civilization started in Greece and there was no way that they could not take Greece in. I think that was the overwhelming pressure for admittance. It still is a controversial question, both from the Greek side and from the Community. There are Greeks, like there are Englishmen, who are anti-Europe, but it is obviously the wave of the future and the young people are very much engaged and involved. I have a cousin who studied in this country and got a doctorate and now works in southern France for a think tank that services the Commission in the computer world the way our beltway bandits do here.

Q: Was it also an element for Karamanlis and perhaps other Greeks that this was a means of anchoring a democratic Greece and that the chances of reverting back to a military regime were much less?

BARBIS: That, more than anything, motivated Karamanlis. The economic benefits, obviously, were important but this was equally important because the junta of 1967 was not the first time the military in Greece had overthrown the legitimate government and established an authoritarian regime. I think I mentioned that in the years that I was in Greece as a boy going to school, that it was a period of dictatorship, 1936 until the out break of World War II.

Q: To what extent were Greece's relations with Turkey a factor? Did Karamanlis feel that if they were part of a European community that was beginning to have a political identity, maybe even thinking in terms of common security foreign policy, that Greece would have firm backing even more than they did as part of NATO, because NATO was looking at the Soviet Union and external targets and not at other members of the alliance?

BARBIS: I believe this was very much a factor. The Greeks recognized the advantage they had over Turkey because of this ideological and cultural heritage aspect and they took advantage of that. This was one of the astute things that Karamanlis did, to exploit that. I think they saw membership in a united Europe very much in their favor and something they could get support from in their dealings with Turkey. If nothing else, in terms of moderating Turkey's views and activities.

Q: I recall from this period, George, that the Greek government was very interested in getting some kind of security guarantee, security assurance from the United States. Something beyond NATO that would be certainly in their eyes useful if there were a future military threat from Turkey. Do you recall that and would you want to add to that?

BARBIS: I think you are right in what you said and I think it was something that always figured in our periodic base negotiations because the Greeks, rightly or wrongly, had a very suspicious attitude towards the Turks. I think in all fairness the Turks said and did a lot of things they didn't have to do in respect to territorial waters and continental shelf and claims on islands, etc., which fed this suspicion. And, what happened in Cyprus demonstrated to the Greeks that there was a scheme in fact, a big plan, to extend Turkish control beyond its territorial limits.

Q: I think we have talked in the past somewhat about Cyprus, but to what extent were the Greeks that you were working with on the political side, both in government and on the outside, interested in Cyprus and the Greek Cypriots as such, or how much of it was seen as a pattern of Turkish aggressiveness threat to Greece, itself?

BARBIS: I think I commented earlier that despite this very strong relationship between Greece and Cyprus, that the Greeks, not only the average Greeks, but the Greeks engaged in international relations, were sort of divided in their views about this or in their attitude towards Cyprus. On the one hand they looked down on them but at the same time anything that would offend the Cypriots by an outsider was an offense against the Greeks. So, whether they wanted it to be or not, Cyprus was an important issue in Greek foreign policy. Whenever you went to the foreign ministry certainly the Cyprus desk officer very much echoed what you would hear from the Nicosia. Cyprus was very dependent on Greek public support and real support as well. So, any new president of Cyprus made his first trip after his inauguration to Athens to see Mr. Karamanlis. I am not sure that they really saw what the Turks did in Cyprus as the first step in a conquest of the Dodecanese and Crete, etc., but certainly it gave strength to their charges that Turkey was aggressive towards Greece and did have claims and intentions that were inimical to Greek territorial and sovereignty questions.

Q: I think you originally had expected to be in Athens for three years or so but wound up being there almost four years and left in 1979. Looking back at the time you left and thinking about what had happened during the period you were there, which was some of the most dramatic, and important developments of the last fifty years in Greece, in terms of US-Greek relations did you feel at the time that you left that things were about the same as when you arrived, a little bit better, a little worse?

BARBIS: My own feeling is that things were a great deal better. It was actually four and a half years. We arrived in January and left in July of 1979. I think the US embassy, first under Ambassador Kubisch's leadership, and then Bob McCloskey's, did have considerable success in bridging the gap that had developed. By no means had we reestablished the intimacy and respect and confidence, and all the rest that had existed in US-Greek relations in prior times. Nor did we overcome the belief of many Greeks that we were somehow responsible for the junta and somehow responsible for Cyprus and for what Turkey has done in Cyprus. There is still disappointment that we are not more forcibly partisans of the Greek cause. There is still the feeling, and in this post-Cold War period even more perhaps, that we view Turkey more important to us strategically and otherwise. But, I came away from my tour there with a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that things were better in July, 1979, in US-Greek relations than they were when I arrived there in January, 1975.

Q: And certainly part of it was what the embassy did through contacts, arranging visits, finding concrete avenues of cooperation.

BARBIS: Exactly. I have said before that Ambassador Kubisch, and he was fortunate to have as his DCM, Monty Stearns, who knew the Greeks so well, whose approach was not one of...and it would have been natural in a way because in our government here in Washington there were a lot of resentment that the Greeks were behaving as they did. They were not being logical, they were being emotional, etc. But, instead of trying to be the school teacher, scolding misbehaving pupils, the embassy's approach was to deal with it as a sovereign government, as a government who was our ally and equal. There was a resentment on the part of many of us at some of the ways we had behaved in prior years in terms of the influence we had exerted on the Greek government. And, although we were very firm in advancing US interests and supporting the US position, I think we did it in a way that wasn't confrontational or offensive and allowed for a dialogue at the official level that was not always reflected in the media.

Q: I think you have very effectively summed it all up. Why don't we move ahead? In the summer of 1979, after four and a half years, you left Athens with a sense of accomplishment and a feeling that things were better, that the glass might be now half full instead of half empty. Where did you go from Greece?

BARBIS: From Greece I returned to the Department to be the deputy coordinator for refugee affairs. This, you will recall, the late seventies, was the period of the boat people, when there was this tremendous outflow from Southeast Asia, especially from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon, of people seeking a better life elsewhere. I guess it was really 1978 when all of this peaked. President Carter had created a coordinator located in the State Department with overall authority, because although the refugee problem of the moment was Southeast Asia, there were certainly other festering situations around the world creating more and more refugees. This office was to provide the leadership and coordination, because many US agencies were involved in resettlement, admission, feeding and caring for people in camps in Asia and elsewhere before they could be resettled elsewhere. Efforts were made, of course, to resettle refugees not only in our country, although we felt a special responsibility having been involved in that whole tragedy of Vietnam, but in other countries as well. So, the coordinator was physically located on the seventh floor of the State Department but was really sort of an appendage of the White House, although not located there. They appointed to this a liberal Democrat, Dick Clark of Iowa, who had been defeated in his last run for the Senate. When my name was proposed to Senator Clark to be his deputy, he happened to be in Rome so I flew over for an interview and we hit it off. I liked him and what he expected of me to do, although this was a new field for me, a new challenge that I wasn't necessarily prepared for. But, it sounded like at this stage in my career, coming to the end of my career, as the kind of assignment that would be something I wanted to do.

So, I came here, ahead of the family, in fact, which is another aspect of Foreign Service life where the officer frequently has to split up the family for temporary periods in order to meet the needs of the Service. I succeeded in getting my feet on the ground in this new job with the support of Chas Freeman, who had been the deputy coordinator and had helped Clark organize the whole opportunity with the support of Frank Wisner, who was the executive secretariat officer [S/S] responsible for dealing with us. Because of that relationship I did have access to the Secretary's office, [and] attended the Secretary's staff meeting when the coordinator didn't go.

I was just getting myself established in the position and beginning to feel comfortable in working in that area and working closely with the program people, who were situated with us at the State Department, too, and dealing with INS, AID, etc., when Senator Clark called me aside and said that he would be leaving. I think this was in November so I had been there only four or five months. This may be of interest, the reason he left was that President Carter and Vice President Mondale had been putting pressure on him to support them in their re-election bid in the upcoming Iowa caucuses and Clark felt that he had already committed himself to Senator Kennedy and that he couldn't continue in that position. So, he departed and for a while Matt Nimitz, Department Counselor, was sort of the acting coordinator. So, I dealt with Matt and Dave Newsom, who was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. I was really finding it not only interesting but a new sort of phase in my career that was good for me.

But, then a new coordinator was appointed and he called me and the director for programs, another career Foreign Service officer, John Baker, and told us it was nothing personal, we could stay if we wanted, but he was going to bring in his own immediate deputy and program director.

Q: The program office was a bureau?

BARBIS: At that time it was not a bureau, it later became a bureau and is now headed by an assistant secretary. This was the beginning. I arrived there when things were beginning to be built that later became the Bureau for Refugee Affairs, which was the program side, and then the Office of the Coordinator which sort of dealt with other agencies and sort of coordinated and made recommendations to the President and testified before Congress. In fact, I had to testify on behalf of Senator Clark once before the Foreign Relations Committee because of another commitment he had, and that was another new experience for me, too.

But, in any event, and I may have made a mistake, I said that I would move on to another assignment. This was a time when there was a glut of senior officers.

Q: Just to get the timing straight, this was the beginning of 1980?

BARBIS: Yes. It was the early months so this was the dead period in availability of places to go, so for several weeks I did nothing except go and see my senior personnel counselor, Don Junior. I would check in with Don every morning and he wasn't coming up with much until the chief of staff of the Army, who was a War College classmate, heard about my being available. He had been chief of staff for little less than a year and since becoming chief of staff he had asked the State Department for something new for the military services, to have a senior Foreign Service officer as his personal advisor.

Q: Was this a sort of political advisor kind of slot that he knew about from his War College experience?

BARBIS: He certainly knew about it from his War College experience. There had been a gentleman, sort of a patron, in fact, of Henry Kissinger, a German refugee, Fritz Kramer who was on the staff of the chief of staff as a civilian and sort of did what a Foreign Service POLAD did at military commands...followed world events, US policy developments, etc. and kept the chief of staff and the Army staff general attuned to political considerations that they otherwise wouldn't know about or think of or had no basis for reacting to.

Q: But, this person didn't come out of the State Department?

BARBIS: He had no connection with the State Department. I am not sure he ever went to the State Department. But, he came out of the old school in Germany, an intellectual, read a lot, sort of a patron of Kissinger and urged him on the path that he took. But, in any event, he had retired. General [Edward Charles] Meyer, before he had become chief of staff [in June 1979], had worked in a different position on the Army staff and had worked closely with Dr. Kramer. So, he had in mind replacing Dr. Kramer with somebody younger, somebody out of the Foreign Service, but senior enough so that he could deal not only with the worker bees, the desk officers in State, who really laid the ground work of actions which later became policies and programs, but also who could deal with his immediate deputies, three star, two star generals in the various areas of Army Operations, personnel, research, policy and strategy, and especially in the area of contacts with foreign armies, which is sort of a growing industry.

Q: How about dealing with the international security staff or apparatus of the Department of Defense and the Joint Chief of Staff?

BARBIS: Whenever you bring an outsider into the Pentagon this creates all kinds of questions. I forget who was assistant secretary for ISA [International Security Affairs] at the time, but when I went to pay a courtesy call on him he says, "Why is Meyer hiring you? I'm his political advisor." There is that rivalry between the Pentagon and the services and within various organizations of all the various bodies represented there. But, General Meyer, I guess, from his War College experience where he met a number of us over a period of a year had been impressed by Foreign Service officers so he thought somebody like me could really serve him well and serve the Army well. And, although we negotiated the terms and everything, and I won't go into the fact that I was not enthusiastic about going there, as I had been on overseas assignments for 12 years, was in the newly created Senior Foreign Service, had been in the Service for some time and was nearing the end of my career and thought that what I needed was the kind of job that I came back to-seventh floor of the State Department, exposure to the senior levels with opportunities to sort of finish my career at the management level or the leadership level. I was afraid if I went out of sight I would go out of mind, which proved to be the case. A lot of pressure was put on me. Ben Reed called me in and gave me a big pep talk. "We have to do this. I have been working with the Pentagon. We are going to improve coordination and cooperation between the two. They really want people from here."

Q: Ben Reed was Under Secretary for Management at that time.

BARBIS: Exactly, the top management guy and Harry Barnes was the Director General, Chief of Personnel, and Harry gave me the same pitch. "You know Ben and I are here and we will take care of you after your two years, but you have to do this for the good of the Service."

One of the first things I learned when I came in in 1951, of course, was "for the good of the Service" [might not be the best for the officer]. I went against my better judgment.

Q: Where was your linkage to the State Department, to the extent there was one?

BARBIS: Well, this was part of the problem and one of the reasons why I was not so enthusiastic. There had been a reorganization of responsibilities and the whole POLAD function which had started as a system of assigning Foreign Service officers to military commands. It used to be that POLAD for a given command reported to the geographic bureau where that command was located. So, the POLAD at Naples or Stuttgart or London would sort of look to EUR as his parent organization. All of these things had been given to PM [Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs] just before my assignment, so I came under PM.

Q: In your case that made some sense, at least theoretically, because your interests were worldwide with the army.

BARBIS: Yes, I don't know where they would have put me if there were no PM. This was the first time this had happened. We had had people in the Department of Defense, we had even had people in the Navy staff, I think at one time on the Army staff, but not at the senior level, and not dealing with the leadership, but with intelligence or some specialty area as a desk officer in ISA, a middle grade officer. We had had senior officers detailed there...Larry Eagleburger was someone I knew who had been a deputy assistant secretary of Defense. But, this was the first time somebody was put into a position at that level with a Service.

One of the first things I did with PM, and, of course, I had had no contact with PM, this was all the doing of Ben Reed and Harry Barnes, was to go there, and, of course, I couldn't see the director, but I saw one of his deputies. I tried to find out what my relationship would be with the Department. I suggested one thing that I thought I would want to be able to do, to attend PM weekly staff meetings since that was the bureau I was attached to and it made sense because the substance of what I would be doing really concerned that bureau, although I would also have to have contacts with geographic people. His answer was, which showed me that Ben Reed and Harry Barnes had not spoken to PM about the importance they "attached" to this assignment, "Whoa, we can't do that. If we let you come to our staff meetings than everybody on detail to the Pentagon will come." I said, "Yes, but is there anybody else at my level dealing with the chief of staff of the Army?" I was stupid that I didn't go to Ben, who I had known when he was executive director of S/S in prior years, and I guess I knew Harry Barnes too from when he was director of junior officers, or something. In any event, instead of going to them and saying, "Okay, you guys, you said you were going to support me, PM won't let me go to their staff meetings, support me on this," I didn't do it and lived to regret it. In any event, there was no imagination in this guy who later became Larry Eagleburger's deputy when he was assistant secretary of European Affairs, David Gompert. He was a very bright guy and everything but he was an outsider, not a career officer, and obviously knew nothing about political military affairs in terms of dealing at those kinds of levels. And, part of it is the elitist approach of who cares about what a military service thinks or does, it is the Department of Defense that runs things. This is true, but a lot of things bubble up from below.

Q: I guess the bottom line is that you were there for nine years or so and the Department never really took advantage of your position.

BARBIS: And that was not only my feeling, but there was a position in the Department of the Air Force. The Carter years had an international relations staff under a deputy assistant secretary. In fact the wife of the legal advisor of the Department, Mrs. Chayes, was the assistant secretary for international relations, Air Force. They had a middle level officer on detail from the State Department under the State/Defense exchange program on her staff. Well, when there was a change of administration, they did away with this assistant secretary, but they had the office, a huge office, and the middle grade officer who happened to be on assignment there at the time suddenly became the only one in this office of international relations. So, Jacques Klein, who you know, took advantage of this and filled the void. He had in his favor also the fact that he was a reserve air force officer, I think full colonel at the time.

Q: He later became major general.

BARBIS: Exactly. He established an excellent relationship with the Secretary of the Air Force. He would travel with him everywhere. Anything on international affairs, Jacques was involved in, even though he was an FSO-3, I think, at that point. Jacques and I were sort of kindred souls because we would both, out of frustration, pound the table, saying why didn't they take advantage of these unique positions that Jacques had created with the Air Force and I with the chief of staff of the Army and to some extent the Secretary of the Army. We even went and spoke to George Vest when he was director general to tell him, "George, we are missing opportunities here, can't you get the Department to take advantage of them?" But people have their own area of responsibility and staffs and don't think that anybody else can help them. They still don't do it as far as I know. And, it is a missed opportunity.

Q: But, there were occasions when the Chief of Staff of the Army was taking a foreign trip or receiving a foreign delegation or dealing with an issue of international import, and obviously the Army has bases and personnel all over the world, where you were able to give advice and I assume find people in the State Department to deal with?

BARBIS: Although I have been pretty negative about the relationship between me and the State Department, on my own initiative dealing with individual officers, I was able to get support or get what I needed, not as much as I would like, but enough. One who stands out in my mind was a deputy assistant secretary for Inter-American Affairs, Bob Gelbard. He was the only person at senior levels, more so than even anyone in PM, who took advantage of my being there. If he had a problem with Pinochet in Chile, he would call me up and say, "Let's have lunch." Then we would talk about how the Army might do something to help. And, in fact, we did in respect to Pinochet when Harry Barnes was down there. We carried a message to General Pinochet, we had lunch and I sat two chairs to his left and General Wickham was in front of him. We had discussed this all before. First with Gelbard in Washington and then in Santiago with Harry Barnes and the General in the embassy. The General, and I found this true of all three chiefs of staff that I worked for, demonstrated a great desire to be helpful to the State Department. A great desire to be guided by the State Department. So, before we went on trips, I would try and get somebody senior from the geographic bureau of the area we were visiting to come over and brief us. Gelbard was the best we ever had. He would even take the initiative and try to use us. I will always be appreciative of what Bob did. A few others did too. When we went to India, a deputy assistant secretary from NEA came and briefed us.

Let me back track a little bit. The first week that I was at the Pentagon General Meyer, who was then the chief of staff, the one who had recruited me in effect, came and put his feet on my desk and gave me my marching orders. It was all very informal. He said, "I want you to be at my side and assist me in any way you can when we are dealing with issues having some impact on our foreign relations. I also want you to feel free to call on any of my deputies." One of the first things they had me do was to go around and meet all the three stars in their offices, tell them who I was and what I could do for them, even the inspector general, and they in turn told me what they did. I was accepted at that level as an equal. We were all on a first name basis, which in the army happens only with your peers.

Q: You were able to go to the staff meetings?

BARBIS: I was able to go to every staff meeting and as the years went on my participation in meetings grew and grew. Under General Wickham, I would go to the chief's meeting with his immediate three stars, and although I was not a principal, I sat in the outer circle and didn't report, they would always ask me if I wanted to report anything.

Getting back to Meyer. He also said, "I also want you to work with the action officers, the majors and lieutenant colonels." The army has a wonderful program of some years standing that all chiefs of staff that I dealt with were great supporters of. The foreign area officers program where they would take an officer who is going to specialize in the Middle East and send him to Princeton or Harvard, etc., to get an advanced degree and then in some cases would be sent to the language school, which was in Beirut and is now in Tunis, to learn Arabic. Part of the program at the language program, say in Tunis, the guy would go with his family and live in the community and have a budget of his own to spend a year traveling. I met more officers who had spent a year in Pakistan as students and then come back and work in political/military affairs. Unfortunately, because they are not front line activities as seen by the war fighting staff, and despite the encouragement...I used to talk to the chiefs about this all the time, you have to encourage selection panels to give these guys some credit because they weren't getting their share of promotions, etc.

So, I started in the beginning with that approach. When an issue developed, it was the political/military officer in charge of a particular country, who would start the initial papers. As they went up the line they got fleshed out more and more and changed and rewritten, but the product that ended on the chief's desk, that he would sign and make policy, originated with a major or lieutenant colonel. I was there long enough that I became an institution and they would automatically come to me with a problem. How should I approach this? What do you think I should do? They would on their own bring me their drafts before they even gave it to the colonel and let me critique it and make my input.

Another aspect was the chief has a voice in the Joint Chiefs of Staff and although the Goldwater/Nichols bill gave the chairman voice and sort of primus inter pares, or even more than that, still the chairman, who was chairman during my years at the Pentagon, dealt with it as a collegial body, the Chiefs of Staff. If the Army chief of staff had a view that disagreed with the chairman or other chiefs, they would debate it, not at one meeting but several meetings, go back and forth on it. I would participate in the briefing of the chief or vice chief, who was going to the meeting, on any issue with a foreign policy impact of any kind.

Q: Would you also interact with the action officer on the staff of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff?

BARBIS: I established informal relations, especially with Foreign Service officer on assignment to ISA and dealt with them. But, I had to be sensitive to jurisdictional and change of command things. So, I would only do things informally. And, although I would have some contacts with the Joint staff, it was always on a personal level. For example, dealing with Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, we had some exceptional desk officers in the Joint Staff. One had been an assistant army attaché in Athens. A Greek language officer. We had been good friends having worked together in Athens. I had a badge that allowed me to walk into the Joint Staff area which is a secure area within the secured Pentagon area, and go and talk to Steve Norton, for example, whom you know. Here we had Turkish-Americans working Turkey, Greece, and Cyprus who were more pro-Greek than they were pro-Turkish.

In any event, I worked with some wonderful guys, and it made my job easier too. It gave me insights that nobody at State could possibly have and when I could I would share it with them. But, there was no attempt on the other side to take advantage of that.

Q: Let me just make some general observations about that problem. One is, I think, from my experience, despite a recognition at high levels and certainly in principle that details by Foreign Service officers to other agencies is very good for the Department of State and for the individual officer in broadening their experience, etc., it has always been perceived by the officers as not career enhancing because it takes them out of the building and they are forgotten and doesn't help with onward assignments. And, as an institution it usually is not taken advantage of either, because the bureaus in the State Department are so preoccupied with each other and with the building and with other agencies, but more as adversaries and competitors, rather than as partners. The situation you are describing with the army staff is not unusual. Unfortunately, it is too common, and is a pity because it ought not to be that way.

BARBIS: You have summarized it very well. It is a problem that the Department, for whatever reason, has not focused on and resolved. And, maybe looking back on it now, it was a mistake not going to Ben Reed and Harry Barnes when I had some leverage, because I was doing them a favor in meeting their commitment to whoever they were dealing with at Defense to provide somebody for a certain job. They made it clear that the chief of the Army was an important person in our government structure and we have to honor his request.

Q: They probably also said perhaps, "Not only is he an important person and we want to honor his request, but it is important for the foreign policy of the United States, for the State Department to have somebody there."

BARBIS: In 1986, wasn't that the uprising in the Philippines when Marcos was taken out? I had met John Maisto in Panama where he was the DCM at our embassy, and he was country director for the Philippines when all that happened. The chief of staff of the Filipino army, who is now the president of the Philippines, was a West Point classmate of General Wickham's, Eddie Ramos, with whom Wickham had kept up his relationship. I passed on to the Philippine desk the fact that General Wickham had a close personal relationship with Ramos. This was after Aquino had taken office, etc.

We were on a trip to Japan and we diverted. This was worked out with Phil Habib, who was sort of a special coordinator of that whole operation of getting rid of Marcos and helping Aquino, etc. That was one of the few times when the Department did take advantage because I played a role in helping that happen. Wickham had dinner with Ramos in Baguio, because it was their West Point graduation time and all the defense types of the cabinet had moved to Baguio. Steve Bosworth, then our ambassador in Manila, has a house up there so he put us up. Chris, his wife, came up to host this and then Steve flew up too to be there when Ramos and Mrs. Ramos came over to have dinner with the Wickhams. And, I participated in on that too. They treated me the way I guess a POLAD should be treated, as somebody who served a purpose. My friendship with Wickham continues to this day, but all three chiefs really treated me better than I had ever been treated in the State Department.

Q: I think that is an important point, that you were treated well. It was General Meyer who initiated it, but then his successors didn't necessarily have to continue that practice or they might have felt more comfortable with somebody different.

BARBIS: It might be interesting taking a few minutes to explain a little about that. General [John Adams] Wickham I had known. He was a classmate at the War College, too. When General Vessey, who was vice chief of staff, became Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, they brought Wickham to be the vice chief of staff, so we renewed our relationship. When he became chief [in July 1983], he said, "Of course, you are staying." I had been there three years at that point with Meyer, so I said, "Okay, I will stay." Don Junior kept failing to come up with an assignment that was attractive so I kept staying because there was no place to go anyhow. And, then, when Wickham completed his four years [in 1987], that made seven years there. [General] Carl F. Vuono, with whom I had worked when he was a three star general, deputy chief of staff for policy and plans, was then a four star general in charge of training and indoctrination command. He sent his right hand man, a colonel, Arcella, to call on me when it was announced that he would be chief of staff. He said, "You know, Carl doesn't like changes. He likes to work with people he knows, etc. Is there any chance that you would be willing to stay on at least through his first year to help him get used to that area where you are involved?" Again, with no assignment to go to, I said, "Why not?" So, I stayed.

Then I came up for retirement in September, 1988 and General Vuono called me in and said, "Isn't there some way that you can stay on?" I said, "Gee, I don't know Carl, I don't think so. But, let me ask the director general who happens to be a good friend of mine." So, I went over and saw George Vest and that is when George told me, "Okay, Vuono wants you to stay on, but what do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I would like to end my career with an ambassadorial assignment." And, George said, "Well, I am sorry the only area I can help you in is if you are willing to go to Africa." And, I said, "Gee, with my health history, I think I would rather stay with Vuono." I didn't even talk to Pat who resented it ever since. George said, "Well, I have the authority to delay your retirement for six months and I will exercise that if that is what you want." And, that is how I stayed beyond September 25, 1988 until April 1, 1989. And then Vuono wouldn't let me go and had his lawyers and personnel people trying to figure out how we keep this guy and they hired me on a "when actually employed" basis. I stayed on another two years.

Then I got involved with the Panama Canal Commission because the Department finally came up with a replacement... One problem of general interest in this State/Defense exchange program is the Pentagon has no difficulty in getting officers to send to the State Department, and they have sent some outstanding people, John Pappageorge being the most famous one I guess. There are all kinds of jobs under the agreement vacant in the Pentagon, in the Defense Department, the Navy, and the Army gave up after setting up my position. I used to work with Milt Hamilton up in the Secretary of Defense's office, who sort was the Defense guy overseeing the State/Defense exchange programs. Milt would call me sometimes and say, "Can't you talk to somebody over there? We have fifteen vacancies and it is in our agreement that they are supposed to fill those positions." I think that is still a problem.

Q: Part of it is these things we have talked about before.

BARBIS: Finally, when the Department came up with some one to replace me, who was acceptable to Vuono, I was going to leave completely. But the assistant secretary for civil works, who is chairman of the board of the Panama Canal, who was a friend of mine, we had shared a house in Tehran in my first assignment in the Foreign Service, said, "Look, I need somebody to advise me as chairman of the board of the Panama Canal." So, for three years, I was involved in that job. When he retired, the Secretary of the Army kept me on in that position as advisor. So, I had a second career over in the Pentagon.

Q: Did you ever figure out how many foreign trips you took as advisor to the army chief of staff?

BARBIS: An awful lot. As I tell Pat often, I traveled more with the army than I did in my 37 years in the Foreign Service. I haven't figured out the exact number. I never went to Africa, other than Egypt. I have been to South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia...

End of interview