

HOWARD IMBREY

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[This interview was not edited by Mr. Imbrey prior to his death]

Q: Let's start at the beginning, could you tell me about when and where you were born and something about your parents?

IMBREY: Yes. I was born across the river in New Jersey because we had a gynecologist there and that was in 1921. One week later I was back in Manhattan and so I was a child in New York City. I grew up in New York City and unfortunately my passport reads Hoboken. My wife was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but she spent six months there and after that she was a childhood delinquent. Well, I grew up in New York. We lived in fairly nice circumstances, made what we call a Jewish migration from the West Side to the East Side.

Q: Now, tell me about your father. What did he do?

IMBREY: He was a lawyer mostly for industry and for various unions, various clothing unions. He was rather successful.

Q: What was his background?

IMBREY: He was born in London of parents we were born in Krakow and he came to the States I imagine in the late 1880s in 1888, 1889. He went to CCNY. He got himself a law degree at NYU and practiced law almost continuously, he died in 1948.

Q: On his side was the Jewish extraction?

IMBREY: Yes, yes.

Q: On your mother's side?

IMBREY: No, my mother was born to royalty. Her grandfather was little Julius Harberg of the Sheriff of New York City.

Q: Oh, the Harbergs?

IMBREY: He was Italian. He led the cotillion. He grew up in very nice circumstances. However, when my mother married my father her family totally turned her off. She was born of German Jews. My father was what they considered a Polish Jew.

Q: Oh, the distinctions were very strong?

IMBREY: Oh, boy. So, her side of the family never spoke to her again.

Q: Really? I mean because the Harbergs were and may still be certainly a very well known society Jewish family in high society?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: Well, now, where did your mother, what sort of education did your mother have?

IMBREY: My mother's education was interrupted by a murder in front of her eyes. A jealous husband killed what he perceived to be her mother's lover. So, it was a book salesman coming to sell books and he killed them both and shot himself in front of the children and in front of my mother. That colored her life tremendously. That and the rejection of the family that she married into. I don't know about her education. She could speak German.

Q: Do you know how they met or when they met?

IMBREY: No, I don't know very much about their life.

Q: Well, when you as a child growing up in New York, where in New York did you live?

IMBREY: Well, we lived first on West End Avenue, which is over on the West Side, then my mother got very tired of cooking. So, we moved to a hotel on Central Park West. Very fancy and dinner was served at night on one of those carts that come up to your room and all the dishes had domes on them. Very elegant.

Q: How did you find growing up in sort of, when did that happen? Was that when you were pretty small?

IMBREY: Yes, I was about ten or eleven. I guess it was then. In the meantime, I was going to a fairly rough school, public school with a very mixed people, Italians, Greeks, certainly Blacks and it was a rough and tumble sort of place. Then I was put into Horace Mann school. Do you know Horace Mann?

Q: Yes.

IMBREY: I spent the equivalent of the four high school years at Horace Mann.

Q: Let's talk about at the pre-high school time at the public school. How did you find, I mean how did you do there, was it a sort of a fight for survival?

IMBREY: Oh, no. In those days the teachers were very strict and they demanded the same thing of everyone and what happened in the yard later, was the kids played stickball instead of fighting each other they, sports allowed a certain amount of violence to be concentrated in a better channel.

Q: How about for a sort of an elementary school before the high school drill, what interested you, I mean, sports, books, movies, what have you?

IMBREY: Books more than anything else. I was not really addicted to sports except to keep up with the guys, but I really liked books. I liked my stamp collection and because of the foreign element in it I think from early on I was attracted about knowledge about other countries.

Q: What about at home or the hotel that was home. In the first place, did you have brothers and sisters?

IMBREY: I have one sister, yes.

Q: When there was a discussion of events in the world and all, I mean, did politics or literature or something else come into the conversation?

IMBREY: Very much so. My father had a number of friends who liked to gather at the house and after their bridge game they certainly went into politics, not so much New York politics. I don't think anybody was interested in that. They were interested in what was going on in the world and I certainly heard those conversations and I enjoyed them.

Q: Well, while you were growing up did you, your father was involved with what, corporate?

IMBREY: Trade unions.

Q: Trade unions. In such a trade did David Dubinsky get in there?

IMBREY: I don't know whether he probably knew Dubinsky. He had several organizations. He had the tie union and shirt makers union among others. He argued some cases before the Supreme Court.

Q: By the time you were growing up, did the Depression hit you? Did that have much of an effect?

IMBREY: Not at first. My father was into real estate and all around him the people who were into the stock market crashed with the stock market and my father was doing very well because things were going well in his field. Then came the disaster. About 1935 or so, maybe '36, the market fell out of real estate and that's when my father felt it.

Q: How did this affect you?

IMBREY: It didn't really affect us much. My father would come home yelling and screaming "We're going to the poor house." He never did. My mother would go out and buy a fur coat. It seemed, no, nothing much ever happened. We were not really hit terribly and then there was a recovery and my father always had his practice, so.

Q: How was it living in a hotel? What was that Bindlemans? That little kid, a little girl who lived there?

IMBREY: Madeline.

Q: Madeline.

IMBREY: No, it wasn't like that. Not quite that kind of a hotel, it was a very good hotel. Naturally I made friends with the janitor and his son, and the janitor's son had an endless supply of dirty books.

Q: The little ones?

IMBREY: The little ones, yes. It wasn't Thimble Thin. It was Popeye and Olive.

Q: All of the comics had their counterparts in the dirty. I remember I used to get hold of those, too. I found out what life was all about.

IMBREY: Yes, get a wonderful education.

Q: Well, Horace Mann. You were at Horace from when to when?

IMBREY: 1935 to 1939.

Q: What was Horace Mann like?

IMBREY: Well, the teachers there prided themselves of teaching at the college level, or so they thought and they were all very good. It was mostly a Jewish crowd, Jewish boys, a couple of Italians, a couple of Christians got in somehow and there was a good deal of competition. The competition was heavy and the grading was strict, but the teachers were very available and the classes as you could imagine were anywhere from eight to fifteen.

Q: Did you sort of concentrate at anything?

IMBREY: I tried to concentrate in languages. I took Latin and then I took Greek and French as well.

Q: You continued reading I assume?

IMBREY: Yes, yes.

Q: Can you think of any books that particularly struck you as influential or not?

IMBREY: Gosh, there's just so many. I really was very taken by The Iliad, The Odyssey, and The Golden Bow.

Q: Oh, yes, Frazier.

IMBREY: Yes, I liked that very much.

Q: That was the exploration of myth I guess?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: What were you looking at, I mean this was a time real events were happening in the Far East and Europe particularly as the precursor to World War II.

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: Were these things that would be discussed either at school or home?

IMBREY: Very much so. We had classes in current events and in world affairs and those things were brought to our attention, but not as much as they might have been. We were very heavy into history of every kind and there's just so many hours a day. So, we certainly knew about them, we certainly were told about them and lectured about them. There were even guest lecturers that came to the place and they let us in.

Q: Did you read a daily newspaper at all?

IMBREY: I don't think so.

Q: They had the Herald Tribune and New York Times.

IMBREY: The World Sun. That old one. No, The Mirror and The News were not permitted in the house.

Q: Oh, yes.

IMBREY: What was the one that came after, not The Post, it was a very intellectual magazine that came in the very beginning of the war about 1940. Well, anyway, if you were caught reading that you were considered really a little bit too intellectual for words.

Q: Did your family practice Judaism at all?

IMBREY: No, not at all. My mother was a total atheist. My father I think would have called himself an agnostic and never once was I ever taken into a temple, ever.

Q: I was wondering whether the problems that were happening in Germany particularly at this time during the Hitler time prior to World War II intrude on your - I mean, was this something that was ever discussed?

IMBREY: Yes, by all means. It was. We knew about it and my family contributed monetarily to various Jewish organizations.

Q: Did you have any idea where you wanted to go school or not?

IMBREY: I wanted to go to Cornell and I got a letter from them saying I would have been accepted except for the Jewish quota. As a matter of fact in those days we accepted that very readily because if they didn't have a Jewish quota they would have had 90% of the class New York Jews. So, then somebody told me about North Carolina and, oh, I had to go to Chapel Hill.

Q: So, you went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: About the Jewish quota I was interviewing somebody who graduated from the Brooklyn High School of Science and said that they wanted to go to MIT, but they would only take three people from there because the classes were mainly very fine Jewish students, but there it was.

IMBREY: There it was, the same thing with Orientals today.

Q: Yes, the University of California where they're having a hell of a time.

IMBREY: Oh, really.

Q: The University of Berkeley is trying to wrestle with this problem.

IMBREY: The Koreans and Japanese, who don't ever quit studying.

Q: Yes. Well, so you went to the University of North Carolina?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: You were there from when to when?

IMBREY: '39 to '42. Now, at this point the war saved my neck. I was flunking out. I was a terrible student.

Q: How come?

IMBREY: It never occurred to me to visit my advisor and so I kept on taking courses that I liked. I took Greek, of course, and Sanskrit. I also took chemistry and math, which I flunked three times in a row. Had no head for it and I only found out much later that if you took a class in a language you didn't have to take math or chemistry. I was away in spades if I had not taken those two things. So, came the war and the call to arms. I said, "That's me." I left school after the junior year and I went into the army.

Q: When did you go in?

IMBREY: I enlisted in '42. Yes. About September of '42.

Q: What did they do with you?

IMBREY: They looked into my proud background and they sent me to the Signal Corps. From the Signal Corps, they sent me to Kansas City to take high speed Morse code. Now that was a real drag. I was out there for about four or five months and I got up to a very high speed for 36 loops a minute, which is rather fast. If it's going that fast you have to learn to type. So, they taught typing, too, which has stayed with me forever. Then, having gotten this high-speed thing, they sent me to an infantry organization as a Signal Corps radio operator. Well, one thing I hadn't known. When you get on a net in the Signal Corps you have to go at the speed of the slowest man in the network. Well, all of us there, in my gang, could go very fast. You got guys in there who go "dit, dit, dit, dash, dit" and you know, go a speed of about one a minute, I said I'll die if I stay in this place. So, I figured out a way of getting out of that. Now, do you want all of this?

Q: Oh, sure.

IMBREY: It's rather funny. I had enough linguistic experience to know I could choose a language that I could learn fairly quickly and I didn't want German nor Italian. I am not esoteric enough, but I knew that Malay was easily learned and there was no real grammar to it. I got myself a book on Malay and I learned some. I taught myself about 500 words, just the words in Malay. You know in Malay you just put them one after the other and you don't have too much grammar.

I applied for the ASTP (Armed Services Training Program) which was for languages. I put down Malay. They said, "how did you learn Malay?" I said my father was a planter. One could get away with a lot. They gave me a test. They didn't have anybody who spoke Malay and so they got a book and they copied some sentences out of it where they had both the English on one side and the Malay on the other. Well, it was the book, the grammar book they give to planters when they are first on the job and they have to learn enough to deal with the run of the plantation. So, it was very basic and the words were like this: "If you do not tap the tree correctly I shall have you whipped." But I knew all the words, so they said okay you know Malay so they put me into a program and I went to Hindustani. Then some seven or eight months of Hindustani four hours a day and by the end of that time we spoke pretty good Hindustani and as a matter of fact where I went out first to Karachi there were all of these poets who arrived among us who were speaking high Hindustani. I was with the Indian Army so I learned army orders, which was the same as Hindustani.

Q: Now you went out to, oh that time it was India?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: The whole place. When did you go out?

IMBREY: 1943 I guess. Yes, the end of '43.

Q: What did you do?

IMBREY: Oh, after the Hindustani course I was picked up by OSS and so from then on I spent the war as OSS. I spent most of the war in Burma, but also in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka. We had a base; Lord Louis Mountbatten was the chief of the whole operations there. He had his base in Kandi. So, we had a group. I don't remember what I was doing. I don't think I was doing very much when we were in Kandi, so we got out of there and went to Burma.

Q: In Burma at that time, was Burma, was it completely occupied by the Japanese or was this the British counterattack?

IMBREY: No, what had happened was that Windy, Orde Wingate had successfully mounted a number of operations with his Chindits and took a hell of a, not a beating, but the fighting was very intense and then came the Morris Task Force, the Americans and there the fighting was very intense. About that time there were Merrill's Marauders they were there and OSS detachments were behind the lines. Now, at that time the Japanese had faced so many enemies in so many places that they had really no way of getting their goods and services to Burma and so the Japanese troops in Burma were really ill-fed, had no medical supplies to speak of and were on their last legs. They were still fighting like tigers, but we were there at a time, or I was there at a time when the war had already been won and we were just making things more difficult for them, but they were no longer anywhere near the fighting force that the others had to face.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

IMBREY: Well, let's go back to Ceylon first because I had one great job there that was very funny. They used to send a submarine out to the states at Sunda and they would find a fishing boat with a couple of people on it and take the people aboard the submarine, tie the boat to the submarine and come back to Tricomoli and Ceylon. There they would teach them how to operate a radio, take them back, put the boat back on top of the water with the people in it and these chaps would send out radio instructions on Japanese ship traffic in their area. So, there it is on my record, Malay speaker and they got out to Tricomoli, so I went out to Tricomoli and so there I met up with the Malays. Well, I didn't know what would happen, except I said to them something like hello and they said, oh you speak Malay. They were so happy that somebody spoke a few words and then we got along very well and the language sort of invented itself as it came along. Then I had this other job of getting them, a lot of them we didn't want to send back to Malay. It was too dangerous for them. So, we would send them to India and we would pile them in the nosecone of a plane and send them over to India and then escort them over to a coffee estate where we kept them there. Of course, when they got in the nose cone of the plane and you know Plexiglas... Do you know what a nose cone looks like? You look down and there's nothing there.

Q: Scares the hell out of you.

IMBREY: Scared the hell out of me because I was with them. In fact, I went back to Burma and was actually all sorts of things. We were blowing up bridges and behind the lines we were setting fires. One thing that we did that was rather funny. One of our people had the idea of using the yellow parachute dye, which is very persistent. So we sent out word up and down the Chimquin River that if ever the river should turn to gold it means that the Japanese would be defeated. So, we turned the river to gold, we dumped in all of the parachutes and they actually floated and it looked like gold. The people believed it. We were doing that sort of thing.

Q: Would you be using your high-speed transmission skills?

IMBREY: No, never again. By that time we had Mohawks.

Q: These were Indians?

IMBREY: Yes, they were speaking their own language?

Q: Their own language so that the ...

IMBREY: No monkeying around with Morse Code.

Q: What was your impression of the Burmese themselves? Were they sort of neutral in the whole thing?

IMBREY: Oh, no, the Japanese had really done a masterful job on them. They hated the Japanese. They hated them. We had our own tribals and we were training some of the tribal people up in the northeast part of the country and they were very friendly to us. The Burmese are quite different. There's the Burmans, the Cochins, the Corins; they're all a little different. The Corins had earlier been approached by the, that is in the '30s, by Protestant missionaries. They're all Christians; they're all hymn singers. They're very easy to get along with. The Burmans are all Buddhists. They are a little bit more touchy. But all of them had been terribly used by the Japanese.

Q: How did you get in? Were you parachuted in?

IMBREY: No, I came in with the Battle of Mitchina and we were on one end of the airfield and the Japanese were at the other end and just about the time I got out of the plane the last Japanese was driven off the airfield.

Q: Was this, did you find yourself moving at all with the British Forces under Slim or under Stilwell?

IMBREY: No, Stilwell was already in Ethiopia or somewhere else. Slim was the commanding general then. For a while I was with the Thirteenth Indian Division on the assumption that someone could speak Hindustani. I was a sergeant, but of course they put me with the officers and the officers would not speak any Indian language with me. It would be like saying, you can't speak English. It was an insult to address them in their own language. But with the soldiers I could get along; you know if you ask for a pot of water or something like that I would do it in Hindi.

Q: Well, where did you end up in the war?

IMBREY: Well, in Rangoon with another wonderful sortie. The British then accused us of attempting to arm Burmese rebels who were seeking independence from British rule. Burma was a crown colony and they said we had armed all, which we had, we had armed a great number of these people. They said to get back these guns because we don't want them around, we don't want them to have independence, they're not ready for it. So, a couple of us were sent out. Each one of us had a truck and a Burmese guide. I went many, many miles in the attempt to get back the weapons.

I get to a village and I'd say that I need the weapons back, the war is over, let's have the weapons, yes, the weapons. Earlier in the colonial period the British had armed every headman with a shotgun. It was a symbol of his authority. When the war came they all buried them. So, the guy would go to the burial place, unearth this rusty shotgun. "Here's your gun." What about the submachine guns, what about the pistols, what about the stingers? Oh, no, we never had those.

Q: Yes, I can imagine. Once you give a gun away you don't really get it back.

IMBREY: Well, I came back I think with about six rusty rifles and that was after about two weeks that I'd gone down to the whole area and I was really ashamed of coming in and all the other guys had the same experience. Nobody ever got any weapons. So, what we did was to break out a couple of cartons of 45s, clean them off, cleaned them all up and gave them to the British. "Here are your guns."

Q: What happened to you afterwards, I mean here you are, not having graduated from a university, you've got your Malay and your OSS experience?

IMBREY: Yes, when I went back to North Carolina after the war, they said well look at your record here you have four hours a day, seven months, that constitutes a major. I said, "I've got a major?" He said, "Yes, all you have to do is take a couple of courses and you're out of here." I graduated from North Carolina, the only graduate of Hindu study ever to this day.

Q: So, you graduated when?

IMBREY: '46.

Q: Then what did you do?

IMBREY: Oh, went to, I got into the import/export business. I thought that would be interesting and they sent me to Cuba to Havana. I was in Havana for a year.

Q: That was when Havana was really jumping.

IMBREY: Oh, boy. It was between Batista. Batista had been president before and after I came. In the middle was a guy named Grau San Martin, who must have ranked with Mobutu, Mugabe, all the thieves. Grau was an expert and I had good success in selling our products, but the factories hadn't really turned to civilian production.

Q: What were you selling?

IMBREY: Well, we had hospital supplies, then a plastic factory. The plastics were rather new there and this was a rather extravagant kind of plastic out of which you could make numerous things, but they weren't up to production so I could get an order for thousands of pisspots for a hospital, but they'd send six, and we had a radio. It was a \$10 radio, which they desperately wanted. I could get about eight of those. Now you get one in thousands. So, finally after a year I gave up. I wasn't making any money for myself.

Q: Then what?

IMBREY: Well, I found out that OSS now had roots in CIG, Central Intelligence which Truman eventually turned into the CIA and I applied for a job there. I had support for that and in 1948 I began with CIA.

Q: How was the recruitment at that time? What sort of things, I mean, were they?

IMBREY: Most of the people had been in the OSS and others were from East Coast colleges for the most part and I think OSS was the big background. If you were in OSS it was not too much of a problem getting in.

Q: What did they want you to do?

IMBREY: Well, first of all there was training. They took me in at a princely sum; I was a P-3, which I think was the equivalent of a GS-9. Well, that was like \$3,000 a year.

Q: That's not bad.

IMBREY: So, that was pretty good. At any rate, after training, let's see. They sent us to various courses in world affairs and in the countries of our interest. I was immediately singled out for India because of the language and the fact that I'd been there before and prepared for a post in Bombay. And we had a little trouble with the State Department as you can imagine getting our people into various posts. The two brothers Allen and John Foster Dulles.

Q: Well, this is still 1948, so Foster didn't get in until '53?

IMBREY: No, Dean Acheson was there at the time, but the State Department was jumpy as usual.

Q: Well, it was a new thing, too.

IMBREY: Yes. Then the guy whom I was replacing, Lennox Fogg, his parents were of the Fogg Museum in Boston. This chap had a drinking problem that culminated with the thought that he might be able to fly. He flew out the first floor or second story window where he was living. Didn't do him any good. He was too drunk, I guess. He survived very well. The State Department said that's enough and they said to the CIA to get that man replaced right away. So, immediately I was shipped out there to replace this guy.

Q: This was in '48?

IMBREY: Yes. '48.

Q: When did the great partition of India take place?

IMBREY: '47.

Q: '47? So, it was sort of immediately afterwards?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: You were in Bombay from when to when?

IMBREY: '48 to '50. Just two years. The ambassador there was Timberlake. He was a leader and ambassador to the Congo and Peru and a few other places. We got along splendidly.

Q: But you were in Bombay rather than New Delhi, is that right?

IMBREY: Yes, that was in Bombay. It was a Consulate General. There were all sorts of people to meet there. First of all there was a navy. We were interested in the Indian navy's ability to cooperate with us and CIA developed sources there. A lot of funny things that were going on there, the guy that I had there was the chief of operations for the Indian navy and he was an admiral and his headquarters were in Bombay. One of the things that interested him that he tried to get me interested in was pornographic pictures, which he had by the ton.

Q: Well, you already had good training with the comic books.

IMBREY: Yes, I had wonderful training for them, but he said, "Do you think you could get me some others?" So, I didn't tell headquarters about this because I thought that was a little risky, but I had a friend who was the chief of station, Dick Clise, in New Delhi. I said, "Dick, what are we going to do?" And, he said, "Don't worry. I have sources for that sort of stuff and they produce a lot of the stuff here." What they have are these little books, some are even typed scripts of various methods of intercourse you wouldn't believe. So, I always had a supply of these things to give him and so our relationship was very good. The only funny thing about that was I went to Delhi on one occasion with my wife and four of us went out to dinner and on our way to the restaurant a guy came running pell-mell with a handful of these things and saying, "Mr. Clise, Mr. Clise, I have some more for you." His wife didn't know anything about this.

Q: You mentioned a wife. When did she appear on the scene?

IMBREY: We were married in Bombay.

Q: What was her background?

IMBREY: She was the sister of my roommate in college. I used to visit my roommate in New York when she was a little girl and eventually we got together and I proposed when drunk.

Q: Great. What was your impression of how India was settling in as a new nation?

IMBREY: There was enough time for Bombay. There were a lot of people who were being oppressed in Pakistan, the new Pakistan and particularly the Sindhi population. Sindhis are a national element from the province of Sin in Pakistan. They're generally distrusted for very good reasons. They're very sly people and they have a lot of attributes that are not particularly inviting. These people came down to Bombay in droves, set up shops, displaced merchants that had been there for years and Bombay was seething. There was a lot of trouble. A lot of fighting in the streets. A lot of loss of control, but it was a very interesting place to be of course. The key to Indian society for most Americans who, especially those who were in Bombay with parcees who are a very cultivated and interesting bunch, you have sympathies with both the Muslims and the Hindus. By now by getting with the parcees you could expand tremendously your cover of friendships and relationships. So, Bombay was in that sense a very good post to begin.

Q: How did you find your relations with the State Department people there?

IMBREY: In my case, it turned out very well. The ambassador...

Q: The ambassador or the consul general?

IMBREY: Oh, well, Timberlake, consul general, yes. Ambassador Timberlake stood in as father of the bride when I married my wife in Bombay and all the other people were extremely supportive and happy to have me along. I had no enemies and I appreciated they all had jobs to do and we worked together.

Q: How did you find some of the Indian government? Did they pay much attention to your activities?

IMBREY: No, as a matter of fact I had good relationships with the police and that was one of my chores of my job was to find out from the police what was going on. We had several communist parties at the time and that, of course, was of tremendous interest to us and to the police. So, I got a great deal of information from them that was reportable and through them I also got relations with labor unions and spent a lot of time developing relations with the labor unions who with the nature of their work were very upset and concerned about communism in their ranks.

Q: The Indian communists at that time which you had seen, were they sort of local grown or were they a disciplined group coming from or getting orders from Moscow?

IMBREY: At first it was one united party under a man named Nikay Rondevey, a very able politician who was elusive. He would have been arrested if they had ever found him. He managed to get a number of people behind him. Moscow-oriented, and certainly the Russians were supporting him to a good extent until the split of the Russians with the Chinese, at which time a Maoist group grew up particularly in the south of India. So, we were watching Membery very carefully, too. So, between the police and my military contacts and the labor contacts I could report a good deal on what was going on in the communist party.

Q: Did you cover Kerala?

IMBREY: The Kerala? Not then. Kerala had a consulate general in Madras and our guy in Madras was supposedly covering it. Unfortunately, he too was an alcoholic.

Q: You were saying the consul general of Madras was a

IMBREY: No, no, the consul general who was stationed there was unfortunately an alcoholic.

Q: That was part of the problem, wasn't it? I think in some of these places where they've been doing this a long time, drinking becomes quite a way of life?

IMBREY: Oh, in the Foreign Service we all drank.

Q: It was a real, real problem.

IMBREY: Yes, it was a problem and you probably remember yourself when the houseboy came in with eighteen different kinds of liquor.

Q: Oh, yes.

IMBREY: Yes, a lot of people were under the influence.

Q: So, how did that work out for you?

IMBREY: Yes, they sent me from Bombay; they said well you handled things so well in Bombay with the first incident, why don't you go down to Madras and relieve the situation there. So, they sent the guy in Madras home and I went down to Madras with the kit and caboodle and family, down to Madras and then I did come to Kerala.

Q: Then Kerala of course for a long time was always looked upon with great suspicion from the American point of view because there was a very strong communist party there.

IMBREY: Well, only after the Maoist thing and that sort of a caste thing. The man who was in charge of that was a Nambuteripod. That is not only a family name, but a caste name and a very high up caste name so you show a lot of respect among the other castes. He was taken in by the Chinese and they were doing very well in a community in which every third guy had a Ph.D. The most amazing thing in all of Kerala is that the people are all so over-trained, over-educated and splendidly over-educated, and, of course, there are no jobs. Who needs all of these professors?

Q: So, they couldn't expand outside of the area?

IMBREY: They had that problem, too, but they were tremendously intelligent and the communist party appealed to them as a haven.

Q: Well, what were we doing? Were we trying to co-opt any of these people or just report on them?

IMBREY: No, Kerala was a specialty. You go about it in a peculiar way. For example, there's a group in Kerala of Syrian Christians. They came over with Thomas the apostle in the fourth century I think it was. They were Syrian Christians. Those guys were amenable to recruitment and reporting. Then there was another group the Maccabean Jews, the black Jews of India who have an area around called Bajetown over on the west coast and their own synagogue and their own tabernacle and God knows what and they were recruitable, too.

Q: What were we seeing there, even if the Maoists were going doing well there, it was sort of a self-sealed operation in that they really couldn't penetrate the rest of Indian society.

IMBREY: There was a tremendous evolution and what began merely as a pocket communist party in two different places spread. North of Madras is another province called Ambhra and all of them were under the influence of this man Ramadini who started a civil war. They sent the Indian army down there to deal with this and so there were security situations for the whole subcontinent that you reported on. In Madras I was the only one really reporting on that. So, we had the consul general and two other people who had consular jobs. So, I had a lot of responsibility in keeping the government informed on the status this little war that was going on in Ambhra.

Q: How did you find the Indian officials at that time? Were they concerned about what was going on?

IMBREY: Oh, tremendously yes because their jobs depended on how they treated their own people. We saw them regularly, we had good relations with a great many of them.

Q: How were you able to find out what was happening?

IMBREY: Through agents. As I said we had agents that were Syrian, Christian, Jewish and various Indian communities and we met surreptitiously, got our information, submitted it. In those days we had to type it on the thatch forms, remember those forms?

Q: Oh, yes. Were Indian officials in the central government concerned about I suppose a somewhat obvious operation of the CIA person there?

IMBREY: I don't think so, because they could have easily have put a stop to it; they could have easily identified us. In those days we certainly had a number of security options at our disposal, but nothing like we have today and the Indian government could have penetrated us immediately and probably had.

Q: So, you were both basically working the same side?

IMBREY: That's right. No objections. I don't recall being harassed by the Indians.

Q: How did the Indian army do when it was brought down?

IMBREY: It won the war. After all most of the people who were fighting that war were dirt poor, there were no weapons, nothing much could be done. It wasn't like today's arms or rebellions.

Q: Also, at the time India was just beginning to put itself together, wasn't it? You had the princely states, which were still quasi-independent or something?

IMBREY: Yes. They were going out of fashion and weren't happy about it; so you had that, too.

Q: How did you find society in Madras as compared to the society in Madrid in Europe in your perspective?

IMBREY: Madras was a peculiar place, everybody was super intellectual. Everybody's family has children who must be artists or in some way prove that they are better than the family that lives next door. Well, the result is they all have to play a musical instrument, dance or Indian dancing or classical Indian dancing. When a girl is about thirteen or fourteen she has to do a sort of coming out, a debut. So, they hire a hall, they put her on the stage with an orchestra and she has to do about four hours of classical dancing. You think it is tough on her; it's also tough on the backsides of those people who are called in to witness this. Anyhow, you went to dinner and just about as the dinner was ending somebody would say, oh, my sister is here and she plays the vina and we were treated to a concert of about three hours of vina music. They're all talented. It's not to say they didn't dance well or play well, but ...

Q: You're saying you found that the hand of Washington or even in New Delhi in your point of view your superiors rested lightly on you?

IMBREY: Very lightly, yes. We were concerned with other things. World communism was in fashion and we had other fish to fry. We were in the middle of Bombay then came along Korea. Korea came in 1950 and so the real attention was on Korea, not what was going on in Bombay.

Q: But wasn't there a concern because the Indians were beginning to play a nasty role. I mean this was when the Indians began with Krishna Menon. I mean, all of a sudden, the Indians weren't really the nice guys. They were a problem. They were a burr under the saddle.

IMBREY: They sure were. Krishna Menon and the United Nations? We really hated them. Colonialism.

Q: He was basically a British socialist snob in a way.

IMBREY: He was under the anti-colonist credentials. So, I'm sure he and Kwame Nkrumah got on very well.

Q: Did this affect your role?

IMBREY: Not really. Most Indians with whom we had contact, they enjoyed the prestige of having contacts with somebody in the consulate and even more so in Delhi in the Embassy. They looked forward to those contacts. They, as a matter of fact, they referred to their own people as Buddhist people.

Q: When you were in Madras, did you see any problem with Tamil separatism or connections with at that time called Ceylon; later it was Sri Lanka?

IMBREY: No. That hadn't come up yet. As far as their own aspirations went, all of the southern Indians have a literature that goes deeper and earlier than the Sanskrit literature of the north. You have writings in Talaygoo, Malayan. All of those have a literary history that is four thousand years old, not to mention Bengal. Bengalis think they have it all, too. So, these are people that are very concerned about the past and their own glory. We have that all the time.

Q: You left Madras when?

IMBREY: '51 I guess.

Q: So, where did you go then?

IMBREY: Well, I was sent to Ceylon or Sri Lanka.

Q: And you were there from '51 to ?

IMBREY: It was one year, '52.

Q: What was the political situation in Ceylon in '51 and '52?

IMBREY: Oh, there again I was under cover as labor reporting officer. That was a new thing that they had invented at the time instead of having a labor attaché in the Embassy, which you couldn't afford because there weren't that many people, you just assigned one of your low-level guys as labor reporting officer. That gave me access to what was a very important labor movement in Ceylon. They had five distinct labor organizations one of which was Trotskyite, the only Trotskyite as far as I know, and run by a very clever man. The reporting of that was eaten up by the Department of Labor. They loved to know about what was going on in Ceylon.

Q: So, was that pretty much what you did?

IMBREY: Oh, I had relations with the police and I would go occasionally to Joffna in the north of the island because they were always hacking down telephone poles and other nasty things. Oh, yes, they had a communist party, which I was watching, too. That was our principal interest in those days. Watch those Russians.

Q: The Tamil movement, how did that stand at that time?

IMBREY: The husband of Bandaranaike, Solomon Ward Bandaranaike, he was, when I was there, he was running a newspaper called Sengalalay, which means Sinhalese blood and he was declaiming against the Indians. What are they doing here, they're taking our money. The Indians worked the tea plantations. The tea plantations are situated on hills and the tea picker had a huge bag about the size of this table or longer and he has to fill that with two leaves on a bud from each plant. Each day you'll get another blossom, two leaves and a bud. That is broken orange pekoe and it goes in the bag. You don't put in any single leaves or single buds in. It has to be quite vigorously gotten. Now, for filling a bag like that, means being almost bent over vertical getting your bag back to the tea factory, they will pay one rupee a day. A rupee that was about thirty cents. This money, many of them sent back to India to support their families there for there were no jobs in India.

Well, this was, in brief, that they were sending all this good Sinhalese money back to India so they should get rid of these guys. Sinhalese wouldn't take on any tea-picking job. They were basically happy go lucky and it's a country where if you take a banana seed, you go like, and that you've got to duck because of the banana tree. Now, at any rate, he was one, he started a great deal of animus against the Indian workers. As a matter of fact he was shot in 1953 or 1954, shortly after I left, by some people who thought he hadn't gone far enough.

Q: So, I mean how did you find sort of getting on in society there? Did all sit around and talk about how awful the Tamils were?

IMBREY: No, no, no. My wife had a Tamil obstetrician as a matter of fact. No, they were well considered when we were there. People liked them. This was only the tea pickers.

Q: How about the unions? I mean I take it there wasn't a tea pickers' union.

IMBREY: No. As far as I can remember I don't think there was one.

Q: What about the union? Were they sort of imbued with the class struggle as taught by northern school of economics and all that?

IMBREY: No they weren't that far educated. They paid their dues and they looked to the union to do something for them politically, but I can't imagine that any of them had any real notions.

Q: I guess our only interest there in a way was the Chinese or the Soviets?

IMBREY: I was not interested in the Chinese or the Soviets there, or I was not directed in that or not in that direction. Most of the time I was in India, I think the Embassy in Delhi possibly had people who were directed in that, but there just weren't enough of them around.

Q: So, you had to deal them out to the top levels?

IMBREY: No, I don't recall.

Q: Did the Soviets have an Embassy in Colombo?

IMBREY: Yes, I guess so.

Q: But it wasn't a major operation?

IMBREY: No, it wasn't on my list. No, I didn't do anything with them.

Q: Did you feel by this time that you were really an Indian hand, I mean a sub-continental hand?

IMBREY: Oh sure, yes. I knew it all.

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

IMBREY: I was back in headquarters heading an overseas organization; I was communist party officer for what was then NEA, Near Eastern African Division.

Q: Today is July 24, 2001. Howard, you went back to CIA Headquarters when? In what year?

IMBREY: 1953.

Q: How long were you there?

IMBREY: I was there until 1956, so that's three years.

Q: What, I want to ask what particular slice of NEA did you have? I mean there was so much.

IMBREY: I was named communist party officer for NEA and my duty was to encourage all of the countries in the Near Eastern/African Division to pay more attention to communism and report on communism and develop agents abroad who could report on communism in their respective countries.

Q: Well, particularly in the Middle Eastern side, where the Arab nationalists were making nice to the Soviet Union, they weren't making nice to indigenous communist parties?

IMBREY: No, but our instructions were to develop agents within the communist party and report on their intentions and relationships with the Soviet Union.

Q: Obviously, you would have to be a little circumspect in this, but a lot of time has passed. In the first place, how effective do you think we were in developing agents dealing with getting reports of all this?

IMBREY: I think we were quite effective. We had, my specialty, of course, having been in India, I did pay more attention to the Indian communist parties than I would to the others, but we developed good sources within the government and the communist parties themselves of India, Pakistan; Afghanistan wasn't a problem in those days. What they did with communism was exactly what we'd like to do with them. In Iran, their Tudeh party, we were very much involved in that as you could imagine. We regarded it as a big menace and worked very hard to destroy the relationships between the Tudeh and the government.

Q: How do you destroy relationships? I mean, you know, I'm sitting back in Washington and I press a button and say to destroy, but what does this mean?

IMBREY: Well, we had Kermit Roosevelt out there, who was a very charismatic man. His able assistant John Waller. Waller had the wrestlers' association and I can't exactly remember how he got in bed with them, but he was able to get the wrestlers out onto the street and whatever the wrestlers wanted to do, the country wanted to do. They're so involved in wrestling in that country.

Q: There and in Turkey. You don't want to mess with them.

IMBREY: They exert a great deal of influence and if they told the communists that that was not a good thing for the country, the people followed the wrestlers. That was one of the operations.

Q: What about when you moved over to the Arab world, did you feel, you know, I'm speaking of Syria and Egypt, one has the feeling that Arab nationalism and communism didn't work very well together.

IMBREY: We did our best to encourage Islamic parties in those days. That was before there was a great rivalry between Shias and Sunnis that developed after the Iranian experience. But in those days one could get to these people and actively organize against communism, certainly in Egypt.

Q: The communist parties in various countries have different ways. The American communist party was apparently a real toady to the Soviet Union and the French communist party was, too, but then you start moving over to the British and Italian, German and all and there was some distance between.

IMBREY: Oh, and dare and glare in the '70s.

Q: But that was much later yes. During this time how, and we're talking about the NEA area, were the communist parties like the Tudeh and the ones in India and Pakistan complete tools of the Soviet Union or was there some distance?

IMBREY: Well, it depended on the rivalry between the Maoists and the Soviets. That became very important especially in India. You had two rival parties, one which was obedient, really, to the Soviet Union and the other in the southwest, who were very favored to the Chinese. So, you had two different groups struggling and they did not like each other one bit.

Q: Did we get into the disinformation side?

IMBREY: Oh, you bet we did.

Q: People were howling saying "Did you hear what so and so's doing?"

IMBREY: Of course as soon as you hear of a rivalry like this, that is a way of getting answers. So, we certainly did that. In India, of course, there are so many other groups, casts, religions. For example in the Kerala region where the Chinese communists were Maoists were important. There were also the Syrian Christians. They [word indistinct] Jews in Jew town, Maccabean Jews who had come over in the 2nd century B.C. They were still an important group there. So you had all sorts of groups you could call on to get into business with you. Plus a tremendously educated class.

Q: In India and Pakistan were they going through the normal thing, kids in college, were communists taking kids out of college who immediately became disaffected with the establishment. I mean was that the pattern?

IMBREY: It certainly was and one of the patterns was, if they had gone to school in America, they came back very pro-communist. If they went to school in the Soviet Union they came back very pro-American.

Q: Were there any great crises or incidents you can think of during this particular period? It was the time of the Suez War.

IMBREY: There was that and the outbreak of the Korean War.

Q: That was around 1950.

IMBREY: But, no I don't think of a period in the mid-'50s where there was any great crisis. It was sort of a mundane job; I just had to go around lecturing and encouraging.

Q: I was wondering in the agency at that time was there a pretty strong wall between what you were doing and that in the clandestine side?

IMBREY: That was the clandestine side.

Q: Oh, you were on the clandestine side?

IMBREY: Oh, yes, there was a war between the clandestine side and the intelligence side and that persisted for a long time. They were not permitted to know our operations and so we were not permitted to tell them and the result was they had to judge the information through a series of fences.

Q: Well, in a way, it was sort of a check. In other words they were looking at more objectively than hearing from the operators who had maybe exaggerated claims of success?

IMBREY: Yes, that's true in one sense. In another, I ran into the same thing myself when I was running one agent in India and I found out that the agency was correcting information from the same agent and that turned out to be an agent of James J. Angleton and I asked his staff to help me out and tell me what was going on. They said no way we're not telling you anything about our operations.

Q: Yes, he was a great spymaster.

IMBREY: Yes, he was and he also was fully in charge and the only one in charge of the Israeli operations or the operations involving the Israelis.

Q: Did you all feel that the Israelis were playing really on the same side with us?

IMBREY: Oh, we were deeply in bed with the Israelis and I think we would have known any deception on their part.

Q: Because I've always had the suspicion that the Israelis had to play somewhat of a double game because they had interests in the Soviet Union. They had stakes and needed a certain amount of cooperation in order to get Jews out of the country and the KGB or whatever it is was willing to play this game to a certain extent.

IMBREY: No, we were right into Moscow and I can't believe that they would have attempted a deception when they were getting an enormous part of their revenue from American aid.

Q: Were you often up against double agents and the whole thing in these countries to; was it a real spy versus spy game?

IMBREY: No, I don't really think so and I certainly don't know of any, in that era I don't know of any important mole. Everybody is always looking for the mole all the time.

Q: Well, I'm not thinking so much as a mole as in the overseas context somebody who maybe you were running them and the Soviets were running them.

IMBREY: Oh, sure. That certainly occurred. Oh yes. You're dealing with penal people. They get money from both sides, yes.

Q: You did this until '56?

IMBREY: In '56 I was relieved from that post, thank God, and sent to Addis Ababa.

Q: And you were in Addis Ababa from when to when?

IMBREY: '56 through '58.

Q: What was the situation in Ethiopia at the time?

IMBREY: Life was never easy. The emperor was fully in charge. We liked him and in our terms in our country he was pretty good. The revenue that he got from the people was under his care when almost 90 percent were educated and so we had no quarrel with the emperor except the fact that he was always asking for more money and airplanes. Joe Simonson was the ambassador and was made ambassador because Eisenhower was under the impression that Ethiopia was a theocracy and that he should send a reverend. Simonson was a minister and he opened every meeting in the embassy "In the name of Jesus Christ, the elder brother of the human race, let not the emperor ask me again for a constitution airplane." But, it was a constellation airplane. He wanted desperately a constellation airplane.

Q: Oh, yes, beautiful planes.

IMBREY: Oh, I loved them. But, at any rate, it was a relatively calm and peaceful country. There were always sideline attempts by the military to get an advantage. Only one important one and that occurred after I left.

Q: What about Eritrea at that time?

IMBREY: That was a thorny issue and the reason for that was in 1954 the United Nations in their wisdom or the wisdom of four delegates that they sent to map out the situation decided that the Eritrea issue should be under the Ethiopians for military and foreign affairs but otherwise have a certain amount of freedom. This never worked as far as the Ethiopians were concerned.

Q: Well, while you were there was Eritrea technically in a different status?

IMBREY: Yes, it was a province, but it was under its own leadership. It was a self-rule.

Q: Did we have Kagnaw Station at the time?

IMBREY: Yes, indeed we had Kagnaw Station and we also had a camp there that contained enough beds, bedding and equipment to house all the people who might eventually be driven out of the Middle East in the event of a serious conflict. I forget the name of that camp, but I visited it a number of times.

Q: It was all part of the evacuation system. During this time you were there I was in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia and that was kind of where our safe haven was.

IMBREY: Oh, you were. But then if you were air lifted out of Tehran then you were gone to Eritrea to this particular camp.

Q: Yes. How about relations with Somalia at the time?

IMBREY: At the time there were no relations. They got along and I don't think there was any difficulty between the two countries to speak of .

Q: They weren't having a war over the Ogaden?

IMBREY: No, no, they weren't having a war. What was happening there all the time was tribal movements and disturbances at just about every time.

Q: Well, there are nomads going back and forth across that Ogaden Desert. Were you involved in the long-term question of who was going to succeed Haile Selassie?

IMBREY: No, that was pretty well taken care of. He had two sons who were eligible. One of them was killed in an automobile crash while we were there. Then the crown prince was the obvious selection to be the ruler. We got along with the crown prince just fine.

Q: So, were we messing around there?

IMBREY: Oh, yes, we had operations, but there again they were against the Russians, against their acolytes. We had the first really important telephone operation. This was before that great thing in the tunnel in Berlin. We had a very big operation, as a matter of fact, we had bugs on the Soviets, Czechs, Egyptians and I think a Bulgarian came in. I can't feel that it was a high priority. In the Embassy there was a wing which was known by the locals as the CIA wing. In the basement we had many tape recorders and a number of people spent the entire day translating from the various take on these things. We had a house rather far out in which the tape recorders were running night and day causing a great deal of problems for us because we have to explain the high bill for electricity, which we did by getting somebody in the telephone company to ignore it. But then the problem was the heat that was generated by these things and we had to go out and buy more fans all the time. The fans didn't work, the electricity didn't work and everything didn't work as you can imagine.

Then another thing, we had a central place where the telephone lines were connected to our apparatus. This was about four feet underground and we built in the house of a former agent, we built a garage around it to make it appear as if it were a garage and then we buried this stuff. Well, about every four or five months they would decide to extend the telephone lines which would mean we'd have to go there, unbury the lines, put them near the surface so that they would find them, but they wouldn't find our bugs and to do that you have to get through Ethiopian mud which sticks like a [word indistinct]. It was a six-hour job getting this stuff to the surface and then getting it back in until we all hated it, but it was a successful operation, except that the people never said anything much over the phone.

Q: Looking at this, were the Soviets very successful in Ethiopia?

IMBREY: No, no, they didn't have much success. They made friends and I don't think they convinced anybody. There was no communist party.

Q: Later in the '70s you had Haile Selassie overthrown and the Mengistu government came in they were talking Marxist, but I think they were sort of home grown, weren't they? They weren't Soviet agents particularly.

IMBREY: The Soviets were playing their own game and the Soviet game at that time was to get to the Red Sea. Now they had been to Somalia, which is on the Indian Ocean. All of a sudden they drop Somalia totally and made friends with the Ethiopians. People, most journalists, will tell you that's when the Americans moved in on the Somalis to take up the slack with the departure of the Russians. That was totally untrue. We never got into Somalia because the president, despite the fact the Russians deserted, was still communist.

Q: Was it Siad Barre?

IMBREY: Yes, Siad Barre. Siad Barre said go to Valista [as heard], communists didn't want anything to do with the Americans and it was only years later that we had somewhat of an arrangement with his intelligence organization. But it didn't make any difference; Somalia was such a backwater that we were not about to spend lots of money doing anything with it.

Q: Well, my understanding was our foreign policy was almost revolved around Kagnew Station and keeping Kagnew Station?

IMBREY: Yes, and then when that became a liability they moved it to Liberia, God bless them.

Q: In '58 what was your rank, title?

IMBREY: Let's see I was a GS-15 at the time.

Q: What were you calling yourself?

IMBREY: Attaché½ at the Embassy. Attaché½ of what? You know we had this big problem between the two brothers, between the two Dulleses. That lasted after both had departed. They did not want us confused with the Foreign Service and so we were always registered as FSR, where everybody looked down the list and spotted us right away.

Q: Then in '58 where did you go?

IMBREY: They had a new plan. Africa was emerging. As of '58 I think there were four independent African countries, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. In their brief year or two after that, and we saw this all coming, there was independence for all of the African regions and we knew we had to get in there before the Soviets. So, they told us to go outside the agency, develop a business, and work at the United Nations in getting sources there and see what we could do. Well, I started a public relations office in New York a couple of blocks from the United Nations and spent most of my time at the UN visiting Africans and encouraging them.

Q: This was from when to when?

IMBREY: '58 to '63, but in '60 the whole thing changed because they sent me out. I guess it was in April and May of 1960 I was sent to Leopoldville to help out with the station, developing sources for the oncoming independence of the Congo and I did all sorts of jobs along with the chief of station and a couple of other guys. One of my people was Al Canharogey, who was to play a larger part with the Baluba element, and Cyrille Adoula who became the prime minister, later and a number of other people, passing money most of the time.

Q: I would think it would be very hard to sort of identify because the Belgians really hadn't done much to develop a political class, had they?

IMBREY: They didn't, but the White Fathers had graduated at least maybe 480 more licentiates.

Q: High school graduates?

IMBREY: No, better than that. That's why I was hesitating. There were sharp young men and we were dealing with as many of those as we could. A year later, you may recall a sequence of events that happened in the Congo. After Lumumba was killed, the government became a government of commissars. There were twelve commissars who were under the aegis of a chief commissar, who was Adoula, and all the commissars were young men who had some university experience or at least some experience under the White Fathers. So, they were a pretty classy set. They could write, they could do a lot of things. So, we're dealing with all of these people and passing out a lot of pittances. It wasn't a lot of money. We were passing out money to enable them to form their political cadres and get around the country and talk. Now getting around the country in those days was not terribly difficult because the Belgians had made an infrastructure that was unbelievable between the river traffic and the road traffic of at least 50,000 miles of paved roads.

Q: You were doing from '59 to?

IMBREY: From '59 to '60, and then shortly after independence I went home.

Q: Came back to New York?

IMBREY: Came back to New York. There was a fight between President Kasavubu and Lumumba. Lumumba was prime minister, Kasavubu the president. Each one could seek a delegation at the United Nations, but there could only be one delegation; they both had the right to seek it. Now, we figured that if Kasavubu seated his delegation at the United Nations it would be a pro-American one and if Lumumba seated his, God knows what it would be. So, Ambassador Timberlake, who is very good friend of mine, Clare Timberlake had been the best man at my wedding in Bombay and we were old, old friends. He knew that I had this public relations office and he asked if I would take on the job of taking on Kasavubu, which I would get paid for by my organization and the expenses would be met. So, I agreed to do that and they sent over Kasavubu and with a little bit of engineering we got Kasavubu into the United Nations and seated his delegation even though Lumumba was there trying to make a big pitch for his organization.

Q: How do you work this sort of thing?

IMBREY: Well, we knew the people in the delegations and we had on our side Morocco and a number of heavy hitters, France, England. It just was a matter of explanation getting their support for the Congo delegation under Kasavubu and we heralded non-communist delegations and at any rate we got him in. Then Kasavubu went home. I was named public relations counselor through the government of the Congo. A very nice title you see. So, they began calling on me, they said, "Well, we're having trouble in Zambia, why don't you go there and tell them what it's all about. We're having trouble in West Africa." Well, I went to every country in Africa, explaining what the Congo was up to and that took at least two or three years out of my life. I was all over the place.

Q: Oh, boy. Well, this was a particularly difficult period because Lumumba was killed; you had the break away with Katanga. Were you there during the Simbas?

IMBREY: In and out.

Q: It was really chaotic, wasn't it?

IMBREY: Oh, it was terrible. I learned one thing. Don't wear a wristwatch. Anytime a soldier saw you with a wristwatch, he would say, "Is that your wristwatch?" and you'd better say, "No, I think it's yours." An officer got hit over the head.

Q: How did you deal with these people? Was it completely denial?

IMBREY: No, no, it wasn't at all because they had their own interests at heart and they had so much money in that place at the time. Not only the Belgians, the various going concerns. When you have the huge mining industry that is there, money is tumbling in every direction and so all these people were playing for the big money. Now the Congo had diamonds, copper, uranium, even the river traffic that carries the boats, everything produced money.

So, also the infrastructure the Belgians had devised. I can only explain it this way. They had to have a work force for Katanga to exploit the mines there. This was back around the 1920s and they found that there was only one group they could depend on to pick up something off the ground and not drop it because the Africans had very little prehensile training as children. They don't have toys, but there was one group, the Baluba. The Balubas are in the mid-section of the country. They imported all of the Baluba and made them the Balubas of the Katanga. That started a number of problems, but they also built houses for all of these people, lovely beautiful houses with water every other house. The women could go to the spigot and fill a bucket. Then they needed coal for the mines; they built the colliery, which produced coal. They need pharmaceuticals; they built their own pharmaceuticals. All of these are money producers. So, they weren't looking for us for their small change, they were looking for the big stuff, the president of a colliery.

Q: Were you sort of working on the same side with the Belgians or did they have their own agenda?

IMBREY: We certainly knew a number of the Belgians and cooperated with them although our programs were different.

Q: Did you get involved at all with the Lumumba business?

IMBREY: No, the only thing I can tell you is they sent out this shellfish compound to chief of station Larry Devlin and he sent it back with an angry note saying, "Don't you know the Belgians are going to kill him, what do you want us to do?" We kept totally out of that one. Then Lumumba really put himself in terrible trouble when he gave a rise of one rank to everybody in the army and then found he couldn't pay the new prices. Then the army rebelled; they put him in an airplane, took him south and they pulled him out of the airplane on the driveway, brought him up to the chief of the Lunda tribe and in Munongo's office and I guess they shot him there or it may not have been there. In Munongo's office they began asking him a couple of questions. Well, this was according to his answers. Munongo took a bayonet and put it right into Lumumba's chest and Captain Gatt, a Belgian, was right there and he fired a bullet in the back of Lumumba's head to put him out of his misery and that was how it happened, but no Americans were involved.

Q: How about Mobutu? Was he a figure while you were there?

IMBREY: No. That was about '62 or '63. I was in and out of the Congo in various countries, but I wasn't involved with the Embassy at all or with our station.

Q: Were you again an attaché or you were just a public relations person?

IMBREY: Public relations handler with an office in New York and tired feet in Africa.

Q: Were you finding other surrounding African countries sort of looking upon the dismemberment of the Congo or not, hoping to get something from it?

IMBREY: No, they didn't have a care for the Congo; they had their own troubles. Let's see I was in Guinea, Mali, and Ivory Coast, well all of them in French West Africa.

Q: How about the Congo Brazzaville, was that sort of out of bounds?

IMBREY: No, they were having their own revolution there and not terribly much to be done. You have to understand the situation. They had people up in Fort Rousset which is in the middle of the country where different tribes are the ones along the Congo River and the Fort Rousset people eventually did take over.

Q: Was the Embassy going in one direction and the station going in another?

IMBREY: Oh, no, the station and the Embassy were very close. In Brazzaville we didn't have a representative. Al Lukens was the chief there and he reported I guess.

Q: What about the Tshombe and the Katanga situation. What were our concerns?

IMBREY: Our concerns were that the country should not be divided into two different countries, which was what Tshombe really wanted. He wanted separatism for Katanga and we regarded that as a misery for the entire country, for they were so dependent on the mining revenues from Katanga, and so the fight really was against separation. We supported the central government. The central government was then run by Adoula and was very adamant against Tshombe. Lumumba had already disappeared from the scene and then Kasavubu was never a terribly important character, just wishy, washy. A chap we followed was named Josef Laho [as heard] who I think was demented. It was very hard for us to find any reliable people. Our principal helpmates were Justin Bomboko with the minister of foreign affairs and the head of the service. Those two really fought to keep the country together.

Q: Were you still playing the UN connection when you went back? Did you go back?

IMBREY: No, and the UN connection in the Congo, remember was under an Indian general. Everybody hated him. I can't think of his name.

Q: When the Indian general came one of the people I have interviewed, Terry McNamara, said they loved him because he didn't take any crap from anybody. His troops were disciplined and the Indians were disciplined troops compared to some of the others. I actually recall some accounts of some Italian troops being captured and eaten.

IMBREY: High in protein.

Q: After dealing with this what were you doing? You were just sort of in a hotel and working on the Congo?

IMBREY: You mean in America?

Q: When you were in the Congo.

IMBREY: Yes, I was in hotels and dealing with the people the best we could and passing out money.

Q: I would think the agency would have a real problem in handing out money because they can always say, "Well I got somebody and he wants \$20,000" and actually you've made a deal with \$10,000 or something. I would think handing out money is, you know, is an accountant's nightmare.

IMBREY: We did have the box and I'm very susceptible to the box, the lie detector.

Q: Oh, yes. Oh, I got you.

IMBREY: I'm very susceptible. All I do is think of a time that I [words indistinct] whatever I was thinking.

Q: Oh, absolutely. I would feel the same way. I felt guilty when I was in the air force and they would line us up and say, "Who did this" and I would always have to stop myself from stepping out there even though I hadn't had a thing to do with anything.

IMBREY: Well, I assure you that if I had been careless with the funds I couldn't have gotten away with it. I've been told that there are people who have lied successfully and defeated the lie detector, but I don't think there are many of them.

Q: Did you have anyone else or were you a sole proprietor of this public relations place?

IMBREY: No, I had another young man along with me who was a junior and I still correspond with him occasionally after these many years. He was not gifted. I had languages and so in Somalia I could speak Italian, in French West Africa, I could speak French and that's what I speak in [word indistinct]. So, you know I get along with my colleagues.

Q: You said you were doing that until '63 and then what happened?

IMBREY: Well, they sent me to Paris, where again I was undercover with a news firm. Since then, '63, when a law was enacted which forbade us from using a news organization as a cover. In those days it wasn't forbidden. So worldwide information services was doing commercial public relations all over the world and they got me a post as its representative in Europe, stationed in Paris.

Q: So, what were you doing?

IMBREY: I was handling all the many, many African agents. Now, try to meet an African on the streets; everybody in Africa, white and black, played their own role. But, if a black happens to be passing through Paris one can get at him in a cafe, a movie, wherever you like and nobody thinks anything of it. So, I was handling about ten to fourteen agents regularly from various parts. If anybody had a problem seeing an agent they sent them to Paris and I would debrief them. That was my role.

Q: Paris was sort of the mecca for so many people in Africa anyway.

IMBREY: Oh, yes, all the French West Africans regularly came to Paris anyway.

Q: Did you have any problems with the French? I mean did the French know what you were up to?

IMBREY: They probably did. I guess I can't be too naive about that, but they never bothered me, they never talked to me about it. Incidentally, I had French friends who knew me in Bombay, or even Addis Ababa. They knew I was CIA and they could have easily have told the government and they may have.

Q: I mean, basically, were you sort of under constraints to keep it to Africans?

IMBREY: Not really, I had one very good agent, he was a Frenchman, but he was also very interested in Africa. Let's see, he was the head of a Christian organization that worked with students in French West Africa and I saw him regularly and I contributed to his program. So, nobody raised any problems. He himself was not particularly unhappy about the arrangement.

Q: Well, this was a time when France was going through a period of fairly strong nationalism with De Gaulle.

IMBREY: Right, and that was the time that Guinea said no to De Gaulle, where everybody else said yes. So, we were dealing with all the yes countries and not much to do with Guinea. I did, of course, have agents in Guinea that I was seeing regularly. But the French would have approved of that.

Q: What were we trying to do, just get reports and keep in touch?

IMBREY: Oh, no, again this was all against the Soviets. Most of the agents that had been developed in these various countries were watching what the Soviets were doing in shipping, penetrating the national organizations. This was the era of mass organizations. Do you remember that? The youth, the WFBY, all these mass organizations, and the Russians were playing a heavy hand developing agents and contacts in those mass organizations.

Q: And we were, too?

IMBREY: We were, too.

Q: At this stage it almost feels like if the FBI hadn't been around the communist party of the United States might have collapsed?

IMBREY: Yes, there was something like that, yes. We didn't have that many. After a while Africa was never a great priority and certainly not at the time of Kissinger. I went to a lecture by Kissinger at the War Department and some young officer asked him a question. He said, "Dr. Kissinger, which is one of the important countries as far as American policy goes?" and he said, "India is important, Pakistan is important", and he went around to France and somebody finally piped up and said, "What about Africa?" and he said, "No, not important."

Q: Did the Soviets have a plan or was this just general mischief making or something?

IMBREY: Sure. They were out to use the mass organizations to get them out on the streets in various countries of the world. Prague was the head of the WFBY for example, and they had a lot of people going to Prague to get the people out in the streets in support of the Soviet policies in Czechoslovakia and you know the Americans went there and ruined it for them at one point.

Q: Our concern in those days was mass movements and that sort of thing. We're not really talking about the terrorists?

IMBREY: No, mass organizations were very important and then Sukarno started the third world operation. What was that called? The nonaligned.

Q: Nasser, and Tito and Sukarno and Nkrumah and the Bandung group.

IMBREY: Which later became the tri-apartheid conference under Castro.

Q: Were the Soviets putting considerable amount of money and effort into Africa?

IMBREY: Gee, I can't say.

Q: Well, did you have the feeling that [words indistinct]?

IMBREY: Dingaparsamonia [as heard] is always there and I can't believe they could have put too much into it. No.

Q: Did you get any feel for your counterparts the Soviet people running these checks? How did you feel about them?

IMBREY: Suave, talented group, could get along anywhere. They were just fine and nice people. Not at all devious.

Q: Did you ever sort, not really let your hair down, but sit around in a bar and chat with them for a while?

IMBREY: With one the name of Devorkian in Addis Ababa who was the chief of the KGB establishment there. He was a very nice, well-spoken man, good English. We spoke of niceties, not politics.

Q: You were in Paris from '63 until when?

IMBREY: Until '66.

Q: You were married?

IMBREY: Yes, yes. I was married in Bombay in '48, '49.

Q: So, this must have been a kind of delight for both of you, living in Paris.

IMBREY: My wife did not mind a bit. She had a background in France. She speaks good French, so she enjoyed it.

Q: In '66 what did they do to you?

IMBREY: Oh, I'm trying to think of the reason why. I moved to Belgium. Let's see, what had happened. Oh, yes. One of my agents was caught in Geneva by the Swiss police and they had a book, a memorandum he had been keeping which had my name in it and a couple of other notations and so the chief of station in Geneva wrote to headquarters, saying that I had been compromised, that the French would know of my goings on immediately. This was an agent the French were interested in. So, they suggested that I get out of there before the French threw me out. So, the agency said, "Okay" and we moved to Brussels. I was very annoyed because I didn't think really that that would happen.

Q: No, as you say they probably had a pretty good fix on you.

IMBREY: Oh, yes. I don't know what happened, but anyway I went to Brussels. Picked up the family, got this nice place there and just told all the agents from now on meet me in Brussels.

Q: So, you were there from '66 to when?

IMBREY: '67.

Q: You were essentially doing the same thing?

IMBREY: Yes, doing exactly the same thing and then in '67 something similar happened and I don't remember what it was, but anyway we had to move to Rome.

Q: So, you were in Rome from '67 until?

IMBREY: '67 to '68. Now, when I moved to Rome, I did the same thing with meeting these guys in Rome instead of Paris or Brussels, and in Rome I fixed myself up nicely. I got a nice office, represented my firm and had a good backup story of why my firm had to move me, which was logical.

Q: This was still worldwide ... ?

IMBREY: Worldwide information services, yes. The cover held fine. There were reasons; I can go into if you ever want to. The chief of station in Rome was very exercised. He said, "You moved into Rome and I was not told anything about it or gave my permission for it." Then he said, "You're using up too much of my station's time." I had something like ten or twelve, maybe more, agents. Each time they would come they would give me a report. In those days I would take the report, digest it, type out my own report and hand it to a contact in the Embassy. He would then bring it back and they had to retype it onto official stationery or prepare it for a cable and that was taking up a lot of his time. Here I was calling the guy every fifteen minutes; come on over I got something for you. So, the chief of station was very annoyed. He said, "I didn't mind when you came in here, but when I see the amount of work it's causing us I don't have the people to handle it, so get the hell out of here." So, I was sent home.

Q: They didn't build up your staff; could they have built up your staff?

IMBREY: Well, you know all those things take a good deal of planning and money and decision and also good communications. My boss was Archie Roosevelt who was a very nice guy, but on the other hand, not too quick to act. So, we came home and I stayed home until my next post.

Q: When you came home what were you doing?

IMBREY: That's where we turn off the tape recorder.

Q: All right, well then, we'll just skip over that. When did you take off again where we can talk?

IMBREY: Let's see. I was sent back to Rome in '72. Turn it off for a while and I'll tell you about it.

Q: What should we talk about, the elections in Italy? You were in Rome from '72 to?

IMBREY: '72 to '76.

Q: It's been in the papers that the Christian Democrats were gaining an awful lot, I mean really since '48 anyway, the big election. So, who was going to spend more money, the Soviets or the Americans? What were you up to?

IMBREY: Well, remember, let's see around '50 I think it was when this great thing that they had, a program where they had all the Americans of Italian ancestry writing to their relatives in Italy to vote Christian Democrat. That was one of the great successful ploys of all time. At any rate, we supported the Christian Democrats for years and the money was not ill spent. It didn't go into peoples' pockets. It went into across the roads, and banners and parades and all sorts of things, but it was highly successful. We kept the communists down to about 37% or 38% of the vote and the Christian Democrats always won. So, here's '72 and there are new problems on all sides and the communists are making good headway and we got in there with a lot of money. I think we had a couple of million dollars for this.

Then came our fight with Graham Martin, who was the ambassador at the time. Martin said, "That money is for me and I will spend it any way I like." Our chief of station said, "No, the CIA is supposed to deal out the money" and Graham said, "No, you deal it out and I'll tell you who to give it to." Well, he chose a man named Lorenzo Decarorechi, who was the head of the secret police in Rome. He and Lorenzo were great friends and Lorenzo was a great friend of ours, too, but was the wrong guy to give the money to in our estimation and we were very unhappy. At any rate we used the money the way Graham Martin wanted us to use it and the result was stupendous. For the first time I think we got the communist vote down by about 3% and the Christian Democrats ahead by about 4% and this was a tremendous victory. It took a great deal of running around and doing all sorts of peculiar work of the kind that I'd been doing before, undermining and having fun and games, but we did it. Then after that I was developing agents in newspapers and other literary elements writing came out a number of types of operations that I had done in the past in this case all to undermine the Soviet position in Italy. In Africa as well. I was again with my Africans.

Q: You were up against a change. You were beginning to get Euro-communism, and certainly presentable in public compared to some of the thugs that had risen out of the regular communist parties. Were you able to do much with the communists?

IMBREY: Oh, yes, we had agents in the trade unions, which were very important in Italy. The Catholic union we supported. They got plenty of help from the Catholics, but from other countries. We had our people in there. Youth organizations and at the time that they were developing the super communist parties, the terrorist gangs.

Q: The red brigades, primolina, some of those.

IMBREY: There were a couple of others that were publishing every day. We did what we could to discourage them.

Q: But they were much harder to penetrate, weren't they, or not?

IMBREY: No, no, we had sufficient penetration of them and we had a battalion of people who really could do that sort of thing very easily. After all if you tell the trade unions what you want them to do they have somebody who will do it and we did have people high up in the trade unions who could do practically anything. I think there were at least five principal labor union organizations in Italy on whom we could count.

Q: I can't remember all the alphabet soup of them. Was this in cooperation with the Italian authorities or did we do our thing and they did their thing?

IMBREY: I imagine the Italians had a pretty good idea of what was going on. We didn't tell them who our agents were and I imagine they handed us a number of agents, but we never knew whether we could trust what they handed us. As I was saying, Lorenzo Federico, who was the principal friend of Graham Martin eventually tried to lead a coup d'etat. This was a famous one where they got police officers that work in the provinces and they had a march on Rome and the dumb bastards stop for a traffic light for just long enough for the forces of the government to turn them back. At any rate, Lorenzo went to jail, I think, or maybe paid his way out, who knows.

Q: Were you involved with this organization, under the Coladeus thing? From what I understand we had had this in some places, this sort of a stay-behind. If the Soviet army took over Italy we had arms and people ready to run guerrilla movements and all of that.

IMBREY: I have heard of that, but I have never had any experience with it.

Q: How about the Vatican, did you get involved with the Vatican?

IMBREY: Let's see. I had one source who worked for the newspaper, Osservatore Romano. That was all. He was an astute observer and so I got a lot of hints from him, which was not what you would call a penetration of the Vatican.

Q: Did you find yourself concentrating pretty much in the north of Italy? What about the Mezzogiorno?

IMBREY: No, we did very little in Mezzogiorno. As a matter of fact, we knew Johnny Agnelli well.

Q: Of course, he's up in Torino.

IMBREY: Let me tell you, we did not like him for what he did to us. Son of a bitch. Let's see, around 1973 or '74 there came out this publication, Who is the CIA. Do you remember that one? It was a Czech publication.

Q: Oh, yes, Who's Who in the CIA.

IMBREY: There were two of them. There was the one that was provided by the East Germans; the Cubans were actually the ones who got the information. They got it from our defector.

Q: Well, they got some stuff kind of wrong because the publication Who's Who in the CIA, I thumbed through that thing to see who I knew and there I was and I had never been in the CIA.

IMBREY: No, they had Eisenhower in that one. This was the second one, the one after that. I know that the information came from Agee and he knew who these guys were and somebody like Eisenhower, he said forget it. So, they had the right guys. The thing came out all over Italy and all of a sudden La Stampa published all the names of the guys who were in Italy, giving their home addresses, which was a little bit more than needed. We were furious about that and so one of our friends knew a lot of society people in New York with whom Agnelli hung out, so he told them the story. Agnelli went to New York and nobody would see him and so he got the message, but after that we were all taking different routes to work.

Q: Well, you were doing this until '76?

IMBREY: Yes.

Q: Where did you go after '76?

IMBREY: After '76 I went back to headquarters for two years and then retired.

Q: Well, then maybe we can finish it off.

IMBREY: Yes, very likely because in the two years there I was known really for covert operations and the type of operations people didn't know what the hell they were talking about. They said, "This is fun and games and cushy work and we don't do that sort of thing anymore. We're just like the chap who said gentlemen don't spy on other gentlemen. We don't stoop to doing these things." I really had very little to do for those two years. We tried a number of operations and they were shot down by the State Department most of the time. There's another thing that happened. In order to get a covert operation off, the covert operation got designed by the CIA upon the basis of a report by the State Department that says "this type of activity is in the interest of the United States, do something."

The CIA devises the operation and then goes to the National Security Council, which in all its wisdom decides whether this is not only feasible but whether it works for our advantage. If they think it is feasible and like it, they send a finding to the President that it is in the interest of the United States. The President signs the finding. That enables the cash to come for the operation. Without that there's no operation. So, we would work very hard to devise the operation, get the cash in and then read about the operation in the papers the next day, the most secret stuff the government was doing.

Q: This was the Carter administration? Where did you feel it was coming from?

IMBREY: This was sort of endemic, Carter and after. I could give you another couple of examples in the '80s. I'm thinking around 1980 we decided on two operations, one to undermine the Iranians, and the second was to have a radio beaming information to arouse the Iranian people. Both findings were accepted. I did a good deal more work in this particular operation.

Q: I think this is probably a good place to stop.

End of interview