

WILLIAM B. WHITMAN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is July 16, 2004. This is an interview with William B. Whitman. What does the B stand for?

WHITMAN: Ballin.

Q: B-A-L-L-I-N. Where does that come from?

WHITMAN: That's a family name from Germany

Q: From Germany. Well, let's start this way. Firstly, where were you born Bill?

WHITMAN: I was born in Orange, New Jersey November 28, 1935.

Q: On your father's side, where do they come from?

WHITMAN: My father's side came from Germany, they were Jews. My great-grandfather, William Ballin, came to the United States at age 14, arriving in steerage in 1867, and stayed in New York. He was in the rag trade, making handkerchiefs and scarves on lower Broadway.

Q: This is sort of the almost the normal immigrant Jewish story?

WHITMAN: Yes, and he did I guess pretty well at it, they, I've done some genealogical work on him, it's kind of hard now because a lot of the records don't exist, except for public documents like the New York census and the city register. So that's how I knew about his occupation and where he lived and died, but not too many other things.

Q: Do you have any idea where in Germany he came from?

WHITMAN: Yes, it was Oldenburg, in northern Germany. I went there a few years ago to see what it was like.

Q: And so that was your great-grandfather. And so what happened? I mean how did the family come down and move from Ballin to Whitman and all that?

WHITMAN: Well, the name is originally Ballin. My great-grandfather William Ballin lived in New York City and in Brooklyn, where he died. My Ballin grandmother, William's daughter, married Louis Witzhausen in the 1890s. They changed the name to Whitman at some point in the 1930s. Louis Witzhausen, my paternal grandfather, was in the jewelry trade in New York, on Maiden Lane, and they lived in Harlem, on 109th Street, where my father was born in 1902. For some reason—and this is pretty shadowy—my Witzhausen grandparents, later moved to Orange, New Jersey. Both of my parents lived in the Oranges, where they met and married in 1930, and that's where I was born, in Orange.

Q: And your father's trade?

WHITMAN: He was a banker. He was in New York with a now extinct bank called Manufacturer's Trust which he left in 1947 and changed jobs and went to Chicago. Of course I went with him. He worked there for the American National Bank and Trust on La Salle Street. I don't think that bank exists anymore either. He was assistant vice president in the correspondent banking section until he died in 1963.

Q: Now, on your mother's side, where do they come from?

WHITMAN: My mother's side came from essentially the Philadelphia area, but before that they were Irish, Northern Ireland. And, I've done only a little bit of research on that side because the other side has been so much more interesting, but her mother, my mother's mother, my grandmother was the child of a policeman in Philadelphia. My grandfather, the man she later married was from the Ellis family in Haddonfield, New Jersey, across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. After they married they always lived in New Jersey, ending up in South Orange. My grandfather, Bowman Ellis also ended up in the Wall Street area as a rubber trader or broker, at a time when people still grew rubber trees. And that he left, and I'm not sure under what circumstances. They both died in the late 1940s.

Q: Did any of the sort of Jewish traditions stay with your family?

WHITMAN: Absolutely not. It's totally secular and actually I sense there was an avoidance of that, that they either didn't want to be Jews or they wanted to be only Americans. Of course this is something you see in immigrants in this country particularly with Italians who don't speak Italian at home because they want to be Americans after they arrive here.

Q: My mother spoke German before she spoke English, and of course I didn't speak any German at all. German was just a language that was used to talk about Christmas in front of the family, to my great frustration.

WHITMAN: Well, there was, I remember my grandmother actually used German, I think she was raised speaking German too, and they lived at that time in New York City, on the, what is now Harlem. I have vague recollections of her speaking German to my father, and to other people, but not much.

Q: When, did you start going to school in New Jersey before you went to Chicago or.. ?

WHITMAN: I went to school in New Jersey through the fifth grade, then we moved to Chicago and I went to school there for a couple of years, actually to Gale School in Rogers Park on the north side of Chicago. Then we moved to Evanston, where I went to high school and the last year of grade school at Nichols School. Then I went to the University of Colorado for two years then came back to Evanston to go to Northwestern from which I graduated in '57.

Q: The school in New Jersey first, how did you take the school?

WHITMAN: Oh, I was a great student. I was a smart kid, I knew a lot of words. They were thinking about advancing me a grade, they never did because I guess it was against their policy. But basically, I really liked it. I was a great reader and I would hang out in the library a lot; I was a really bookish kid who got straight As.

Q: How about at home? Did you all sit around the table and talk about world events?

WHITMAN: Not really- my parents or grandparents didn't have much interest in that kind of thing. Of course a lot of this was during World War II, and you of course you talked about that, especially with my Uncle Bowman, my mother's brother off with the Navy in the Pacific. Also none of them liked Roosevelt, so...

Q: Well New Jersey the banker belt there.

WHITMAN: No they really hated Roosevelt they would have liked about 50 more years of Hoover.

[laughter]

There was not much, I have to tell you, intellectual spark around the table. I mean it was sort of day to day stuff, family stuff and maybe that's the way most people live.

Q: Brothers, sisters?

WHITMAN: No.

Q: Then when you got to Chicago how did you find the school there? Was it different than the New Jersey?

WHITMAN: Not really, it was more confusing because I was only in the city of Chicago system for about a year and my parents didn't like it so they sent me to the Evanston schools before we even moved there.

Q: What was the Evanston school? private school?

WHITMAN: No it was a public school, really good, Evanston High, which was at that point one of the top five high schools in the country. The Evanston experience was mainly high school, but I also attended 7th and 8th grades at a public grade school, Nichols, in south Evanston.

Q: In high school, what were your activities?

WHITMAN: I was in amateur radio, things like that, short wave.

Q: Did you build your own?

WHITMAN: I never got good enough to do that. That was my main interest, that and dating and things like that, well I didn't do a lot of dating either I was sort of finding my way I guess.

Q: How about academics? Which ones got to you?

WHITMAN: I was an economics and a geography major in college. In high school I just don't remember what was interesting to me. I have the distinct impression that I didn't really do a lot with the high school curriculum. I got Bs and Cs, nothing outstanding though.

Q: How about reading? What type of books did you enjoy?

WHITMAN: Mainly fiction in those days I think. I also enjoyed reading newspapers, and got interested in foreign affairs to an extent.

Q: Did foreign affairs intrude at all in let's take high school first.

WHITMAN: No, it wasn't really. You have to know Evanston. Evanston was a kind of a Republican white bread suburb of Chicago. Was then, it's much more cosmopolitan now, but then it was a rather kind of confining place. Nobody I knew, would have conversations about serious subjects such as politics or world affairs.

Q: I was born in Chicago but my family lived for a short time in Winnetka. But then we moved to California. It was a Republican hotbed.

WHITMAN: Well there wasn't an awful lot of curiosity there. It was a business mentality and a business set of values.

Q: But you were in high school from '47 on?

WHITMAN: I graduated in '53.

Q: '53 from high school. So the Cold War was going on. Was this much of a subject?

WHITMAN: Well, I think it was all reactive. I think high school kids are more interested in finding out about life and about what motivates them. The Cold War was obviously a very big thing, was topic A in the news and everything else, but I don't remember any Cold War kinds of searching conversations at all.

Q: What sparked you to go to Colorado from Evanston?

WHITMAN: Well, they took me, and...

Q: This is because you said you hadn't really engaged?

WHITMAN: I had Bs and Cs. That's right. I had a decent record but nothing that was going to get me into Dartmouth or someplace like that. So I went to Colorado for two years and then had a pretty good time out there, I must say.

Q: Intellectual pursuits or skiing or girls?

WHITMAN: Oh, some intellectual pursuits, but I started to take some classes that interested me, Latin American History for one, and a few others and I started to get the glimmerings of things. I also took some English classes I liked. But this was a gradual process, and during the two years there, again this wasn't, I mean Boulder to this day is not exactly the Athens of North America and ...

Q: It's fairly isolated too.

WHITMAN: Yes, it was sports driven too. Football games all the time, sororities, fraternities, big social life. Lot of drinking. And, basically it was a good time but at the same time I realized I really wanted to go to someplace where it's serious. So I transferred to Northwestern in '55, graduated from there in '57 and I was taking some pretty good classes at Northwestern, and that's where I took the Foreign Service Exam my junior year.

Q: At Northwestern, what sort of classes were you taking?

WHITMAN: I was in liberal arts as an economics and geography major. Well, the economics today would be unrecognizable because this was before the advent of econometrics and using computers and things like that. And so, what you came out of that with at the undergraduate level was sort of a horseback general impression of economics that was useful to me later in life because you've got a certain familiarity with the way things really work, but certainly nothing of the sense of theoretical economics or constructing models of what we do here at FSI (Foreign Service Institute).

Q: Your basic book was Samuelson?

WHITMAN: Yes, Samuelson was the basic book, and it taught me enough about economics to do okay in the Foreign Service in economic work, but certainly I wouldn't call myself an economist.Q: How did the Foreign Service cross your radar?

WHITMAN: Well, I think part of it because the insularity of where I had been up to that point of my junior year. And, the idea of traveling, the idea of doing diplomatic work, the idea of living in foreign countries, even though I'd never done it. I never left the United States until I went on my first assignment. It had appeal to me. I walked into a fraternity house room one night and a friend of mine had the application to take the exam sitting on his desk, and I said, "Are you going to use this?", he said "Nah, I'm not gonna take it", so I signed it and signed up and took the exam in Chicago in '56 and passed. Big surprise. Not by a lot, but I got about a 72. And then the orals came about maybe six months after that.

Q: Was the exam the two day, or three day?

WHITMAN: One day.

Q: One day. It just changed about that time.

WHITMAN: I don't, I just don't know. I took the written exam and then I took the oral exam also in Chicago.

Q: How did that go?

WHITMAN: I guess it went okay, they passed me.

Q: Do you remember any of the questions, or...?

WHITMAN: I do as a matter of fact. Much later I worked for the Board of Examiners giving the oral exams and I thought about my 1956 exam a lot and unfortunately I don't remember the names of the people who gave it to me I don't think BEX keeps the records back that far, this is almost 40, almost 50 years ago. So, but I remember a couple of the questions, for example if a foreigner asks you to name five famous American artists or five famous American sculptors who would you tell them about? And I really aced that because I had been a stamp collector, that's another one of the interests I had at one point, and there was a series of stamps came up in 1940 called "Famous Americans Series" and they had five famous artists from all disciplines ... and so I just sort of regurgitated Saint Gaudens or John Singer Sargent, or anybody like that, so and that satisfied them. I don't really remember very much about the exam, maybe during subsequent sessions we could talk about it. But they were very nice to me, there were four of them and one of me. I had heard it was really rough and they tried to trip you up with the usual tricks, but I passed.

And then, that was '56, I graduated from Northwestern in '57, but didn't enter the Foreign Service until January of 1960. The reason was the budget, there was no money for hiring new officers, or very many new officers, and I wasn't certainly high on the register. But, between '57 and '60 I guess they were really strapped for funds, so I was really anxious to do it and I went to work in Chicago for Lamson Brothers, a brokerage house, and later for Norge, an appliance firm, with the thought that I would leave at once if the Foreign Service called, which they finally did toward the end of 1959.

Q: How did you find the brokerage business?

WHITMAN: Well, I liked it. The brokerage business was prestigious and everyone in those days was a trainee when you got out of college and I was a trainee, I think I was making probably 400 dollars a month or less actually, and it was alright, I didn't like the firm where I was working, it was really pretty seedy and didn't have any future for me, but it was interesting to me to see how the stock market functioned. Not that I was anywhere near close to an\any kind of decision making or any kind of insights, but it was OK.

Then I went to work for an appliance company called Norge which also has since gone out of business. It was in the Merchandise Mart in Chicago.

Q: They did refrigerators.

WHITMAN: Refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers. And I went to work in the market research department which was essentially a clerk's job. Mainly I didn't care because I was just, as soon as the Foreign Service sent me a letter I was gone.

Q: Were you picking up any language, or did you have a language?

WHITMAN: I had Spanish in high school, and then, that was it.

Q: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to do other than wear striped pants?

WHITMAN: No, I thought it would be, I certainly wanted to try it, I mean I wanted to live overseas, a very prestigious job, it was something that not everybody could do, difficult to enter, an elite, at least was thought of then as that, and so I was pleased, I was happy to do it. But I didn't have any real grounding in foreign affairs. As I later learned when I was into the Board of Examiners thing, people today come to the Foreign Service, young people, my age then, would have come to the Foreign Service knowing quite a bit and many would have been from the Peace Corps-they know very well what a DCM is and what a consular section does, but I had zero idea when I went in.

Q: I have to say, I when I read a couple of Joseph Grew's books and that was about it [laughter]. That was really a different era, you came in, when you came out of Groton you got a job working for an ambassador right away. You came in 1960?

WHITMAN: January of 1960.

Q: What was your class like? Your basic officer course?

WHITMAN: It was really a mixed bag. I don't know, maybe we were in the bottom of the register when they finally got down to us. A lot of people never stuck around. We had some very brilliant people, the people who had far greater intellectual credentials than I had. And we had some not so bright people-we were a mixed bag of social, non-social people. We all got along fine, but those days it was in Arlington Towers in that converted garage they used to run, in the basement. We had a nice class, none of us were on any cookie cutter mold, and that was the way the Foreign Service was to become, they weren't going to have everybody out of Groton any more.

Q: What about the gender mix, the racial mix?

WHITMAN: We had no blacks. And we had very few women. We had maybe two or three, that was it. And the age was getting on toward 30.

Q: This is because of the hiatus.

WHITMAN: Yes, I'm sure. I mean I've never gone back to look at the, I guess I could look at how many people they took in 1959 which was, or '58 which is when I should have gone in, I don't know.

Q: Were you pointed towards anything or..?

WHITMAN: When I came in, I knew zilch. I came in wanting to do a good job. I was really impressed with the Foreign Service, I was impressed with myself for getting into the Foreign Service. My first assignment was announced at that great moment when somebody from personnel comes over and tells you, "You're going to New Guinea" or someplace. So my first assignment was the Argentine desk in ARA and I was the assistant Argentine desk officer for two years.

Q: Where, well during that time, you did it from '60 to '62, how did you feel about that? Were you ready to go overseas? Or were you..?

WHITMAN: Oh, yes, well I was really ready to go overseas that was one of the reasons I entered the Foreign Service; I didn't enter the Foreign Service to go to room 6254 in Foggy Bottom every day [laughter]. So the job was very interesting to me, I saw a lot of people up close in then what was called ARA, and I was sort of impressed with these people, you had assistant secretaries like Tom Mann and Woodward and people like that, and Roy Rubottom who had been ambassador to Argentina at one point.

And then there was a mixed bag of people in ARA then, I mean it wasn't really the high steppers of the 1960s.

Q: Well, let's of course this is the Kennedy era, did you get caught up in the Kennedy...?

WHITMAN: Very much, that was very exciting, really exciting. And it was really an inspirational thing. Dick Goodwin was there too by the way. And everybody was inspired by the Kennedy approach by the president, and it sort of kept the thing humming along. I mean, I was in ARA when we had the Bay of Pigs and that was certainly no fun and so it was sort of... but basically the Kennedy administration was a great inspiration to us. As a matter of fact, the Cuban desk officer who I knew well, he got one night a phone call around six o'clock and he picks up the phone he said, "This is the President. I want you to tell me, I want to ask you some questions about Cuba." And fortunately this guy didn't say yes, and I'm Adolf Hitler or something. But that was the kind of thing it was, and you had the impression that the Foreign Service also was the thing that President Kennedy appreciated very much, and he had personal connections with the Foreign Service officer, he'd not only call desk officers, but one of his closest collaborators was with us in ARA and they were very interested in everything, there was his Alliance for Progress, remember that?

Q: Yes, oh yes very much.

WHITMAN: Peace Corps was getting off the ground.

Q: Oh, the Kennedy thing, telephoning my name being Kennedy and I was in INR at the time, and I would call somebody and they weren't there and it was "Just tell them Kennedy called" and then I'd say, "My name is Kennedy" and there'd be this pause. No it was an exciting time and of course Kennedy came to press conferences at the State Department.

WHITMAN: Yes and I used to go down there and watch it. They would bring him into the basement and then they would go into the special elevators, the ones with the wood thing and up to the auditorium, and he's certainly a hero of mine.

Q: Well, what was the situation in Argentina in 1960 when you got on the desk?

WHITMAN: As usual, confusing. We had the president whose name was Frondizi and we were supporting him strongly as a moderate leftist, but there were all kinds of people in the shadows there in the wings, the generals, the admirals, right wing people, but basically Frondizi was no bomb thrower-he had some very conservative people in his financial ministries. But basically it wasn't very exciting because the administration we got along well with, and we were trying to help each other out, and that was it.

Q: Did, had Peron, in one of his things he had been and had left the scene by that time?

WHITMAN: He was in exile I think, in Spain. And the only exciting thing that happened in the Argentine desk was the Eichmann case. Remember Adolf Eichmann was grabbed off the street in Buenos Aires, and taken to Israel. That happened the very first or second day of my stint on the desk in the summer of 1960 And we had Cuba which was a major concern; basically it was a nice job for a junior officer.

Q: Well, did you, were you able to use this sort of experience at a later time to see how the State Department worked, often the desk officer, the system desk officer, you get a little feel about clearances..

WHITMAN: Oh, you get to see this, I mean you were told this in A-100 but in those days you had to take a cable around and somebody would scratch initials on the bottom, you would stand out in the hallway at seven at night waiting for this clearance to go, then you take the cable down the hall, you take a copy on a sheet. It was very, of course, a junior officer, I did a lot of that, standing around and waiting.

Q: Did you get a feel for ARA, American Republics, being a career field, I mean...

WHITMAN: No, I didn't feel that way. And, so I started shopping around when it got to time to look for an onward assignment. I would have gone to Buenos Aires, in fact if there had been something open it would have been perfect, because I was interested in Argentina, and Buenos Aires was, still is, a very nice place. I was still single then so, for single guys it was terrific. So, I was still thinking with no mentality of a dedicated career professional at all. Just a 27 year old guy.

Q: Some of us came in the Foreign Service, I came in a little before you, in '55, but I had the feel that ARA, you went in there it was sort of like a black hole, you never want to leave, if that was your bag, fine, but if not, keep away from it.

WHITMAN: Well, and also you can't help but draw conclusions. I mean, you would talk to people and you find out where they served. Well they went from Caracas, to Asuncion, to Santo Domingo, it goes on and on and on and they never left. And a lot of them never wanted to leave, and I got the impression that a lot of them liked the perks, they liked the job, they liked the cheap help at home. You could have a terrific lifestyle in those places then, this is before of course, any kind of security consideration. So, I was sort of dimly getting that, and I decided that's not really what I had in mind, although I would have done it I guess, but so then I got an assignment to Italy as consolation.

Q: Where'd you go in Italy?

WHITMAN: Well, I went to Palermo and, this was '62. I took the ship. When I got on that ship, the first stop we made was Lisbon, and that's the first time I'd been out of the United States, and it was thrilling. So then I got back on the ship after a day in Lisbon and went to Palermo. It was a big visa post if you remember in those days.

Q: Yes.

WHITMAN: And we had a very congenial bunch of people. I was a citizenship officer, working for a woman named Mary Chiavarini who you may know.

Q: Yes I know Mary.

WHITMAN: And Mary and I got along quite well, and I was eager, I was doing work, I loved being in Palermo, had a big social life. Well, I shouldn't say big, but an adequate one. And it was Italy, and things were nice.

Q: Yup. I remember, you mentioned the ship, we came over on the ship together, I was a married man. I remember also there were a bunch of Australian, I think they were Australian physical instructresses or things like this, and you were having a ball, and there I was as a married man sort of wallowing [laughter].

WHITMAN: Well, as I said, I was not exactly a serious guy in those days. I remember that ship very well. Dick Martin was on it. Remember Dick? And Mary, and their children. And there was Rick Lawton, who was going to Naples. But then there was another, I thought about this many times, because later I went to Angola and there was an officer who got off at Lisbon who was going down to be Consul General in Luanda and they were very worried that the Portuguese authorities, the Salazar people, when we arrived in Lisbon, would try to take photographs and other things and link him with the administration in Portugal, and then down in Angola the press would print the picture, in effect saying to dissenters, "See here's your guy with our President," We didn't want that image of being associated with Portugal. But anyway, the ship, we got to Palermo, we had a very good group of people in the consulate. People who are my friends to this day. I had dinner with them last night.

Q: You were in Palermo from '62-'64?

WHITMAN: Right

Q: What was Palermo like?

WHITMAN: It was provincial. It was really tumultuous and hot and it was August. confusing in many ways. Just from the moment you set foot on the gangplank, there was just the docks, and it was southern Italian. And I, we had some interesting people. Roz Ridgeway was there, and Harlan Moen and others, and we all got along quite well, we saw each other socially, we had a good time. No one was married. I had a villa out in Mondello, which was a fishing village and beachfront suburb of Palermo, and I was a happy guy.

Q: You were doing what, citizenship?

WHITMAN: Yes, first year. First year I did citizenship work, I would do what they used to call the Nulla Osta, remember that? A lot of times come back from the US to get married in Sicily, and swear they had no other marriages in the US. But we had no way of really checking on that, so we found out later of course, a lot of people had wives in several parts of the world. I was also doing passport and protection work - a lot of protection work, because you had a lot of street crime, tourists would get their pockets picked and passports stolen-things like that.

Q: What was the Mafia..?

WHITMAN: Ohhh... there were shootings right and left, it was a time of rivalry between the young Mafia which was involved in prostitution and drugs, and the old timers who didn't want to get into that stuff, men of honor. There were a lot of very gaudy shootings, killings and assassinations. I'll tell you a story you'll appreciate. One day there was an American woman who came into the Villa Igiea Hotel, best hotel in town, she passes the concierge desk and she's just distraught, tears and everything. The concierge said, "What's the matter?" and she said, "Well, I was just downtown and someone snatched my purse and everything I had was in it. My passport, my traveler's checks, my credit card, I mean everything I have. I don't even think I can pay you when I check out of this hotel." And the concierge said, "Well where were you?" She named the street corner she was at, and he said, "Well what time did this happen?" So she said, "Oh 11 in the morning". He said, "Look, go upstairs, try to pull yourself together, get a rest and I'll see what I can do." About two or three hours later, there's a knock on her door, it's the concierge, "Can I come in?" She said "sure." He has the suitcase with him, and he opens the suitcase on the bed and he says, "Which of these is your purse?" And she points it out and there it is, everything is intact. And of course what he, the hotel had a deal with the Mafia. They knew exactly who was snatching purses on that corner at that hour. So they got, that's an example of what the Mafia could do for you.

Q: Well, did..

WHITMAN: My villa had a garage and a chauffeur's room which I was asked by the owners who, Giacomo, an old man in his seventies, and he lived with his mangy dog. Never bothered me, I'd see him usually drunk. And during that time in Mondello there were a lot of break-ins. Because it was mainly a summer place, there were houses that were unprotected by police during the winter.. But the whole time I was there I never was robbed. And the reason was that I was Giacomo's retirement plan. He had been a former capo Mafia from the town up the coast. And the landlady, to ensure that I didn't get broken into and her house didn't get damaged, hired Giacomo to live in the garage in exchange for protection. And that's the way it was. So no one touched me. Houses right and left being broken into, trucks backing up to haul off the furniture. That's what they did.

Q: Well, what about, who was the Consul General while you were there?

WHITMAN: The first consulate general was a man named Loren Carroll. A very nice man and a former Newsweek bureau chief in Paris, who got a political appointment as Consul General in Palermo, where he lived in sort of seclusion. And you never saw him really, very arm's length guy. Nice guy when you talked to him, but he didn't really want to mingle. Carroll was an intellectual, he didn't want to be bothered with coming and goings of a big consulate like that. His deputy, Joe Weidenmeyer who was essentially as much as he could trying to run the place. And then later, John Ordway who had been head of personnel. When he had presumably had his choice of positions after the personnel job, he decided to go take Palermo, I think he wanted just to- it was his last post, and he wanted to retire. His son is still in the Foreign Service I guess. Those were the two principal officers when I was there.

Q: Back to the Mafia and all, did that, with protection of welfare, not when I was there at my old consulate district of Naples, with Lucky Luciano, but you had these Americans who were Mafia associated, or I guess they were American citizens who went back, I mean all one has to do is see the movie The Godfather...

WHITMAN: Sure, or the Sopranos for that matter.

Q: Did you have Americans who were wandering around doing their Mafia thing?

WHITMAN: You'd hear anecdotal stories. They never checked in with us, and they always made sure their passports were in order and things like that. Maybe they weren't Mafia but there were many Italian Americans who went back to their village with a giant Pontiac to show off with their old friends and relatives about how they had made it big in America. Things like that. We never got any Lucky Lucianos or, Luciano was in Sicily for a while. You never heard from them. And there was very little you could do to deny anybody a visa who had alleged Mafia connections because they never had a conviction. So we get some people there, some people who were allegedly Mafia hit men, one of them who had been identified in a New Yorker article as a participant in the murder of Salvatore Giuliano, and I sent an advisory opinion back, I said, "What do we do about this," and the answer came back, "Got to issue the visa," because he has no arrest record. So we issued the visa.

Q: How about Americans getting into trouble? Did you have Americans get in jail and that sort of thing?

WHITMAN: Not many. Palermo is sort of off the beaten path, we were getting sailors, but the Navy took care of those. The fleet put in fairly often. That was one of my jobs, to do the welcoming conference. And the Navy patrol, the shore patrol, really took care of those. They didn't really ever need much help from us. And then, the only interesting things in maybe an oral history sense was the Bay of Pigs, when they pulled out the missiles from Cuba after the missile crisis of '62. We got a cable one day, instructing consular officers in seaports to check all Russian and Polish registry vessels to see if they have or don't have missiles aboard. Actually, I did one. It was a Yugoslav vessel, and I went aboard, it was right after lunch, and I talked to the captain, and I looked around the deck, and on the deck were strapped former DC Transit streetcars, including the "Silver Sightseer," I had seen these trolleys on the streets of DC a couple years earlier, and here they were in Palermo with their destination boards still marked "Georgetown" or "Union Station" on their way to new routes in the city of Sarajevo. Surreal.

Q: I saw a streetcar going on the streets of Sarajevo with "Cabin John" still on it.

WHITMAN: Yes, and I'm not surprised. Those were the streetcars that were on that vessel in '62. And I'll tell you more when we get to Sarajevo about the streetcars.

Q: Roy Chalk was the head of DC Transit, a figure of some notoriety in DC because he shut down the transport system from time to time.

WHITMAN: He was, I guess, not a very nice man. The streetcars, we all did all types of consular work like that along with the visa mill. I liked it, it was fun.

Q: What were you finding in the visa business in there, I mean I suppose it to have given you an insight into the American Italian community.

WHITMAN: Not really because these were all pure Italians. These were Sicilians out of the villages who were coming, speaking no Italian. They spoke only dialects, you'd have to have an interpreter sometimes. And that's who you were seeing.

Q: Were they potential wives?

WHITMAN: They were mothers, grandmothers, they were sisters, but basically they were all relatives traveling under visa preferences in preferred visa categories. I don't think we had any visa numbers at all for people off the street, for people who didn't have a family connection with somebody in the US. It was interesting in those days- you probably found this true in Naples- our visa applicants all came from about 10 or 12 cities and towns. And other Sicilian towns we never heard from- you never saw anybody from town X. The reason is that in town X, everyone went to Australia or to some other country like Argentina. It all depended on who went first and who set it up and that was it. But we were getting a lot of applicants. I forget how many visas we issued in total, but I issued 25 a day, four days a week, and there were three of us visa officers, so call it 300 a week.

[end side A]

[Side B]

So you can imagine, knowing Sicily and the Mafia, you can imagine what Sicilian politics was like, and it was thoroughly corrupt, and it ended up corrupting the national parties as well.

Q: At that point were there any attempts on the part of the government in Rome to send down special policeman to really clean up the mess?

WHITMAN: Well, yes, they did, there was General DiLorenzo and, yes, the one who was assassinated, but this was years later. They had what they called the Squadra Mobile and I think those were people, those were riot police essentially, but I don't remember any particular efforts. Mussolini had the "Prefect of Steel" who was going to go down and end the Mafia, but he never did, he got co-opted, he just couldn't do anything.

Q: Given the idea of southern Italy in those days, I went as consul general to Naples in '79 and the Pope came almost the day I came there, Pope John Paul, and this was the first time the Pope had gone to Naples since the 1920s. I mean, they just avoided these places.

WHITMAN: Well you have the church high level corruption too, I mean everybody was mixed up in this in the south. And the Cardinal of Palermo has famously said that there is no such thing as the Mafia, this is a creation for the foreign press, the sensational, the left-wing press. So, they weren't in denial, they knew perfectly well what was going on, but they were hand and glove in those days and I was taking an interest because that was where I lived and I was interested in Palermo and Sicily, but that wasn't what I did at work.

Q: Well, where did you, after two years there, wither? Oh, by the way, how did the, you were there during the assassination of President Kennedy. How did that play down there?

WHITMAN: Oh, it was tremendous, you had delegations come to the consulate with flowers, and signing the book, it was really quite an overwhelming experience. I heard about the assassination, I was on the Constitution actually and the shipping line had invited me aboard for drinks and dinner and I was in the bar and somebody said somebody shot Kennedy and so I went to, they told me that the ambassador designated to Switzerland was aboard so I went, I looked him up and, a man named True Davis and he made an announcement over the public system on the boat that the president was shot dead and that they were going to close the bar and things like that. And then of course, as I was leaving a lot of the shore excursion people were coming back and they were getting the word. It was quite shocking. But there was a very big emotional outburst all over the world, but in Palermo which had, still has, very big ties with the United States. One time they wanted to be the 49th state.

Q: I think actually we had a consul there who I think was pushing this, this was in the 1860s or something like that.

WHITMAN: No, it was 1947. This was a Salvatore Giuliano business because he was, there was a separatist movement in Sicily and he was being used by them as a bandit to develop this movement to become the 49th state, totally off the wall, but, and maybe there was a consul general who..

Q: Back in the '60s or something, I think he recognized, well anyway

WHITMAN: Well the predecessor to Loren Carroll was a guy named James Keeley and Keeley was I guess kind of a wild man, a loose cannon, whatever you want to call it.

Q: Well then, ok 1964.

WHITMAN: '64 I took the ship back. And got back to, I was assigned at that point to Bolivia. And I got back, I was on home leave in Chicago, in Evanston and I got a phone call from personnel, a guy named Roger Brewin, who you may remember. Roger called me and said, "Don't move, stay where you are, because there's been a revolution in Bolivia and we don't want to give them an impression of business as usual, so we're not sending anybody down to Bolivia at all right now." So I stayed put. I came back from Palermo in August, and I was getting pretty antsy and in October or November I called back and I said, "What's new, you were going to call me" and he said, "Oh, yes! You get down there right away". He had obviously forgotten all about me. So I went down there, I'm not sure when I arrived exactly, it was December '64. And went to Cochabamba. I flew down there on Panagra, through Lima and then into La Paz, where Josh Brownell the consular officer met me with an oxygen tank because of the altitude. I spent a couple days in the embassy sort of getting my breath so to speak, and I went down to Cochabamba. And there I was for two and a half years.

Q: What was the situation in '64 in Bolivia. You say there had been a revolution. I thought that was sort of standard operating procedure. They had a government a year.

WHITMAN: Yes, they had a government, the government was, the head of state was a man named Paz Estenssoro who was ejected by the military. It was a military coup. And they had a pair of generals shared the co-presidency of Bolivia and the Department didn't like this idea of generals ousting legitimately, well maybe, elected governments. So, that was, we're not doing business as usual we're going to teach you a thing or two, we're not going to send Bill Whitman down to Cochabamba. And I was there doing visa work.

Q: Where does Cochabamba fit into the, what sort of city was it?

WHITMAN: It was nice, it was eternal spring, it was a Shangri-La kind of place, in the Andes 8,500 feet. It never really rained. You could always count on playing tennis, you could always count on getting out in the sun. It was a real sleeper post. It was pretty sleepy too. There wasn't an awful lot to do. I did all the consular work and it was kind of fun. And I was still single, so I was having that kind of fun too. And but, again, this was not exactly a hotbed or focus of American interest. We were holding up a very small consulate there. Two vice counsels and a counsel.

Q: Who was the counsel?

WHITMAN: Counsel was a guy named John McVickar, who was the guy who repatriated Lee Harvey Oswald. You probably already know this story.

Q: Tell me.

WHITMAN: Well apparently, John would talk about it because he didn't particularly think he was guilty of anything, but he was in Moscow doing consulate work and Oswald comes in and wants to renounce his citizenship. And then he's there when he comes back and decides he wants his citizenship back, he wants to be repatriated, so they sent off a cable asking what to do, and I think they were told to give Oswald a passport. So he did, but he was questioned rather closely by the Warren Commission about his role in that, about what the interview was like and whether Oswald seemed programmed. John thought he sounded somewhat that way. Anyway, it was pretty quiet. We both knew that we were just supposed to keep things going. One thing about Cochabamba was it was the home of one of the presidents, Rene Barrientos. So Cochabamba politics was a matter of some interest in his actions and activities, so we would report on that stuff. And McVickar would go out and talk to politicians and things, and I did too. And we traveled a lot, it was a huge consular district.

Q: What sort of district was it? What were they doing?

WHITMAN: I was told it was the size of Western Europe minus Spain. And there was all kinds of places, very exciting in a way. All kinds of outposts, places in the Amazon basin, you had also towns like Santa Cruz which was essentially a Spanish colonial town. You had the capital of Sucre. If you wanted to wander around and see offbeat places, it was the place to be.

Q: Were there any movements going on there that you were watching?

WHITMAN: Well, Che Guevara.

Q: Did that happen during your time?

WHITMAN: Yes, that happened, he was not killed when I was there.

Q: Did you know he was there?

WHITMAN: Yes. We knew.

Q: Was there any feeling about why he was doing his thing?

WHITMAN: It turned out the man was operating on some very bad information. He landed in eastern Bolivia south of Santa Cruz. He apparently went there believing that as soon as he got there and organized his band that the people would rally to him, throw out the government and declare a communist state. Of course the Bolivians couldn't care less about this kind of thing and that never happened. It was a kind of a sad end, because he was sick and he was pursued and we would hear at the consulate that some pharmacy had been broken into in some remote village and because he needed medicine and finally they got him.

Q: Well also I mean, they didn't even speak Spanish where he was.

WHITMAN: Well yes, they spoke Cuban Spanish.

Q: Well I mean the people he was trying to rally.

WHITMAN: Where he was operating they spoke Spanish. It's in the highlands that you found Aymara and Quechua in Cochabamba. But they would understand Spanish.

Q: Do we much about him at that time, Cochabamba?

WHITMAN: Well, he was sort of surprised to find, remember he was thought to be dead. Nobody knew where he was and that was a bombshell, that he had been sighted.

Q: What about drug business, was there anything going on there?

WHITMAN: Well, I was the narcotics officer which meant doing reports from newspapers, about cocaine seizures involving coca, a staple of the Bolivian diet. There were cocaine mills and they would ship stuff out to Brazil. I'm sure there was a lot going on, but we weren't particularly interested in those days.

Q: Did you have coca tea and all that, or.. ?

WHITMAN: No, I didn't. But they do, they chew, it was pretty disgusting, I mean you chew, they make a beer called Chicha by chewing coca leaves, spitting out the fluid, then fermenting it. Then they drink it.

Q: Well that's always delightful. What, how did the rule of the embassy fall upon our consulate in Cochabamba.

WHITMAN: Our ambassador, Douglas Henderson, was a former vice consul in Cochabamba during World War II. The post was set up in Cochabamba to keep an eye on the Germans and particularly their activities in rubber and things like that on their plantations. So Henderson had been down there and he liked Cochabamba a lot and he would come down fairly often. In those days there was a military plane at his service in La Paz, and he'd come down, and, very nice man, really very nice man, and we had a lot of good times together, even though I was extremely junior. But the embassy counselors or the consul general, rarely turned up. People from La Paz would come down on vacation because the altitude was lower and the climate was delightful. So that was about it. The DCM, Bob Hurwitch, came down once or twice. But basically they wanted political intel from us and what Barrientos was up to, if he was in town, and that kind of stuff. For that we dealt mainly with the political section, that was Max Chaplin and Larry Pezzullo. And those were the people we dealt with the most, and it was McVickar who did that mainly.

Q: Just as sort of a sociological note, how was it dating in a place like Bolivia? I would think that you would be up against the chaperones and everything else.

WHITMAN: Oh no, it wasn't that way at all, they were very emancipated, I mean there was none of that, it was much less restricted than Palermo, and then there was a huge Peace Corps contingent there and I married a Peace Corps volunteer, and we're still married, so that was another source of social life.

Q: Well then, well just to pick up, what was the background of your wife?

WHITMAN: Good schools, from Charlotte, North Carolina, doctor's family, decided on the Peace Corps because she got tired of working in New York and went in the Peace Corps training and was assigned to a village near Cochabamba.

Q: How was the Peace Corps there? Were they doing good works and all?

WHITMAN: Yes. For example, my wife was teaching English, and sometimes Spanish because there were mainly only Quechua speakers in her village. She was also sort of helping with latrine stuff, things like lids for latrines. There were a lot of PCVs down there. Some were medical, some were teachers. If you put a stopwatch to them and did a time and motion study or something like that you would probably find out that there was, a lot of slippage, but that wasn't really what counted. We weren't running efficiency studies on Peace Corps volunteers. It was getting out there that was the important thing, and make sure they didn't get into trouble.

Q: What was the feeling in your area, I had, I had the feeling that, from what, up in La Paz and all, that the miners and all were quite leftist and were a problem for us, but...

WHITMAN: It's true, there was violence, and there were strikes, and these were people with really bad lives in the mines. But in the Cochabamba valley you had peasant militias and they were I think much more conservative than the miners, and in fact there used to be scuffles between them. In Cochabamba, the peasant militia came to town a couple of times they, shot all their guns in the air, and essentially took over the main plaza, I of course, that was part of my reporting job, I'd go down and see these things happen and report back.

Q: These were the militias?

WHITMAN: Yes, peasant militia organized for political reasons. And they supported the Barrientos administration.

Q: Then, well after this, in '66 did you leave? Or '67?

WHITMAN: '67. I was offered an assignment in Paraguay and, I should go back to tell you that, when McVickar left, a fellow named Tom Dickson became principal officer, which he was when I left. Tom had been around ARA for a long time. I left Bolivia in '67, I turned down the Paraguay assignment because I didn't want to become one of the ARA guys who was on that circuit forever. I spoke to Ambassador Henderson and he somehow fixed it, I forget how. I told him I'd really like to go to Eastern Europe and he said, "Let me see what I can do" and got in touch with somebody and I was assigned to Serbo-Croatian training in the late summer of '67. So we came back up here. And I took 10 months of Serbo and got out to Belgrade in May, 1968.

Q: How did you find Serbian?

WHITMAN: I liked it. I got a three after the full time, intensive FSI (Foreign Service Institute) course and eventually got up to a four. I like languages, I took Italian before I went to Palermo at FSI and I took Spanish at FSI to get off language probation, and then I took, so three languages in about five years. We had a good, very congenial Serbo class.

Q: How, did you have Jankovic or Popovic?

WHITMAN: Yes, I had Jankovic. And, there were others in there who, I can't remember their names, but Janko was the senior instructor.

Q: What was your, what assignment did you have?

WHITMAN: Commercial Attache.

Q: And you were there from '68 to...?

WHITMAN: '72,-I extended.

Q: Whom did you succeed in Belgrade?

WHITMAN: Russ Prickett.

Q: I was going to say, Russ, I thought...

WHITMAN: Russ was my predecessor. He and I had an overlap of a few, a week or two. He and I went around and got made the rounds. It turned out to be a great job.

Q: It was a good time too.

WHITMAN: Yes, well, things were just opening up there, they'd gone through reforms, and the Yugoslavs wanted joint ventures badly, especially American business and technology, and of course foreign exchange. And there was no, of course there was no US Chamber of Commerce, there were no American banks, it was just me, as a permanent, resident point of reference and source of information. I did a lot of briefings, I did a lot of travel, headed a lot of trade missions. It was a very active job, and it was very visible. We also put on trade fairs; I helped to run a show at the Novi Sad agriculture fair. And I was very busy and I was very happy with that job. It was the first job that I had in the Foreign Service that I thought was really substantive, important.

Q: What was the, who was the ambassador when you were there?

WHITMAN: It was Burke Elbrick. Wonderful man.

Q: A very fine man, yes.

WHITMAN: And he had a DCM named Irv Tobin. Do you remember Irv?

Q: Oh yes, I remember Irv and Elbrick.

WHITMAN: Elbrick's daughter, Valerie, is a close friend of ours to this day. Just spoke to her the other day.

Q: Oh, well give her my regards

WHITMAN: I'll do that. And, so Elbrick was there and he was sort of the ideal for all of us, I mean he was sort of Mr. Diplomacy, he was the kind of guy who you sort of, gee I wish I could be like that someday. He was a very classy guy.

Q: Well he was, he was quite frankly the source of this whole oral history program, well, he used to tell these stories about being a vice consul and getting Americans out of Poland.

WHITMAN: Out of Lisbon too.

Q: Yes, out of Lisbon and all of that, and when I went to his funeral I thought, my God what a terrible loss that we don't have stories of this, and that was the sort of the genesis that started this oral history program, it was having listened to him, I thought...

WHITMAN: Oh the guy was amazing, I mean I know exactly what you mean because he would be sitting there with these old hardened communists under Tito and he would literally have them sitting at his feet. He was the real McCoy and later in this we'll get to the point where he was kidnapped and Valerie was with us, she was back in Yugoslavia. But, this was a very interesting time. I really enjoyed it. When Burke Elbrick was replaced and went to Brazil he was replaced by William Leonhart who brought in his own choice as DCM, Tom Enders.

Q: While we're on this sort of bit could you talk about the Enders/Leonhart chemistry and how that, how you...

WHITMAN: Well, I mean the chemistry, it was to me, I must say, Leonhart was a very strange and difficult guy, maybe I shouldn't say that, and he brought Enders in because Enders was a very prestigious person to have. He was a real boy wonder, 38 years old DAS in EB, a brilliant man. So what happened was sort of two scorpions in a bottle. Tom was obviously a dazzler and Leonhart was a very inside kind of a guy. And I don't know, and then there were a lot of allegations about, the wives didn't get along. Anyhow, it was really a mess, and I was suspected of disloyalty by giving a going away party for Enders. That was not well-received by Leonhart or his cronies. So, of course, Enders came back to Washington and he had I think briefly a rough time of it, but he had so many contacts and so many people knew him and respected him, even though he could be difficult too. But he had landed on his feet in going to Laos. And Leonhart got fired, I guess as a result of this whole mess.

Q: Well how did this reflect on the work in the embassy, and what were you getting, I mean were you all aware of this?

WHITMAN: Yes, at a certain point, especially when they took Enders' car and driver away and cleaned out his office before he left. It was a tense time. Fortunately for us, at least for me, I was busy enough and interested in what was going on around me that I didn't really dwell on this, but of course it was a topic A of conversation in the embassy. I was working for a man named Ray Albright a very nice man. Ray I think, was a Leonhart loyalist, but was very nice to me, and we got along fine. But there was an us and them kind of a feeling for a while there.

Q: What was the political economic situation in '68 when you got to Belgrade?

WHITMAN: Well, you had the economic side, you had the reforms had just taken place, and Yugoslavia was opening to tourism, to foreign investment, doing essentially what the Chinese are trying to do today, have a Western economy with a command state on the political side. So for me there was an awful lot going on and people were very interested in Yugoslavia because politically because it was the so-called non-aligned Third Way, Tito was a leader of the non-aligned movement and we paid a lot of attention to him. Delegations would come, people would fly in to see Tito; Nixon came to court and there was lots of wooing. And very strong interest in what the Yugoslavs thought about the economy, about politics, about everything. Yugoslavia assumed a position of importance way out of proportion with its actual position. But if you look at where it was located, and look at Tito's personal position, it was quite something. It was an exciting time to be in Yugoslavia.

Q: Well, were you, I mean people were, I mean this was the self-management time?

WHITMAN: They did have the self-management experiment, and there was a lot of interest in that way of organizing the economy. I had a lot of contact with people from the Yugoslav enterprises and with people who wanted to do business with them. People would come to me, they wanted to know who to talk to, see, and maybe invest in a Yugoslav firm.

Q: You know, there was a lot of publicity about this and I think we all felt good that this was the Third Way and all that, but were you in the position of saying, well this is all very nice but one, it's not that type of country to really be able to deliver much and it's way overblown?

WHITMAN: I was interested in what I was doing because I thought there was a real sense of purpose to this. And you sort of wished them well, I mean these are people trying to grope their way, or Tito, for his own reasons, trying to grope his way toward more rational society, a more rational way of doing things. And some of it was pretty ludicrous, I mean the Iron Hand was never really out of sight, but Tito was then pretty old, you never knew what was going to happen afterward. Some very attractive younger politicians were standing around, Tito of course had no successor and never chose one, but you had to hope that maybe a sort of a younger group would come in and take this and move it the right direction. And we were very solidly behind Tito as a government.

Q: Well you mentioned you wished them well, I mean it's really insidious when you think about, I think most of us served in Yugoslavia I think, I was there for five years, just the year before you, how almost we were, I don't want to say cooperative, but we became quite strong partisans of whole, I mean this was such an attractive place at the time.

WHITMAN: Yes, well I agree with that, and subsequent events in Yugoslavia make people look with great nostalgia on that period. Because when Tito was there, you didn't have millions of people killed, or raped or whatever. Remember, during the war about 10 years ago, they dressed somebody up with a Tito's Marshal uniform and him out in the streets of Belgrade, people stomped and cheered and threw, and hugged him saying "we missed you" and things like that. Although Tito had plenty of defects, they then looked like the good old days of only 10 years before. Yes, it was superficial in a way because the Croats were just keeping this under wraps and we knew, that was the big issue. Nobody really really knew what would happen, what was going on under the surface.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, wasn't this the time when Tito came down pretty hard on the Croats? Because they were beginning to get overly nationalistic?

WHITMAN: Well, he was right in a way, I mean I was in Croatia right after they became independent and it was nutty and nationalist. Zagreb Radio had a program about the Croat language; every day three new, maybe freshly invented, words that you would learn, so you didn't have to use the Serbian words. I mean, it went on and on and on. I think that's probably eased since then, but it was, they were very nationalistic and obnoxious. And they were very resentful of the Serbs who hogged all the good jobs, ran the state airline, took the money out of the tourist enterprises in Dubrovnik and all up and down the coast and brought money back to Belgrade and then doled it out to themselves. If the Croats were lucky they'd get a small percentage.

Q: Well, were you or members of the embassy talking about this resentment or were you overly aware of this?

WHITMAN: We were aware of some things. I don't think we really got into where we could say definitely. It was clear to us, it was clear to me, the Slovenes had their own thing, and that was so obvious. And Belgrade left them alone basically. The real, the Macedonians, the southern republics, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Serbia basically were on the same wavelength. For example, and events have proved this since, the Macedonian and Montenegrin economies were inextricably tied with that of Serbia. They didn't really have what it took to really go off on their own, and so it was the Croats then, that were really the main issue. And in the history of the former Yugoslavia you found that the Slovenes and the Serbs worked together very well in the interwar Yugoslavia to check the Croats.

Q: How did you find the...

WHITMAN: But to answer your question, I don't think we ever really adequately understood the depth of that.

Q: Well my feeling was, I had heard, I'm sure you did too, about the horrors of World War II, the burning of the Orthodox Church of Glina and all of that, but, sort of OK that was World War II, they're simply not going to kill each other, I mean, something happens. It just comes to my mind, life has gone too far..

WHITMAN: That's exactly that's the first thing.

Q: I mean the horrors that came out of Bosnia, of what the Serbs did, and I identified.. did you find that you kind of identified with the Serbs and found your counterpart or somebody in their consulate general in Zagreb that there was a, I won't say a disconnect, but a certain affinity each to their own area.

WHITMAN: Yes, I always, over seven years in Yugoslavia I found the consulate in Zagreb to be quite pro-Croat. When you live there in a polarized situation, you're talking to Croats all day long and they're telling you certain things in a very delicate way there's a danger of becoming a cheerleader. At the same time in Belgrade we tended to think that Yugoslavia, as then constituted, would go on and on. And we thought, Yugoslavia seemed to have a lot of promise, despite its imperfections. Remember, they were way ahead of everybody else in Eastern Europe in those days. And we thought, I guess, or I thought, no one would be so stupid as to break this up. And then when Tito died remember in 1980, that was the big question, what's going to happen?

Q: Did you find, were you noticing a discrepancy between the way the enterprises, commercial enterprises in Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia, Slovenia, was there a rank order?

WHITMAN: Yes, I mean, clearly so, in Ljubljana you could see that this was a very different almost Austrian situation. I mean they were just a world apart from Serbia. And in those days I think the Slovenes found it useful to go along with the Serbs and maybe the Croats too, but it was always clear to me that this was a very different place. And then Croatia, well what part of Croatia are you talking about? Are you talking about Osijek where you have similarities to say Vojvodina and that kind of thing, or are you talking about the coast where you have a cultural background that's Italian-influenced.

Q: How about, in the trade world, how good an investment was it? In other words, the American people coming in.

WHITMAN: Oh, we were pushing it of course, for a lot of reasons.

Q: But were we pushing it basically because we wished Yugoslav well and it was a stone in the eye of the Soviets or, but what about American business?

WHITMAN: Well they had to make their own decisions. I mean we could take them, we could introduce them to people, talk about the positive feelings we had about Yugoslavia, but in a last analysis, they're not going to act only on what I say, or what the ambassador said or anything like that. There was a lot of high level encouragement, but that was about all you could do. And, joint ventures never really, I don't think we ever had any really important, I think there were some that were sort of exploiting cheap labor or whatever they could use, but basically you wouldn't find the kind of venture came out of that that you would find with a company say in France or Mexico. So it never really caught on, because the Yugoslavs never wanted to really give up majority control. It was 51/49 and the 51 was theirs and you have the old joke, the joint venture meant it was their joint and your venture [laughter] and I think a lot of people said, and then they started, it was all, they were doing it by the seat of their pants. They were saying we can do this so you have majority control, we're structure the board so even though you only have 49% of the financial management, you have 55% control, and that kind of thing. There was a lot of improvisation, and that makes business uneasy to because, well maybe they could change it against me at some point if they want to. So it never really caught on, but there was a major amount of trade increase, but you never got the tourism. People thought of it as going behind the curtain, which we definitely didn't feel. We thought the curtain started in Bulgaria or Hungary, but it was a fascinating time to be there.

Q: What of trade disputes?

WHITMAN: Not really, the only one I remember distinctly was a gambling investment in Montenegro. A syndicate from Vegas came out and bought out, well they got there and they bought into the Milacher, remember Milacher? Milacher was the former royal palace down on the coast, on the mainland there was ...stuck out. They went into a joint venture with somebody in Montenegro to open a casino, which they did, and I went down there about three months later to try to get the mess solved, because their Yugoslav partners had had a dispute and they seized these guys' passports, so they weren't going back to Vegas anytime soon, and I forgot how it came out, but that was the only trade dispute I clearly remember except normal. And we had export controls in those days. That was another thing that took a lot of time. Those were kind of disputes because sometimes we'd have to challenge, we had end use certificates, and we would go around and make sure that piece of equipment was really in Sarajevo and it wasn't on its way to Russia. And of course, you never really knew but you'd have to accept their statement that it was in the military lab in Osijek or something.

Q: What about, you mentioned the streetcars in Sarajevo? You saw them later on?

WHITMAN: No, I'll tell you, I went back after I retired to Sarajevo a couple of times during the war. I stayed in the Holiday Inn, and my window looked right down on the streetcar tracks; the street was called Sniper Alley in those days, but we'll get to that later.

Q: How, quickly back to the sort of the embassy thing. When Enders left, was there, how did, did the embassy almost break down into two camps?

WHITMAN: Well Tom Enders was not always a sympathetic figure, but Leonhart certainly wasn't either among his staff.

Q: He was always too tall, tony and very.. and his wife was

WHITMAN: Tiny. Italian. I'm trying to think about this episode, it was now '70 so it was over 30 years ago. It was sort of a feeling of "well now what." And then right after that, not long, within six months or a year, Leonhart himself got the axe and Malcolm Toon came in, and Leonhart had to get out of town. He left the town the morning that Toon came in, cuz he couldn't figure out how he wanted to get out of there, and they told him not, that Tito was in the United States around that time and they told him not to come. At least that's what I heard in Belgrade. That they got Toon involved with that rather than Leonhart. So Toon came in, I forgot when that was, probably '71.

Q: What did, I mean, how did Leonhart act after Enders left? Was he approachable?

WHITMAN: Sort of. He brought a new DCM in. Dick Johnson.

Q: Yes, Dick and I took Serbian together.

WHITMAN: Yes, I still see them too. In fact we're supposed to go out to their place the Valley in a couple of weeks. I remember Dick telling me that they told him in Washington, don't take any stuff off this guy and we have confidence in you, you do what you want to do. So Dick came, and of course Dick and I hit it off immediately and that was a very different thing, and then Leonhart got fired, and Toon arrived and Dick became Toon's DCM. The Johnsons are still good friends who we see often. And Toon came off as a crusty person, but this was only superficially. I liked him very much.

Q: This is tape two side one of Bill Whitman.

WHITMAN: Anyway, I was the kind of guy who, my contacts with Leonhart were staff meetings, when we did trade missions and other gatherings the ambassador was needed, you know I'd write remarks for him and he'd, you know, give him a script on how to get there and all that stuff, and I'd meet him at the door-that kind of thing. I don't remember having a very close relationship with Leonhart, I don't think he had very close relationships with very many people. And Dick, I don't know, I think that was sort of an edgy relationship. Then Leonhart leaves, Mac Toon came in, that's quite a different story.

Q: What about, you mentioned with Burke Elbrick being kidnapped. How did that play in where you were?

WHITMAN: I was the duty officer and I got a phone call from the ambassador who said, "I've just gotten word that Burke Elbrick had been kidnapped in Brazil," and do you know how to get a hold of Valerie? Valerie at that time was working with a film company on location in Novi Sad, but I don't think I was the one who told Valerie about this, but I did talk to her after that, before she went to Brazil to join her mother.

Q: That was a shock for all of us. I think this is probably, is there anything else we should cover do you think?

WHITMAN: About Belgrade?

Q: Yes.

WHITMAN: No, except to me, it was the first substantive job I had in the Foreign Service after being in the Foreign Service for 12 years. And at that point I got engaged in the career aspect of it. I was then married and I was living a more serious life. And it was a wonderful place to be. As for the Enders/Leonhart thing, I guess FSI (Foreign Service Institute) still uses it as a textbook case of what not to do, and maybe it is. But, basically I thought that was one of the best assignments you could have. I had my own program, I had my own contacts, I had my own budget, I was very busy. And so when I left in '72, I was not at all relieved, I thought it was just a great thing.

Q: We'll just put at the end here in '72 whither?

WHITMAN: In '72 I was assigned back to Washington to EB and to the Office of Fuels and Energy.

Q: So we'll pick it up next time in '72 and EB. And I'll ask you also, did you know Frances Wilson at the time?

WHITMAN: Very well.

Q: Today is the 28th of July, 2004. Bill, you were at EB from when to when?

WHITMAN: Well, I left Belgrade in the summer of '72 hoping to become the Yugoslav desk officer, and that was all set up through Bob Barry at that point. And it fell apart and I'm not sure why, but I wanted to stay with the Yugoslav thing, I saw, it was personally fascinating to me that situation, but something I knew pretty well and I thought I could do a good job on the desk. However the mysteries of personnel unfolded and out of the black hole came an assignment to EB, the Office of Fuels and Energy. Which really was dismaying to me because, first of all I never really considered myself an economist and EB, and I certainly didn't know much about fuels and energy except that, you know I knew where you could buy gasoline, and I never really... well, I went. And I reluctantly went to EB.

Q: I'd just like to get the parameters. You left there when?

WHITMAN: I left Belgrade...

Q: I mean left the Office of Fuels and Energy.

WHITMAN: '75

Q: Okay, if you want to talk about that.

WHITMAN: Well I got there in '72 and it was a small office of about four people. The office director was a fascinating and a brilliant man named Jim Aikens. And Jim was probably one of the two people in the department who knew anything about oil. That's something that was just of not any interest to the State Department except, you know, it was the key to our relationship with Saudi Arabia. But oil was not a problem. And it was cheap. I remember first meeting, I went to an EB in fuels. It was over at the old, the Winder building. With an office, the predecessor office of the Office of Emergency Management. And the meeting was called to try to figure out ways to keep cheap foreign crude out of the United States. And we sat around that table for a couple of hours. And in those days you had to have tickets to allow you to bring in this cheap foreign oil. That was in the fall of '72. So that was a small office and Jim was endlessly entertaining, fun to be with, and terrifically instructional to watch. The other person who knew a lot about oil in those days was Jules Katz. And Jules was the deputy secretary over at that office. His office was just across the hall from us. But anyway we were sort of poking around. I've forgotten exactly what we did, we went to meetings like that. We tracked certain developments in the oil market. We were there when the embargo came.

Q: This was after the Yom Kippur War of October of '73.

WHITMAN: That's right. So we came and we were there during a frantic period. There were four of us to begin with. We were just overwhelmed. Everybody needed to know everything about oil at that point. Kissinger was secretary of state, he never paid any attention to any commodity until the oil embargo came and then I think he really, then everybody got into oil. So we were doing an awful lot of basic memo writing, briefers, constant touch with oil companies, their representatives in Washington. Jim was at the White House a lot because he had unique expertise.

Q: Can you talk a bit about your understanding, the background of Jim Aikens, where he came from, and how did he get this expertise?

WHITMAN: Jim was an Arabist and had spent his whole career in Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia. Knew the people intimately. Knew a lot about it. He was a very close friend of Sheikh Yamani who was the number one in the Saudi oil picture and was actually a minister. I don't know whose place he took, but Yamani was a very big name then, and he was very close to Yamani. He also occupied himself with this question of other producers. He would go down to Ecuador and talk to them about their arrangements. We watched all these kind of deals the oil companies cooked up and of course they had an impact on the bilateral relationship, but didn't at that point, they never had any broader implications for us. So the oil embargo came after the war. We were just frantic and the office doubled in size, almost within a month or two.

Then we divided the office into two sides, producer country affairs and consumer country affairs. We knew so little about oil in those days that when the embargo hit the United States it also cut the Canadians off from oil because it affected the pipeline from Portland, Maine up into eastern Canada. So we got into a lot of stuff about oil, got a lot into synthetic fuels, the tar sands of the Athabasca and of the Orinoco. So we were really going at it, and it was a very fast, it was just a fascinating jump, and again at the center of the stage. These were the days when you lined up at dawn to buy gasoline when you could find it. Lots of diplomacy about oil. Intense White House interest. Enough so that Jim was taken over to the White House and made energy advisor to Erlikin I think it was who was then the domestic czar, and he was in the running to be our oil czar, was passed over and given another, recompense given the ambassadorship to Saudi Arabia which is where he ended up I think in '73 or '74.

Q: Well, how was he as a leader?

WHITMAN: Inspirational I think. He was so good and so smart and so approachable, and he just knew so damn much that he was a natural leader I thought.

Q: In a way, he and Tom Enders seem to be somewhat of a pair of being particularly very smart people.

WHITMAN: And very energetic. And Jim rubbed a lot of people the wrong way because he was dismissive of you if you didn't know what you were talking about. In an interagency sense he was not a popular guy, but he didn't care. It was more important to be right than to be...

Q: How, when you came in during the calm period before you-know-what hit the fan, how were you bringing yourself up to snuff about oil and all?

WHITMAN: Well a lot of it was osmotic, and you just hang around somebody like Aikens and Katz, you learn a lot fast. And in those days it wasn't all that tricky. The posted price of oil was \$2.50 a barrel around then, and nobody paid the posted price. So we were looking in those days, and I'm not sure the background of all this, we were, even though things seemed to be fairly calm in the oil business, we were still thinking about alternate sources outside of the Arab world, and that's why we looked at the Orinoco and at the Canadian tar sands. And we were looking at other things too.

Q: How about..

WHITMAN: Syn fuels. We were talking a lot about that, the tar, also the coal, liquefying coal, gas, we've got a lot of, it never really worked out, I mean there were all kinds of environmental complications to taking them out in the coal and turning it into white powder. Um, there were, they claimed it could be done, the oil companies claimed it could be done as soon as the price of oil hit X amount, otherwise below that point it didn't pay them to go and take the investment. But we never reached that point. Quite obviously. So we preferred to drill in the Arctic reserve than to think about liquefaction.

Q: When the embargo hit, what side [of consumers and producers] what piece of the action did you have?

WHITMAN: I was, I think, a consumer, I just don't remember that very well. At that point when oil got larger, we had a deputy director for consumers. Steve Bosworth came, and Larry Raich came. And Steve was another gifted officer, Steve replaced Jim Aikens.

Q: What were we doing outside of wringing our hands?

WHITMAN: Well Enders was back then and he was the deputy, he was the assistant secretary at that point. And he and Steve Bosworth intellectually, in an intellectual feat, thought up what was then called the IEA (International Energy Agency), and it was the association of consumer countries. And Steve and Tom really built this out of their heads and made it happen. And it was warehoused within the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) in Paris. And it exists today. And we spent a lot of time tending and nursing and writing about that particular organization.

Q: What did it do?

WHITMAN: It provided a way for consumer nations to consult on price developments and to deal as a bloc with what was then OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) which by then was founded. And it was never really a counterweight, but it was a consultive institution. And that's really what OECD does anyway is sort of a talk shop. Um, but they had emergency drills, the IEA for example, there were triggers. At certain levels when the oil market was deprived of a certain amount of barrels, then the nations would, these countries would coordinate conservation methods. And different levels of lack of supply would trigger various steps, national speed limits, this kind of, lots of things that were designed to be automatic. We used to have drills, we used to have simulated emergencies.

Q: You know, in a way, as they were doing this, how was this embargo working because oil is essentially fungible. I mean, it moves around and you put an embargo, but how can you supply country X as a good guy, and keep country Y which is the United States as a bad guy?

WHITMAN: Well you couldn't. Cargoes go to sea and nobody really knows where they'll wind up. You could say, here's a tanker that's going to Japan, but it's really going to stop off at San Diego. Yes you're right oil is fungible but there was still a huge shortfall in gasoline and oil products as you remember from those days of waiting in line. There were also, don't forget this was an Arab oil embargo or boycott, and certainly the producers like Indonesia and others were not obliged to follow it. So there was oil coming in from them openly. Also, Mexico came on stream about then. So, it wasn't a perfect thing, but for money you can get practically anything done, if you want to pay enough for oil.

Q: In your work, what were you mainly doing?

WHITMAN: Mainly I was spending a lot of time dealing with the companies to get information, writing briefing papers and testimony. A lot of my stuff was talking points on oil because this was now the most important issue in the country, it affected everyone. The administration and the secretary of state could not ignore it, they couldn't say, "Well, that's for the economists," which is what they did before. So, there was an awful lot of briefing material and meetings all over town on oil. Around that time the future Department of Energy called the Federal Energy Agency, FEA, was founded and housed across the street in Columbia Plaza. They worked for the White House. Then you had the traditional energy - the Office of Emergency Planning, General Lincoln, and the Interior Department which really wasn't all that important to us. The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) knew an awful lot about energy. To their credit, they built up an excellent staff, and in the early days they would give us a lot of the analysis which we didn't yet have in house.

Q: What about Jules Katz, what sort of role did he play?

WHITMAN: Jules and Jim had sometimes a prickly relationship. Jules was the deputy secretary, he'd get exasperated with Jim, because Jim was essentially a loner in many ways. He knew a lot and he knew he knew a lot. Jules would try to put the brakes on occasionally, and it was that kind of a feeling. But Jules was wonderful, he really knew a lot. He had a lot of finesse in dealing with the bureaucracy. We spent a fair amount of time writing testimony for him. In those days Jules was EB's DAS for commodities so he also knew a hell of a lot about coffee, rubber, and other stuff, and oil is part of that portfolio, but before 1972 he'd spend a lot of time on the coffee trade and on coffee conferences than he would on oil. I thought, even at the time that Jules was kind of a national asset. Certainly he was for the Department.

Q: Did we have the feeling that OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) was the enemy?

WHITMAN: Well you had OPEC and then you had the Arabs. I forgot when the oil embargo ended, but by that time OPEC had been founded. There were a lot of predictions it would fail, because how could you possibly get these disparate countries to pull together? For a while in the early days, OPEC really did what it was supposed to do, but with a lot of cheating going on. There was a lot of oil in the world too. And these were countries that needed the money. Because of corruption they needed oil money to keep paying people off and to keep the boat afloat, so there was every incentive for them to produce as much oil and sell as much oil as they could. You recall in those days there was also the fear that the Arabs were going to buy this country. People would do projections of what the Arabs would do, they would buy London, they would buy all the real estate in New York, people would project out exponential growth in their oil receipts which would show them owning the world in 1990 or something like that. And of course it never happened. They spent it as fast as they got it, wasted it, and they spent it here.

Q: For them there was no place to put it.

WHITMAN: Well the only place you could put money like that is probably New York. And real estate in a country that's stable like this one, maybe the UK (United Kingdom). But there just weren't all that many outlets.

Q: What was the role, as we saw it then, of Iran?

WHITMAN: Well, Iran was the home of our great friend the Shah who, as a non-Arab, didn't participate in the embargo. But we had a very close relationship with the Shah and his oil minister and his coterie. And I think Jim predicted at one point this wasn't going to last, and it didn't.

Q: Did you find the EB bureau, was there good communication with the geographic bureaus, particularly in this case?

WHITMAN: Yes, we did a lot of that. I had a lot of contacts almost every day with NEA, the Middle east bureau and with ARA because of Mexico and Venezuela. We tried to keep in close touch. We were full time on this one subject. We knew a lot and we had a good feel for it and we always did what we could to keep talking to these people. I think it was quite harmonious. And then we had the assistant secretary who was Tom Enders who glommed onto everything with great energy and intellect.

Q: Well really when you're looking at Enders, Katz, and Akins, and Bosworth too, you're talking about an awful lot of brain power and energy.

WHITMAN: And Steve was recruited by Jules to take over when Jim went to the White House and then to Saudi Arabia. There was an interim director named George Bennis who followed Akins but didn't do nearly as well. Then he was replaced by Jules with Steve Bosworth. Steve was much more personable and easygoing than Tom, and more. But he was just as smart and just as energetic, and he and Tom, thanks to their intellectual firepower, dreamed up and put together this consumer's association called the IEA based in Paris.

Q: There was considerable concern that while the United States could handle the price increase, what of the emerging countries in the Third World in Africa and other places where the increase was a terrible blow to their economy.

WHITMAN: Yes, you could certainly make that case in Japan, which totally depended on imported energy. Don't forget, you had African members of OPEC too. Nigeria was supplying us outside the embargo, as was Gabon with its madman president. They would make oil available to their neighbors in the region, even at concessional prices just to keep people from crossing their borders and coming after them and their oil. But yes, it was a tough blow for the Third World.

Q: Then you left in '75. Where'd you go?

WHITMAN: Thanks to our good friend Frances Wilson, during that time in Belgrade I was commercial attaché; I had a very harmonious relationship with the Commerce Department's exhibits people because we did the Novi Sad Fair exhibit and other things in Yugoslavia, including many trade missions. In those days there was a State/Commerce exchange program, and I decided that what I really thought I should do is go to Milan to run the U.S. Trade Center. And it was worked out in personnel, I would be going to Commerce for three years to go to Milan and head up their trade center. So I was assigned there in spring of '75 after working for a while in the Center's back-up office in Commerce.

Q: Then you were in Milan from '75 to '78. What was Milan like?

WHITMAN: It was great. I had an atypical job by Foreign Service standards, but it was a "real world" job. The Center staged six or seven vertically themed exhibits every year of American products. We had our own exhibit hall with a large floor, and it was in one of the buildings on the Milan Fairgrounds, so people were used to coming there to do business. During the major spring fair we'd open our own pavilion doors onto the Fairgrounds to integrate with The Milan Fair's exhibit at the time. For example, if the Milan Fair did a big security equipment show, we would open up our pavilion into their buildings and show American security equipment as the American pavilion in their show.

And there was a lot of planning involved. You had to be very careful when scheduling shows because of conflicts with other Trade Centers and you had to schedule shows three or four years in advance because of the way the business worked. So I got in the habit of thinking far down the road, which is a good habit to have, and something in the normal flow Foreign Service work you don't get to do because two weeks is often the distant future. In this case we're talking two, three, four years, and careful planning. We had to not only plan the dates, but we had to plan the content, we had to do market surveys to make sure the market was good for that kind of product. We had terrific hi-fi and security shows, we also had great computer shows for many years they were the first and largest ones south of the Alps. And it made a lot of money. In fact the Center always turned a good profit, because we charged for our services. We sent money back to Commerce after every show-it was a profitable operation. We had our advertising agency office right in the building with us, and we worked closely with them on ad campaigns and PR. The Center job had results you could measure; it was one of the few jobs a Foreign Service officer could have where you could actually measure how well you were doing by real standards. It wasn't how many memos you wrote to files, it was how many people turned up, and how many dollars in sales and what were your sales figures. And you knew right away whether you had done it right, or shouldn't have done that show or whatever. You were never batted 1,000. It was fun to do and it was real world.

Q: How much was this Italian and how much was this international?

WHITMAN: Mainly Italian. We covered all of Italy from there. We'd invite people from all over, including Switzerland and other neighboring countries.

Q: What about the Italian economy in the '75 to '78 period?

WHITMAN: I don't know, the Italian economy in those days, half of it was submerged, you didn't know all the facts, except in the north we could see that people were doing very well. It's a very regional economy. In Sicily people could be starving, but in Bergamo folks were living high on the hog. Those were also the days of the Red Brigades, and that was what we thought about more than the economy because they were operating in our neighborhood. I was about five blocks from the fairgrounds and from my office. I was very careful about how I moved back and forth between those two places. I think I was under surveillance at least once. There were kneecappings in our neighborhood, once when my daughter was taking the school bus we heard pop, pop, pop down the street and there was somebody getting kneecapped, and then we saw a car going down a side street at top breakneck speed getting away. This was also the time when Aldo Moro was kidnapped and murdered in Rome.

Q: The former prime minister.

WHITMAN: So those were the things we thought about the most, was terrorism. And of course I was kind of a pretty prominent target, as was the consulate. Nevertheless I loved being in Milan, it's an exciting place. Lots of interesting people.

Q: What were the politics of the city of Milan?

WHITMAN: Socialist.

Q: That wasn't the red belt. That was Bologna.

WHITMAN: Yes, but it's a factory town. There were a lot of major communist towns around Milan, it was quite a left wing area. Not quite as radical as Bologna, but pretty red, and there were a lot of fairly rough people there, people who weren't entirely happy with their lot.

Q: Were you up against a lot of the strikes?

WHITMAN: Oh, all the time. We had to factor that into Center plans.

Q: My gathering is the strikes seemed to be more of a nuisance than to have a real, they don't last very long.

WHITMAN: That's true, but it can be really inconvenient if Alitalia goes out for two days. I mean two days isn't a long time, but two days of no flights is a long time. Everybody went on strike at one point or another. There were frequent general strikes too.

Q: Did you find yourself having people come up to you and say, "Look I understand you're putting on a fair, this exhibit, and we want to have a little extra money," or something like that, was this a factor for you?

WHITMAN: You mean for corruption? We dealt mainly with the Italian representatives of American firms. For example if you're doing security equipment or computers you'd have the Honeywell Italia people, or the representatives of IBM or maybe an agent. I don't think we had any kind of rake off or anything like that. Every year, because of the computer show and its popularity, we'd pay off the deficit of the whole trade center program worldwide with that one show.

Q: Was this an annual computer show more or less?

WHITMAN: Yes, I'm sure they don't do it anymore.

Q: At that point it was really just getting known.

WHITMAN: Yes, computers in those days, this was '76, a long time ago in the computer world, almost prehistoric. I wish I'd kept the catalogues we'd printed, pictures of the products, things like that. It would be very instructive to go back and look at that, because you'd think it was Stone Age. I've got probably more computing power on my cell phone right now than there is in an IBM mainframe of that period.

Q: Were there any shows that put out a great hope and they flopped?

WHITMAN: Yes, we did a fashion show once. We also had our standbys like we'd run every year, like "Hi-fi U.S.A", with American stereo gear. That was a whole different world of fanatics, and the Italians would come to the Center and to see and hear Marantz, and all the other big names like Macintosh. That show was just a zoo. The average age of the attendees was probably 20, and they just loved it. Our exhibitors were mainly Italian distributors and agents, not the American firms.

Q: How about equipment for manufacturing, I would think this would be a big thing because Italy really is a manufacturing...

WHITMAN: We did process controls, we did quality controls, we did security equipment, we did computers, what else did we do? Electronics. Every Center had to do five or six shows in a year. And some of ours were just desperation, because we had to meet our show quota, meaning some years we couldn't think of five or six good shows to put on. There were some shows you didn't want to run every year, you wanted to run every two years because there just wasn't that much interest. So we did some flops, mainly because we had this requirement and we'd stretch ourselves pretty thin sometimes.

Q: How about things like farm equipment?

WHITMAN: We never did farm equipment. We did some metal finishing stuff, things like that. We did a little show called Cooking U.S.A., it was during the main fair and it was American foods. So we cooperated with Agriculture to get all kinds of people to do hamburgers, etc. Those were the first days of vegetable burgers, we did some of that. Along with Dairy Queen and other typical American foods, which drew a big crowd.

Q: Were American manufacturers happy with their Italian distributors and all that?

WHITMAN: It was all mixed, some were happy, some were not. Some used the shows to find new distributors. Some of them came to the exhibits and the shows to find distributors to start out with the Italian market. It was a mixed bag. You couldn't really generalize.

Q: How'd you find the hand of the Department of Commerce on what you were doing?

WHITMAN: We had a great deal of autonomy. There were some things that were onerous, like the minimum number of shows requirement which we had to do. There was a lot of back and forth by phone with our desk officer at Commerce, about how the recruiting was going, because they did the recruiting for the shows there. Sometimes we would help out from Milan. Commerce is no model bureaucracy, but I think we did pretty well.

Q: Commerce had a reputation, I guess still does, of being often a dumping ground for political appointees of the upper supervisory levels. I would imagine you'd be dealing pretty much with the professional side.

WHITMAN: We had some of the dumpees too. But I worked with Commerce quite closely in Belgrade too. I probably should have mentioned this. We had the big Boeing versus McDonnell Douglas aircraft sale.

Q: What was that?

WHITMAN: The Yugoslav airline, JAT, decided to get rid of all their Russian prop planes and wanted to enter the modern world by switching to Western jets. So the first tranche of this, the first stage, there were three competitors: Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, and Caravelle. And we were first fighting off the French. It was very political. The French air marshal came down. I think the president of France came to talk about this with Tito and talk about European unity. They were also offering the Yugoslavs concessional prices.

But JAT decided to go American, and then it was McDonnell Douglas versus Boeing which is something we had to be quite careful about. But we would deal with each of them separately of course, and try and not show any favor. But it was quite clear from the start that McDonnell Douglas was really a lot more interested and a lot more flexible. And one of the sticking points came that the Yugoslavs said OK, if we buy your planes, you've gotta buy Yugoslav products. This made it a barter deal. And Boeing said no, they really didn't want to do that. McDonnell Douglas got very inventive. They got the contract by taking Yugoslav canned ham, which they took and sold in their commissary and cafeteria at the factory in Long Beach. And that's why McDonnell Douglas made a huge sale and Boeing didn't. I was intimately involved with both competitors, counseling them, talking, letting them talk to us and we'd talk to them.

Q: What was their plane?

WHITMAN: DC-9. And you know the funny thing, two years ago, I was in Nigeria, I was flying a shuttle flight there between Lagos and Abuja, the capital. And I walked out to the airplane, and there is a DC-9 with the name of the Nigerian airline on the side and "YU-AHP" painted on the tail ". All the signs on the seatbacks and everything are in Serbo-Croatian and English. And the pilot is introduced as Captain Milovic or something like that. And sure enough, this was one of the same planes I helped sell to JAT back in '70,'71. The planes and their crews, because JAT ran out of places to fly to, because there was no more Yugoslavia, went down to Nigeria, and there they were flying this shuttle service back and forth. I saw the pilots two nights later in the hotel and sure enough they were all talking Serbo.

Q: Who was calling the shots as far as what type of exhibits?

WHITMAN: It was sort of a coordinated thing. For example, we would come up with themes that we thought would play well locally. We had the market research done by the PR (public relations) firm or by a private individual. But then you got into trouble because you could not do the same theme in another trade center that year, because you'd be going back to the same American companies to exhibit, and it wouldn't work. They wouldn't probably exhibit at two or three trade centers in any one year. So you had to stagger that. And then it was all the need to use the careful timing as I mentioned earlier. It was like choreographing shows.

Q: Did you find that you were really looking at northern Italy, sort of avoiding Sicily and the Mezzogiorno and all that?

WHITMAN: Oh no, I traveled. They wanted me to go around and talk to people, publicize the center and the show. So I went all over Italy. I went to Sardinia, I went to Palermo a couple of times, Rome because the embassy was there and Commerce did a big show in Rome on water purification. I sent a lot of people down to that show, and I went down myself. I also went to Zurich because we were pushing some shows in Switzerland. Switzerland was only an hour away.

Q: How about the base in Torino, the Agnellis and Fiat. They were sort of the 500 pound gorilla.

WHITMAN: I would call on Fiat occasionally because we would do a show that might have held some interest for them because Fiat made more than cars. For example FIAT produced robots, and all kinds of process control equipment. For shows like that I would go talk to somebody at Fiat, some specialized person to encourage them to attend.

Q: Were the Japanese around? Were they a competitor?

WHITMAN: Yes, I remember the Japanese more from Belgrade because there was a JETRO, Japanese trade organization office. I don't remember them being a big factor in Milan, but they may have been, I don't know.

Don't forget Milan was a very wealthy market, so there was a lot of appeal for foreign countries to come in and do this. And they all had commercial attaches at their consulates. The Canadians have a commercial office, all of the people, rather of one size or another had a commercial office in Milan. But none of them had what we had which was a show floor and an entertainment facility, a bar, and a place on the fairground.

Q: How'd you find you worked with the consul general?

WHITMAN: Not well. The consul general at the time, Partly by serendipity and partly by checking on him myself, I found him going behind my back, trying to get some of my people. I had foreign service officers working for me at the trade center, and he wanted to move a couple of them over to his operation, and he wanted some of my representation money too. There was a big scene after which we never got along.

Q: Who was it?

WHITMAN: Tom Fina.

Q: He was an old Italian hand. He'd been an Italian hand for a long time.

WHITMAN: Definitely too long. Fina was devious-very slippery and difficult to deal with. He definitely needed to work on his ethics. It was just not a good situation. I never had this kind of conflict and personal animosity with any other colleagues in the foreign service.

Q: Were you concerned that Fina, being part of, you might say, the old-line foreign service, might foul you up career wise?

WHITMAN: Yes, I think he tried to every time he wrote my efficiency report. I was of course mindful of that, I also tried to cover my flanks with the embassy who also had a little influence, at arm's length, but wasn't all that interested in the trade center, but I kept the DCM and commercial counselor in Rome informed about what was going on. However their ability to influence things was quite limited.

Q: Did you get at all involved in the, I only had it for a little while but when I was consul general of Naples I never served there before so I wasn't an old Italian hand, but the fascination of the political life that went on in Rome, sort of like a minuet. Nothing changed but the partners changed a little bit.

WHITMAN: This intricate Roman political situation was kind of a miasma and very arcane. Fina tried to follow that and he had his own views about what we ought to do in Italy, and he communicated them directly to Washington without clearing with the embassy, which upset the embassy's front office. Fina's advocating that we allow the communists to enter the government weren't the embassy's views at all. I wasn't the only person Tom had trouble with or made trouble for-he had problems with the embassy as well.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITMAN: The DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) was Bob Beaudry and the ambassador was at first John Volpe and the Richard Gardner. Gardner was Carter's appointee.

Q: Did Volpe pay much attention to what you were doing?

WHITMAN: Not really. I'd met him before in Yugoslavia. He was secretary of transportation. And I got to know him and I got to know one of his top staff pretty well, a guy named Joe Bosco. And another friend of mine from Palermo who went to Harvard Law School, and then went to work for Volpe, so I knew some people on his staff. I had a very agreeable time with him and his wife, who were very nice people. But he didn't pay a lot of attention to the Center. I was careful to call on some of the people who worked for him in Rome, including Tom Trimarco, his executive assistant, who shared my opinion of Fina. I'd go down to Rome about three or four times a year just to touch base and make sure I covered myself a little bit.

Q: How about when Gardner came in?

WHITMAN: Gardner came with I think highly unrealistic expectations, because he had an Italian wife, and he had a long history in Italy because he'd been a lawyer for Italian interests. And after arriving in Rome he got attacked, just like any other U.S. ambassador, and this was a real shock to him. He had gone out of his way to court the press, spoke Italian, and what do you know, the Italian press went after him just like they do every ambassador. He was very upset.

Q: Did it impact on you?

WHITMAN: Not really. Except at the main publishing center of Italy, Mondadori and all these people were located in Milan. I don't think the embassy really took much of an interest in what I was doing. I was having a pretty good time, and I enjoyed what I was doing and it was a challenge. Also, living conditions in Milan were excellent. Very exciting place. We had a lot of friends in the cultural world and also in journalism. The apartment we had was Mussolini's apartment. He was married in our living room in 1922. He was living there with Rachele, his common law wife, but he wanted to conclude the Lateran Pact with the Vatican and thought he should regularize the relationship by marrying in the church, concord. And she was living in our apartment with the children while he was down in Rome being the prime minister. So he came up for Christmas in '22 and decided he had to get right with the church in order to placate the Vatican, so he called his brother and a priest from the neighborhood and he got married in my living room. I had right wing Italians to dinner who would get all emotional, when I told them about where they were and who had lived there. It was a nice apartment and it was a typical Mussolini apartment, the public rooms were grand, with high ceilings and parquet floors. But the rooms where we actually lived, the bedrooms, etc., were small. It was all impression.

Q: Well what happened to you after Milan?

WHITMAN: I went back to Belgrade in '79 as economic counselor. I wanted to go back, because I liked it so much the first time, and so I went back seven years later. And it was just as much fun. More fun in a way actually because I was working directly with Larry Eagleburger who's a fascinating guy.

Q: Who was Larry's DCM?

WHITMAN: Jack Scanlan. We really got along well and I would go with Larry down to the coast and open schools and we'd drink too much and have a good time. More fun than I could tell you. And at the same time he's very inspirational and demanding. But it was great fun to work for him, and I did that for two years.

Q: That was '79 to '81? You'd been away seven years, what was the situation in Yugoslavia?

WHITMAN: The main thing was that Tito died in 1980, on my second tour.

Q: It was a long death.

WHITMAN: He was in a Ljubljana hospital. Tito was in his upper eighties at that point. They were trying to keep everything going, no one wanted to say anything in those days about, suppose he dies? That's what they didn't want to hear, because nobody knew what to do. There was no designated successor. Then they put this sort of Rube Goldberg system of rotating the Yugoslav presidency among the republics. I was doing some of the same things I did before—promoting commercial interests, and industrial diplomacy more than pure economics, but there was still a lot of interest in Yugoslavia. My section of two FSOs (Foreign Service Officers) got out and we got around. But in 1980 Tito died. Eagleburger had prepared well in advance for that, thinking about how he wanted to handle that when it happened, so when Tito really did conk out we moved right into place. Handling the large funeral delegation and contacts with the post-Tito leadership were very much on his mind.

Q: Who came in the delegation?

WHITMAN: A cast of dozens, including Vice President Mondale, the President's mother, Lillian Carter and Secretary of the Treasury William Miller.

Q: How did that go?

WHITMAN: It was OK. One guy in the funeral delegation, had a burgundy sport coat on when they took him and the others to the Skupstina (Parliament) building where they had placed Tito's coffin. These were the last days of the Carter administration. We were busy at that time looking hard at what was going on, including the effect of Tito's demise on the economy, certainly on politics and leadership. When we asked people, what do you see ahead, any new directions, they tried gamely to say, "Well, no change. Tito's gone, but we're going to follow Tito's road," which was patently not going to happen. And they were going to have to sort out who was going to run the joint, how were they going to do this rotating presidency? Of course as you recall the key to Yugoslavia was parceling out jobs in a fair way so all the republics had a piece of the leadership, whether it was the ambassadorship to Washington or the minister of finance. There was a very stylized dance that was done trying to keep things going.

Those were the times in Belgrade when Larry and I would go call on Slobodan Milosevic. He was then the president of the local bank, the "BeoBanka," and one of our best economic contacts. Since he was so knowledgeable, Eagleburger and I would talk to him about financial problems, because the country was piling up big foreign debt, largely due to undisciplined borrowing by the provincial banks. And we talked to him about the fact that New York banks were beginning to wonder about this. They were complaining that there doesn't seem to be any coordination to the borrowing of Yugoslavia. The debt was piling up and what are you going to do about it? We would do projections of how they could or could not service that debt. That's why the embassy saw an awful lot of bankers in '79 and '80 including David Rockefeller.

Q: Well I often wondered do banks get nervous about this, but at a certain point can't they just say, well I don't think we'll take your debt. I would think it would be almost self-regulating at a certain point.

WHITMAN: Well they would do it, they'd just raise the interest rates. For example a bank in Montenegro, they wanted to build a stadium or a sports palace. Well, the official government stance was to permit no more projects like this, but there they were, out of Titograd and in New York looking for money. And the banks had an excuse for them, saying well, how does this square with what your government's done? But there was no discipline in the borrowing process, and I spent a lot of time talking to people about that-how are you going to pay for those airplanes and all those other things you want to do. Then when Tito died that became more pointed even and there was an underlying sense of unease by bankers, because they liked what they thought then was Tito's stability .

Q: I was wondering, how did you feel about his hand on the economy?

WHITMAN: I don't think Tito spent a lot of time thinking about the economy. He was a political guy. He mainly wanted to keep the inter-republican rivalries down. Then there was the army, which was a big unknown to the embassy-we didn't know very much at all about it and had few contacts. So I think the economy was something he had to know about, but I don't think his heart was really in it. But there they were running up a \$20 billion debt and nobody could see how they could service that in a reasonable way. Don't forget, at the same time, this is the time when Poland was doing a lot of borrowing. And the banks tend to loan the money because that's what they're in business to do. Also if they turn them down, the Yugoslavs would simply say "we're not going to use you anymore, we have real friends in Manny Hanny".

Q: What about the Yugoslav system of worker self- management? How was that working?

WHITMAN: There was an awful lot of fiction connected with this. You'd find companies that were doing well, but you could almost bet that if they were doing well they weren't polling the workers every time they made a management decision. They had strong managers who would inform people, and often the workers had built up confidence in these people as managers. They'd say, look we need to buy a fleet of trucks and instead of taking a lot of time, the worker rep would say OK. They'd explain it, but basically it was not a decision that was reached by the workers' counsel. There were less successful companies who did the workers' council thing and they were usually not well-run.

Q: As you were doing this did we see that Yugoslavia was going on a downward slope?

WHITMAN: There was a fear when Tito died that the Russians were going to come in. That was a fear I certainly heard expressed by some Yugoslavs. By that time, 1980, it might have happened.

Q: Afghanistan, they'd gone in '79, so this wasn't that far away.

WHITMAN: There was a concern that if there were disruptions, there was general chaos in Yugoslavia that the Russians would be tempted to intervene. Don't forget that during my first assignment there we had the Czech uprising in '68. So they had a record of doing things in the region and there was some concern. So there was this residual concern about the red army and I think we were worried too, maybe not about the red army, but that the Russians would step up their efforts to infiltrate or take over in another way, by getting their friends in positions of power. And the economic decline was notable. You had this big debt service problem. They were living on borrowed money.

Q: I think one of the factors of what you dealt with in Yugoslavia was the concern about the Soviets perhaps moving in, once the divisive forces within the country got going it would be an invitation. It really held things together, once the Soviets sort of collapsed that took the cork out of the bottle. There was always a factor in dealing with Yugoslavia, complete breakup could mean the Soviets might take advantage.

WHITMAN: Or use one republic's dissatisfaction as the way to meddle in Yugoslav affairs. Maybe try to take over.

Q: How did you view the distribution of funds between the republics. The Slovenians and the Croats were complaining that the Serbs were grabbing all the money to a certain extent Macedonia and Bosnia but basically those damned Serbs were milking the rich cows of Slovenia and Croatia for their own benefit.

WHITMAN: That was definitely a factor, in fact there were foreign exchange riots in the streets of Zagreb. People protested, because what happened was a lot of the hard currency earned from tourists visiting Dalmatia would have to be turned over by the bank of Dalmatia to the central bank in Belgrade which was seen as a Serb institution. At that point it was theirs and they would reappropriate it because they had import restrictions and things. You could get authority to buy the foreign exchange for certain items and not for others. So the bank was thought to be favoring Serbian and Montenegrin enterprises in making those foreign exchange allocations. Those decisions meant that a lot of those dollars never got back to Croatia, and that's why there was student and general unrest in Zagreb.

I went back to Croatia after they became independent and one of the problems they had then was that the people in Dalmatia were angry that they had to turn over their currency to Zagreb. So you essentially have the same problem now in an independent Croatia. In any event, there was a lot more strife going on under Tito than we knew or could see. I don't think we ever really reported that there was enough hatred in Croatia to power a breakup.

Q: What were you getting from Milosevic?

WHITMAN: Well Milosevic had lived in New York at one point so when we went in to talk to him about bankers' concerns he knew exactly what we were talking about. Very icy guy- his English was good and he was quite worldly actually. He was an important embassy contact who said he shared our concerns about over-borrowing by Yugoslav banks, but didn't know what he could do about that. Several years later I saw Larry, when he was deputy secretary. I said, "When we were dealing with Milosevic did you ever think that man would turn into a mad dog?" He said, "I never imagined that." Our visiting bankers would all talk to him when they were in town because he ran the biggest bank in town and was a knowledgeable guy.

Q: Looking at the country were you seeing a change in the divisive forces, the ethnic things, or not?

WHITMAN: That was stuff that was really held very closely, far down. Every once in a while you'd get a whiff of this from somebody who said, I had dinner with my relatives in Zagreb and all they talked about at dinner was how much they hated the Serbs. Ok, I got a couple of conversations like that, but it was pretty well-masked. Obviously, Tito would deal with you harshly. He did deal with the Croats harshly in that settling of accounts. So everything was sort of sitting on it, and I still think it could have been avoided if it hadn't been for Milosevic and Tucman.

Q: You know I think this is a classic case of where leadership, you have a different type of person there, but two people stoking ethnic things.

WHITMAN: Each for their own reason.

Q: I don't know how you thought about it, but it looked like Milosevic was more this was the way to power, where Tucman really felt this.

WHITMAN: Well Tucman never really got the blame that Milosevic did, probably because he didn't merit as much, but he was certainly not a good person, and certainly the wrong person to have facing Milosevic at that time, extreme nationalist. Warren Zerman's book I think was right. I think also Moody's book was right about this. It could have been avoided with some good will and a lot better leadership. But that wasn't around.

Q: Was Croatia really different, as the economic counselor did you see Croatia as being a different breed of camp than what you're getting...

WHITMAN: Sure in Slovenia certainly. First of all I always thought in the back of my mind that Slovenia eventually someday will go off on its own. If you were asking, did I see the breakup of Yugoslavia, the answer is no. Partly because I don't think I was aware of how pernicious this leadership could be. It was also pernicious but it was also tapping into some real hatred. I didn't think they'd be that stupid to blow the place up. It was a going-on institution with its imperfections. It was still a hell of a lot better than Bulgaria, Romania, and other neighbors. And I didn't think they were that dumb, but they were.

Q: I think for all of us, seeing what had happened in Germany and the Holocaust and all that you just couldn't imagine that sort of thing or hatred when people were too smart to do that.

WHITMAN: Of course, Tito would come down on you if you were preaching any kind of ethnic hatred, except maybe the Kosovars, where the Serbs had racist prejudices. They had jokes about others, the Bosnians; the Croats would tell jokes about the Serbs and vice versa, but they never would tell you about the real resentment they disguised. I caught a lot of it when I went back after the place broke up and the Croats said we felt like a colony. As I said before the Slovenes got away with a lot because the Serbs never really saw them as rivals. They were going to set up their own airlines, they did their own deals to buy DC-9s, they had a good bank, within reason, they were on a long leash, and I think they played the game. But nobody, even Eagleburger, would have predicted when Tito died that the place wasn't going to last. Although he did take a straw vote at a staff meeting whether this place going to continue as is or what?

Q: How did it go?

WHITMAN: We all voted, and most, including me, thought it was going to stay together. Partly because it was wishful thinking, I was inclined to think of things would stay as they were - there's a Yugoslavia now there's going to be a Yugoslavia in 20 years of course.

Q: Did you find that the whole mission was suffering some of the same internal differences that the country had? You were in Belgrade, did you find that our Consul General in Croatia reflected a different view?

WHITMAN: Olaf Grobel was the principal officer in Zagreb when we were there the second time. I didn't feel that he had any particular built in bias or anything.

Q: Was there still the same commercial interest, other than banking loans, that had been prior, or had this been sort of going downhill?

WHITMAN: I think there was concern about debt and about the future of Yugoslavia. I went with Miller, our secretary of treasury, who was in town with the funeral delegation to see the minister of finance. This was the morning after the funeral. And the minister of finance told us officially how much debt there was and he said, "Our income intake is not great," I forgot what numbers he threw out. And Miller said, "I'd say you have a big problem," and the Minister said, "I think you're right." So they just borrowed themselves into trouble. They would tell you that debt was not really a bad debt because there was a safety net of all banks in Yugoslavia. If one bank couldn't meet its obligations the others would swing right in behind and cover for them. Then Poland went under financially, and then it became clear that there was no guaranteeing power. The thought in Poland had been always that the Soviets would step in, would not let default happen. They would cover any shortfall the Poles ran up. And I think that started people thinking, well maybe the Yugoslavs aren't any better credit risk.

After Tito's death a lot of this stuff was officially acknowledged although we knew pretty much what was going on anyway. By the time I left in '82 it was still a going concern. That was not true 10 years later, or nine years later.

Q: In '82 when you left.

WHITMAN: Eagleburger was called right after Reagan was elected. He was one of the few Republicans in the Foreign Service and he was very good. They called him and they asked him to be assistant secretary for Europe. I'd see Larry all the time. I'd go over in the afternoons and he'd pull out his stamp collection and we'd talk. Or I'd bring cables out for him to sign at the residence. And in the afternoons the phone would start to ring with calls from all over, after he was named. As soon as Reagan was elected a lot of FSOs knew that he was going to be something important. So the phone starts to ring "gee, how's it going Larry? just thought I'd give you a call." And then he was named assistant secretary for Europe and he became even more popular. Lots of phone calls from people wanting to go to Portugal -the usual stuff. When he left, he named a successor who was David Anderson, who I worked for one year and liked him immensely, he was just a great guy. When Larry left the assistant secretary's job in EUR to go to be deputy secretary, he offered the assistant secretary job to David, and David at that point realized that he was finishing up in the Foreign Service, so he turned it down, stayed on in Belgrade, of course later died.

Q: He went to Berlin to head up the Aspen Institute.

WHITMAN: That's right.

Q: How was Marlene Eagleburger? Marlene started out as a consular assistant in my office.

WHITMAN: She was also Larry's secretary.

Q: She moved up from my office to his office.

WHITMAN: Well I liked Marlene immensely. We had a lot of fun with them. Very funny and easy to deal with. I never knew the first Mrs. Eagleburger.

Q: Muriel. She was from Wisconsin and went back there. No, I think she stayed in Europe. I'm not sure. They broke up when Larry was involved with Marlene. David married?

WHITMAN: Yes. He was married to Helen. She's German. Very attractive blonde with a small daughter. I thought Helen was sort of off-putting myself.

Q: We knew David's first wife, I forget, but they were... I think probably a good place to stop Bill, where did you go when you left in '82?

WHITMAN: I went to Rome with Larry's help.

Q: What were you doing in Rome?

WHITMAN: I was economic minister.

Q: Who was the ambassador there?

WHITMAN: Max Rabb.

Q: Ok well next time we'll talk, you were in Rome from '82 to '87.

Okay, today is September 13, 2004. Bill, I would love to talk about Rome. You had been in Palermo hadn't you?

WHITMAN: I'd been in Palermo and Milan.

Q: So you were really coming home.

WHITMAN: Oh, yes, between all that time I'd been back. So you know by the time I ended my career I'd spent 10 years there.

Q: What was your first impression of the embassy. I'd spent a good time in Naples as consul general and I had the feeling that Rome was kind of a world outside anything else. The politics and all very closed off. How did you find coming to the embassy?

WHITMAN: First of all, from the fringes in Palermo and Milan, we never integrated with the embassy. Basically the embassy was one thing and the consulates were another. The embassy maybe to this day had never succeeded in integrating the consulates as much as they could. I think this is what the latest inspections found. So you have the embassy and then you have everyone else. The embassy would come out and visit us in Milan, but in the case of Palermo we almost never saw anyone in terms of interest. Milan was different because Milan was and is a major city.

Q: You were there from when to when?

WHITMAN: '82 to '87.

Q: Your first ambassador was Maxwell Rabb.

WHITMAN: The only ambassador. He was there for a total of six years.

Q: How did you find him?

WHITMAN: I liked him in a way, but he was a complete politico-a friend of Reagan and he never stopped telling me about how close they were. He had big industrial contacts, but these were mainly social contacts and didn't further our interests.

Q: How was it like working for him and how did he run the embassy?

WHITMAN: Well I never had a single problem with Max Rabb, but others did. He had a very clear idea of his identity as ambassador and personal status. Mainly people who had dustups with him let him down in that sense. Got him into a situation that was embarrassing or awkward. I was very careful about that, and how to handle him. He was ok with me.

Q: strengths.... Did you find that in your position it was useful?

WHITMAN: Max was actually, yes, at least on one occasion. I was the economic minister, and what I was practicing there was essentially industrial diplomacy. We had a very good treasury unit which nominally did work for me. They were doing pure economics, the real economics and analysis. So the people I had to deal with and I were basically involved with industrial arrangements. Particularly aircraft, both commercial when it came to McDonnell Douglas/Boeing versus Airbus, and in the military field as well. And we had an aerospace committee within the embassy, and that's what I spent a lot of time on. Max actually did do some weighing in on a political level very forcefully with the minister of industry and let them know with no possible doubt that we wanted the Americans to get the Alitalia contract and not Airbus. That was kind of rare-in day to day diplomatic life he wasn't much at bat, mainly looking after his own social and business interests. He was also heavily involved personally with the Abbas situation. You recall Were you there when that happened?

Q: Were you there when that happened?

WHITMAN: Yes, I should explain, I was economic minister by assignment, but I spent a lot of time as acting DCM, so I saw Max a lot. And as I said Max and I got along fine, even at close range. The Abu Abbas thing came up, I was not acting DCM at that time, John Holmes was. But Max felt personally betrayed by the Italians because

Q: Talk a little about this, from your perspective. They had this man who was a known terrorist.

WHITMAN: Yes, he murdered Klinghofer.

Q: When they had him, what caused them to let him go?

WHITMAN: The Italians, at least at that time, never stopped trying to cultivate the Arab world. So this to them was something they saw as doing the Arabs a favor. This is because I assume a part of ENI's oil concessions with Libya and other big money interests. There was another motive in that the Italians always thought that if you appease a terrorist they would never come after you.

Q: The Greeks tried that thing too.

WHITMAN: Yes, and that was part of the Italian position.

Q: The officers at the embassy, yourself included, must have caused a great deal of bitterness?

WHITMAN: It was a very unpleasant thing. It certainly raised a lot of concerns here in Washington, and around the world because I think they did entirely the wrong thing. And for us it reinforced their reputation as a weak system. Even though they'd done some things for us that were quite courageous before around that time, such as taking the Comiso missiles when no one else wanted them and their willingness to accept a lot of the basing and other troop stations that came to us when the Greeks closed us down. They weren't entirely craven, but that was one case where we were a bit rankled.

Q: Talk about your work. How were your contacts, what were you doing and accomplishing?

Q: How did you find your Italian counterparts?

WHITMAN: Some of them were very thoughtful. Some of my counterparts and contacts came from the treasury where they had fabulous contacts, the fact that they were in the banking world, and these were people who weren't just bankers they were smart on a lot of subjects, including politics, and you had good talks with them. But all too often I dealt with Italian officials who I thought were skating right across the surface, superficial and not heavily involved. This was true partly of the Foreign Ministry.

Q: When you were there, there was what, several governments that were socialist under Craxi and then the CEU came back?

WHITMAN: I don't remember. I remember Craxi very well and I think he was there all the time I was there, or most of it, because he was the longest serving prime minister ever. I'd have to look it up, there was a certain timeline. It was the kind of political situation that I was glad I didn't have to track it. We had a political section, Charlie Stout, who I think you knew, and they followed these ins and outs very closely. But to me it was always the same. These headlines I see in the paper today, they could have been in the paper when I was down in Palermo 40 years ago. Nothing ever changed. I thought it was sort of boring, although they tried to generate a lot of excitement about whether they will or won't they form a coalition, will he won't he, and I never really got caught up in it and, I suspect, neither did most of the Italian people.

Q: I found from the viewpoint of Naples, they say, "What are they saying about the change in government," well they aren't saying anything about the change in government.

WHITMAN: The big issue for us was not so much who's on first, but are they going to let the communism in the government. And that was a big deal because we had defense relations there that would be compromised if the Italians had a communist defense minister. So this was, I could see, very important. But the rest of it... and the Italian public was turned off just as much as I was. People weren't grabbing the paper every day to see who said what in Parma.

Q: Who was making the decision on something like this Airbus thing? Where was this? Was this an industry decision?

WHITMAN: The industry was controlled by the government in those days. You have to remember, you had us on one side pushing the American manufacturers, but on the other side were the Europeans, the French, mostly fellow socialists at that time, pushing Airbus. So you had the feeling that probably for financial reasons, because I'm sure there was money changing hands right and left, the Italians would have preferred a French offer, but the industry itself, the people who actually ran these companies, preferred the Americans. So you had a tug of war here between the political interests of the socialist government in pacifying the French if not actually giving the whole thing to them. And then the equally political desire to keep us happy. Plus the fact that the industry itself favored American partners.

Q: Why was that?

WHITMAN: I think they felt the technology was better. They also felt their interests would be better because they'd get more subcontracts. They didn't like particularly dealing with the French and the Germans who dwarfed everyone else in Europe when it came to aerospace. So the Italians would have been a tail on that kite. They probably would have been a tail on the American kite too.

Q: How did it turn out?

WHITMAN: They bought American. It was Boeing. So we spent a lot of time on those issues, aerospace issues, aircraft. That said, it was a nice job. We had a very good DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) Peter Bridges. I was DCM for a long time after he left for Somalia. And Peter was really the main interface with Max. But I think he saved his ammunition for really serious things.

Q: How about the problem of corruption within the Italian system?

WHITMAN: It was pervasive. You remember this was even before the gigantic "Tangentopoli" scandals, which totally erased some political parties and sent some people to jail. A very good friend of mine, Sergio Castellari, who, as undersecretary of the ministry of state participations, was a key figure in industrial decision making on major projects and therefore was probably heavily involved. My wife and I used to visit him at his mall estate outside Rome, which must have cost far beyond his salary possibilities. About two years after I left Rome. Sergio left the government and went to work for Deutschebank. He was later was found dead on his estate grounds. The verdict was suicide, but Sergio's gun was still tucked into his belt. A big mystery to this day.

Q: Were we sort of tracking the money that...

WHITMAN: Not really. We might have been doing this , I'm not sure that there's much benefit in it, unless it was going into the hands of terrorists. That kind of money leaking out was leaking into political parties and not any foreign interests.

Q: Did you find that you were inhibited because of restrictions? We had to not pick a favorite say in airplane production, where the French had their one candidate. Or that payoffs would be made?

WHITMAN: I've forgotten how we handled that. Basically we dealt with the Americans as equals. I'm sure the Italians told us it's either Boeing or Airbus. At that point it was clear what to focus on. I don't remember ever being frustrated or inhibited. They knew what we were saying.

Q: How were the ties between the embassy and your office.

WHITMAN: I had visitors all the time. People of course loved to come to Rome, we never saw so many congressional and other visitors in Belgrade. And I should mention this, that the care and feeding of visitors was another important item on our agenda because we had a continual parade of CODELS, so that took up a fair amount of my time. That said, my time in Rome was extremely pleasant. Ambassador Rabb made almost no demands on us, or very few demands to turn up at the villa every night, or on the weekends. He was very careful and thoughtful about that. Basically it was a nine to six or eight to six job five days a week, and it was wonderful because it left all kinds of time for me to explore Rome and the area.

Q: Do they get the Roman film industry?

WHITMAN: Only by visiting Cinecitta. We always imagined the industry, you know if you were in Yugoslavia and you had industry you do industry snapshots. But Italy was reported on every day in the financial press, and we were told then, don't bother with stuff we've already seen in the financial press so we really did not do a lot of basic reporting except when it came to aerospace and the Italian defense industry. And also we had a terrific Treasury unit that did the real financial and economic reporting

Q: How did we view the Italian communist party?

WHITMAN: I can understand why people were concerned about the position of the party, in a position where they would get into NATO's council. On the other hand, the Italian communist party impressed me. At least superficially as not being very communist and not very dangerous people. You read the leftist press, I mean there was a big leftist chic element at that time—a lot of rich people calling themselves communist, partly in reaction to the right wing Christian democrats who were so venal. So the communists looked pretty clean, although everybody knew pretty much that they weren't 100% pure, they seemed better. So the communists got a lot of support from middle class and upper class people as a reaction to the other party, socialists. Don't forget we established the Social Democratic party to take the disaffected people from the left and socialist parties, but that party never really got much resonance.

Q: All I know is down in Naples the mayor of Naples was a communist and was always asking me, "do whatever you can to keep the Sixth Fleet here." People getting killed by bombs or suddenly murdered commemorations and in churches the communists were always there with a red banner.

WHITMAN: I think that if they had ever gotten into power that statement might have fallen away. The hardliners might have stepped forward and said ok, thanks for your help, we'll take over from here. And then all these respectable communists would have been shuffled off nowhere and some real tough guys would step forward. But that never happened.

Q: How about the Italian industrial leaders?

WHITMAN: Well, yes, they were entirely different political animals— a different world. Although some of the industrial leadership, consisted of the Agnellis and other important families, many of the industries in those days were state managed.

Q: Where'd you go in '87?

WHITMAN: I came back to the Department as head of senior assignments. Another good job, I must say. When I left Italy I had some desire to be a DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) I think, then I got a phone call from Bill Swing saying that I should come back and head senior assignments. And I said sure ok, I did it and it was a great job.

Q: You did it from when to when?

WHITMAN: Three years, until 1990.

Q: Tell me about the job.

WHITMAN: If you looked at just the title you would say, "here's the man who makes the senior assignments." In practice, as I'm sure you know, there are a lot of people involved in making those assignments. First there was the "D Committee," run by the deputy secretary and which includes the Department's top officials, which chooses DCMs and ambassadors. So a lot of the best senior assignments were beyond by purview. In our office was prepared candidate lists of those FSOs we thought would be best qualified for the jobs the D Committee was considering at that meeting; we would put up five people strictly on the basis of professional qualifications like area experience, language ability, Of course we knew that there were plenty of personal connections that usually determined who went where as ambassador or DCM. I forget what our batting average was, but it wasn't even .500. So sometimes we would recycle the best names for inclusion in other countries and other situations. Basically we were left doing our assignments for people who weren't all that easy to assign. We had a very good office, we enjoyed working together. And I'll say one thing about that job, everybody returns your calls! And you would get calls. You would get calls from Jamaica, Chad, all over the world from officers asking how am I doing? Have you made any decisions for, for example, Portugal?

Q: Vest was head of?

WHITMAN: He was director general. And Bill Swing was his deputy. Wonderful people. Very, very professional. I would know from those meetings which we had almost every day, that this guy didn't have a prayer to go to Portugal. And they were really nice people, they didn't want to say, "You don't have a chance in hell." They wanted me to say that or I would sort of deflect questions by saying that things were still uncertain, we don't know, the White House has its own candidate, or leave a strong hint, etc. These phone calls from the overseas candidates would start rolling in around seven AM. But in a lot of cases Swing or Vest didn't want to tell them they hadn't a chance-start trying out for another job, and this left these people on hold for quite a while, which was dangerous because the longer the cycle moves on, the less chance you have of getting a good job. We also dealt with a lot of senior officers we just couldn't place. Other seniors didn't want to go to the vacant jobs we wanted them to fill for a variety of reasons-because they didn't see it as career-enhancing, lack of interest in living in the country involved and sometimes for medical reasons, either theirs or their family's. So we were stumped, because you can't say, "Goddammit you're going to go." So you had a lot of unassigned positions.

Q: I left in '90 so I've been out of the game for a long time, but there was an awful lot of pushing to get DCM assignments rather than being political counselor, say, in the Philippines, it's far better to be DCM at Bujumbura or something like that.

WHITMAN: Well that was the thought. See the conventional wisdom was to get a DCM-ship, no matter where, because you need to get promoted. At that time you had the time and grade requirement and it was an article of faith that DCMs might be extended by receiving limited career extensions or LCEs.

I knew at the time that this was baloney. Being a DCM in Madrid or Tokyo might save your career, Chad wouldn't. So people neglected very nice jobs in very nice countries to try to get to be DCM anywhere. This was part of the Foreign Service mythology at the time.

When I left that job I was offered a chance by people I had been working for to put my name on a couple of ambassadorial lists. I knew I wasn't going to get Ottawa or any prominent place and going to Djibouti or Ghana as a chief of mission did not appeal to me at all. First of all because I knew how little the Department cared about places like that. Also my wife had started a career here in Washington and was making decent money. If I had gone off to Djibouti for three years, she would never make any money, and would probably never enter the job market when we returned. Whereas if I stayed here in Washington we'd have two incomes.

Second thing is I'd lost confidence in the system's ability to reward its members for a lot of reasons. And by that time I was kind of fed up. The Foreign Service is fine if you feel as I did when I entered-that they were looking out for you and you were looking out for them and it was a mutually respectful and rewarding deal. But I'd seen quite clearly that that was not the case. I also saw ambassadors coming back from distinguished assignments who were kept on with no real jobs because nobody wanted to terminate them and the system couldn't come up with anything for them. Section 813 I think it is, that says if you don't get a comparable job as ambassador you come back and you're terminated. That's what the system should have done to reduce the glut of senior officers, we used to talk about that, but I never could persuade people. So while all of this was going on I decided I lost a lot of enthusiasm for the Foreign Service. So I told them I didn't want to be thrown into the D Committee list, and I would find my own nest assignment, which I did, I took a Pearson assignment in Washington at the Conference Board, working on planning an international conference that never took place because of their own internal wrangling and office politics. Then I got a call saying I had not been granted an LCE extension. The main reason was that I had been promoted too quickly to MC; if I had missed just one promotion, I would have had another 10 years to get promoted. But I was promoted to MC too fast and I had arrived at the LCE decision brink too soon. The odd thing was that during my last year in the foreign service, they, to their credit, rectified my problem by extending the time in grade for MCs; but they held that I was not eligible to be saved by that new provision.

In a class action suit with about 10 other officers I grieved that we should be retroactively granted that during that extra year this new system gave us and we should be subject to that because we were on the payroll when it was enacted. In my own case I found, in checking my own personnel file that letters of commendation from the Director General were missing. After a lengthy grievance assisted by our lawyers, the Grievance Board found against us, but if you read the grievance board finding we were winning up until the last page. So I retired in March, 1992.

Q: What about the senior assignments. There was much talk about career development and all, sort of in the good old days people were given small embassies and then they...

WHITMAN: Oh, yes, sometimes that worked. We would have people who were relatively new senior officers and very promising ones and there would be clearly an effort to give them smaller embassies.. Bill Swing cared a lot about bringing along a lot of people who struck him as exceptional diplomats and he had a pretty good idea of who these people were who ought to go to Cameroon or elsewhere on their "starter embassies." As for formal career development, that may have been going on just below the senior level, but I didn't get much of it.

Q: What about the problem that comes up in these interviews, not problem, but what happens when they see young officers that end up as sort of staff assistants and assistants to senior officers with frankly very little line experience, but an awful lot of time carrying somebody's briefcase and all. Getting a sponsor pushing it. Did you feel that in a lot of..

WHITMAN: Yes, but that's been the way since time out of mind - you've get people's attention. Someone could be doing a sensational job in Ouagadougou while another could be doing a great job for the deputy secretary or some other top official on the 6th or 7th floor-guess which one is going to get ahead.

Q: Of course it really boils down to them that likes the adventure part of being overseas and them that wants to career enhance.

WHITMAN: Sure, but them that wants to career enhance, enhance their chance of a good overseas job, so they go overseas too, but they don't go as number two in the political section in Asuncion, they're pulling strings to go as political counselor in Peru, and that's really the key. I certainly can't complain, I got promoted to MC and I got the assignments I wanted.

Q: I've often thought, I had a stint in personnel, and looking at this that efficiency reports are fine, but it's really the assignment, you've got to do well at it, the assignment's the major thing. I mean if you're the greatest DCM in Switzerland it's not going to do you as much good as being a DAS in the Middle East.

WHITMAN: If you have two talented officers, let's say OC level, and one is a DCM in a less important post where the ambassador can't write, her efficiency report is not going to come across very well. If the other is in a post where the ambassador is a gifted writer, a promotion is much more likely. Writing effective and vivid efficiency reports is a lot of work and sad to say, a lot of Foreign Service officers can't write-they do what they call drafting, but it's not writing. And you know how it is, you know the end of the day, oh my God tomorrow they're due so the report comes out something like a checklist or template, and then the panel reads this, and it's flat. It's not two dimensional, it's one dimensional.

Q: What about, quickly touching on this, you were working for this Pearson assignment. What were they asking?

WHITMAN: Well the Conference Board was looking for someone with Foreign Service experience who could plan and organize a major, major transatlantic CEO forum of Board members from Europe and the US to discuss many important trade and other issues. It never happened. I found that the Board was just as bogged down in its own internal policies and maneuvering as the State Department or any other bureaucracy, with lots of intramural battles.

Q: You were with them for a year.

WHITMAN: Yes, and then after that ended I was in my year of grace before I was supposedly finished. And the grievance was still in progress and I was waiting to see how that came out.

Q: How did you find the board of examiners?

WHITMAN: Well you know, mostly I liked them. There were some dull days, but there was quite a bit of travel around the country which I liked. And there were certain points in the examining process where candidates have to sharpen their wits, solve a problem, carry out role-playing parts, etc. I thought it was fun, and highly gratifying to see how many very sharp younger people are trying to get in the Foreign Service.

Q: Would you like to stop here today?

WHITMAN: It's probably as good a point, because at this point I lose the grievance and I move on into other assignments and that I think is a good place to stop.

Q: Alright so we'll pick up the next time in 1991,'92 when you left the Foreign Service but since you came back to the State Department in a series of jobs and we'll talk about those

Today is September 20, 2004.

WHITMAN: I was going to say, I think I mentioned in the last seance that I began to lose interest in the Foreign Service in Rome and that was when I started writing for money, when I started travel writing, I started out in 1987 with an article in the New York Times on a little country railroad outside Rome and since then it's mushroomed into something about 100 articles and three books so that's what I've been doing since Italy, since the year I left Rome. So I wrote two more stories for the Times about subjects near Rome and then came back here and started doing more writing at the same time I was doing my final assignment in the Foreign Service as a grievant.

Q: You did have a series of when actually employed (WAE) assignments didn't you?

WHITMAN: That's right, and this started almost right after I retired. I'm trying to think of the month, I think I retired in early '92 and right away got a call from EUR asking if I would head the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) mission in Skopje, Macedonia, replacing Bob Frowick, who opened the mission. This was of course at a time when the Serbs, looked like they were going to run amok in that part of the world, and everybody was afraid the Macedonians might be next, certainly the Macedonians were afraid of that. So I agreed to do this. I went for three months to Skopje, I had a mission of 10 multinational missions, observer mission they called it. Essentially we just kept an eye on internal matters in Macedonia and on the borders.

Q: How did you find it at that time?

WHITMAN: It was very remote. Skopje as you recall was never really a cosmopolitan center. It was poor, remote, and the new capital of a new country which was really threatened. And they were finding their way. There were no other diplomats in town except our group which was Austrian, Swedish, Norwegian, Canadian and we sort of kept track of things, and we were kind of an unofficial embassy to the government of Macedonia and they were glad to have us because there were no other embassies there except a Greek consulate.

So we did a lot of that, a lot of liaison with the top people. A lot of travel. We had a couple of weeks we would go around the border, check out the border, see if there's anything happening that we should know about, report back transgressions. The Serbs were active there, stirring things up. Of course, Macedonia was never attacked, but there was a lot to exploit there. There was the Albanian minority problem, there was the Serb minority problem, there were the Turks. That's of course why fruit salad is called a Macedonia because of the tremendous ethnic mix. Also I was asked by OSCE to take a tour of the neighboring capitals of neighboring countries I should say, and talk to them about their view of the security situation in the Balkans. And this took me to Budapest, sorry to Sofia, and to Tirana which I'd never visited before. And for a very exciting three or four days there.

Q: Let's talk about Macedonia first. What sort of government did they have? Who were the leaders?

WHITMAN: Well the leader was a man name of Kiro Gligorov who was a senior official, and the top Macedonian in Belgrade under Tito. And I'd met him briefly in Belgrade when I went in with Eagleburger to talk to him a few times. Then I saw him again a lot more in Skopje because he remembered me and I remembered him of course, and he still thought I was sort of Eagleburger's representative in Skopje which I really didn't want him to think I was because that wasn't fair to OSCE. But he was the top guy and the rest were sort of youngish. Of course everybody then was a former communist and Gligorov, who I liked very much, was the top man and sort of the father of his country.

Q: How were things between the Albanians and the Macedonians?

WHITMAN: Well they were tight and tense, they still are. There's been that tension for years, maybe centuries in that part of the world. You have about a third of Macedonia is Albanian and they cover a lot of the physically geographic territory, the western part around Debar down to the Greek border. There was always tension, mainly because the Slavic Macedonians didn't much like the Albanians and they excluded them from a lot of civic life. For example, this was a minority with probably a third of the population and they had about 1% of the police officer billets. So they were essentially excluded and they were discriminated against really. And there was violence. I mean, there were riots.

Q: What were your mission there doing? Was it just to observe or were you telling the Macedonians, gee you Slavics you better get some Albanians on board.

WHITMAN: Yes, we would give that kind of Dutch uncle advice to them. I mean, it was quite clear to us that this was certainly negative on the side of security of the country. You have disaffected and possibly violent minorities of some size. And we really did a lot of sort of talking to them about opening up. I used to go to talk to the minister of the interior quite a bit about that. So we were giving them advice. We were also reporting back to OSCE in Vienna about what was going on, and I would go to meetings at OSCE and report there on the situation in Macedonia.

Q: What were you seeing over in Kosovo?

WHITMAN: We saw Kosovo as in a way connected because Kosovo, the border to Kosovo was only 40 or 50 kilometers from Skopje, and there was a huge amount of traffic across that border because everybody had relatives in Kosovo. And they were of course Albanian. So we watched that pretty carefully. At that point though Kosovo had not really gotten so serious. Everybody knew it could be and Arkan, the Serb terrorist and warlord was there. And I remember going into the Grand Hotel in Kosovo, in Pristina, and found all of his thugs were there checking people's suitcases and lying around the lobby drinking, they'd have their girlfriends with them, and they were all armed. It was quite something.

Q: Did we have troops at that point in Macedonia?

WHITMAN: No we didn't. I was there when the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) group came, the Nordic division. They came down while I was there and I was under instructions to work out some sort of amicable collaboration with NATO and we did. I'd go to their staff meetings, we'd talk a lot. They're very nice people and it wasn't such a big trick to get along with them. But at first they were sort of uncertain as to what they were doing there.

Q: What were they doing?

WHITMAN: I think it was really more or less a symbolic gesture.

Q: Sort of a trip wire or something?

WHITMAN: It could be a trip wire, but I don't know what their marching orders were, if the Serbs actually did come in. They were just starting to come in. The first arrival was there about six weeks before I left.

Q: What was the situation over in Bosnia at this time? Had NATO already gone in?

WHITMAN: I'm not sure. I think that UNPROFOR was there at that time. Bosnia was not the first to, it was Croatia that got it first, then Slovenia.

Q: What about the Greeks? I saw a map of Greece just the other day on the internet and it still called the former republic of Macedonia?

WHITMAN: When I first got to Skopje there was no gasoline because the Greeks had cut off the port of Salonika which was the main port for Macedonia because they wanted Macedonia not to be called Macedonia and I doubt if they really wanted to be independent at all. But there was a lot of harassment at the border when you crossed. That road just shut down. You could drive from Skopje down to Salonika and not see more than one or two other cars. Just completely shut down.

Q: What was the Greek Consul doing?

WHITMAN: I don't know. Hard to know. I know he had never been withdrawn. I assume he did some elementary visa work, something like that. Reporting I'm sure.

Q: Had the Bulgarians made their peace with the Macedonians? Languages and..

WHITMAN: The Bulgarian government was different then, by that time and they were quite, I think that they told the Macedonians if you're worried about deploying troops somewhere else, go right ahead, don't worry about us.

Q: Were they active there at all?

WHITMAN: I don't remember them being particularly active. I remember going over to Sofia when I was there, I talked to them and they were very supportive of Macedonia, whether or not how sincere that was I don't know.

Q: How about when you went to Tirana? Anything going on then?

WHITMAN: That was after Hoxha left or died and the communists had been thrown out and it was a brand new country. It was fascinating to me because in Belgrade we were never allowed to think about Albania which was really in a hermit state. So when I went it was quite an interesting trip for me. I saw this odd country for the first time and they were just getting around to functioning. It was really pretty bad. Broken down buses, European castoff buses that European countries had sent them. No lights. I lived in Hoxha's house when I was there, it was a guest villa by that time. And it is a dirt poor place. Really ramshackle. I went and talked to the president, the foreign minister and they were very nice to me but they had really nothing to work with.

Q: Did Macedonia come across their radar?

WHITMAN: I don't think anybody at that point thought the Macedonians were a threat to anybody. I think everybody thought the disarray of violence in the Balkans would harm Albania or Kosovo or Macedonia and that meant the Serbs. And the Serbs were like crazy people. There was no telling what they would do.

Q: Did you have the feeling that the Serbs were panting on the borders?

WHITMAN: Well that was the fear. I think they had pretty much their hands full with the Croats. I mean you remember this was the time I think of Osijek and Vukovar. First of all, if things had worked out for the Serbs they could later at their own leisure take care of the Macedonians. That was I'm sure what they thought. So we were more nervous than we probably needed to be at that point, but you never know. But if there were an ethnic blowup in Macedonia the Serbs might not have been able to resist exploiting it.

Q: How about the Orthodox church? Did you meet any of the principals there?

WHITMAN: No, I didn't really do much with the church. Church only is an element of society, not as a factor.

Q: How was it being on a mission with mixed people?

WHITMAN: We got along fine. It was a very affable bunch. I must say that personally I couldn't be a very strict boss with that kind of an arrangement,. So we all got along pretty well. The EC sent some observers down and they were sort of pinned onto us. The Russians sent a diplomat down. One of their Yugoslav experts, and he was with us. So it was kind of a federate of kind of an arrangement and I had no control really over anybody because I wasn't writing any efficiency reports, doing anything.

Q: Did you just sort of all spread out or did you stay together?

WHITMAN: We had two man teams that would go around the borders. Some of them I didn't care for too much, but I had people on the team who really loved to get out there in the boonies with our four wheel drive vehicles. They were good because they did all the contacts at Debar and places like that which were real flashpoints. Debar of course was on the border with Albania and was a major center of Albanian sentiment.

Q: Were you getting delegations from the Albanian minority?

WHITMAN: Yes, they'd come and see us. The church came by, the gypsies came by, they knew we were in town and they wanted to complain about the way that Macedonians were treating them. I had pretty good contacts with the leaders of the Albanian community who were fast getting overtaken by a younger, more zealous group. And I had contacts with the opposition party in Macedonia, so we tried to keep a hand in everything. Cultivate people, it wasn't hard, it's not that big a country, certainly when it comes to numbers of people to count.

Q: What was happening to the gypsies?

WHITMAN: The usual. They were discriminated against. They had linguistic, one of the things OSC was big on is mother tongue language training. The Turkish community in Macedonia came to us and said you know, we don't have any Turkish language classes in Macedonia, and that's not right. And it turns out there was nobody qualified to teach Turkish. In fact, children didn't even speak Turkish, so how could you have instruction in Turkish. There was a lot of that going on. I'm sure that some of them had legitimate gripes, but a lot of it was just sort of griping, dissatisfaction.

Q: Did you by any chance ever get over to, when they had this earthquake in '63 I guess (in Skopje) I went down first and I spent three weeks with a MASH a seventh army hospital. Then when I left Larry came down with the engineer troops to put up some pre-fab places. From what I understand it had been quickly taken over by the gypsies. Did you ever see the place?

WHITMAN: The camp that was taken over by the gypsies?

Q: I mean these pre-fab houses that the engineers put up.

WHITMAN: I don't remember seeing anything like that. I do remember the railroad station is still there. And the clock is still stopped at the moment of the earthquake. And somebody opened a restaurant in a Wagon Lits buffet car that had been parked in the station, but that was over 10 years ago.

Q: I went the day after the earthquake to look for Americans and ended up as the sort of Polad to the hospital.

WHITMAN: You know, even four years ago it was even worse than when I was there, it was more isolated, it was less fun. Now they've got a lot of embassies in Skopje. I bet the nightlife and the restaurant scene and everything has picked up. Culture has picked up immensely. When I was there, there was nothing. Some of the best restaurants in town were pizzerias, that was about it. You wouldn't want to stay at any hotels.

Q: I went down there one time after a flood, this is before the earthquake, the Hotel Macedonia. Larry and I went to it and stayed there, and then the earthquake came about six months later and it collapsed killing some Americans as well as others in the hotel. So after you left there, what..

WHITMAN: I left in the spring of '92. Anyway, after that I was asked by PRM the refugee bureau to be their Yugoslav desk officer for a year. They had been unable to fill the job that some rear officer in charge of Yugoslav affairs. And they asked me if I could fill in for what turned out to be nine months, as a WAE, which I did. And went back there a couple times. During the siege I went to Sarajevo twice as part of a delegation, a UN (United Nations) delegation the first time, to assess their humanitarian needs. Seeds, food. The second was something entirely different. Anyway, I went there twice in one year, just to Sarajevo, and to Belgrade. And then finished up that PRM stint.

Q: While you were there, during the siege of Sarajevo obviously this was before NATO, before the U.S. went in.

WHITMAN: Yes, we didn't have anything. I remember when I was working for PRM, that was a time when we were absolutely refusing to send any Americans into Bosnia. We'd send money, we'd send Jordanians, we'd send anything but we wouldn't send our troops.

Q: Were you running across, at least three Foreign Service officers, maybe more resigned because of the, they were really in the accounts of what the Serbs were doing. The rapes, the killings and all that. This must have been part of your world too wasn't it?

WHITMAN: Yes, but as an observer more than anything else because when we were in Sarajevo, that's where we were, you didn't go anywhere. You went from the airport to where you were staying, went to the conference site, you went to meetings, etcetera. But you were traveling a lot of time in the armored car. They had sniper shields up at a lot of places. I remember when they were running across the streets..

Q: There was the so-called sniper alley.

WHITMAN: Well that's where I stayed the second time. I stayed at the hotel, the Holiday Inn. Have you seen the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo?

Q: I remember seeing pictures of it.

WHITMAN: It was built for the Olympics. They put me up in a room on the ninth floor and I went up to my room, it was a standard Yugoslav upscale hotel, not great. The room on either side of me had yellow crime scene tapes, with "do not cross" written on them. So of course, I had to look and see what those, and of course the two rooms had been blown up by mortar fire and I have pictures of this, these rooms just totally destroyed. And the source of the mortar fire was about three blocks away in the suburb that was Serb. And the Serbian flag was flying over this nearby apartment house., essentially just across sniper alley, across this little river. So the guy at the desk said, "You're the first person we've put up there in quite a while. Ninth floor is the top floor." So there wasn't a piece of glass in the whole lobby. They had plastic sheets and canvas up to cover the windows, which were all blown out It was quite a scene.

Q: What were you doing?

WHITMAN: We were meeting with the Bosnian government to talk about their needs and what the U.S. could support, what the UN should, the U.S. should support UN getting. It was a lot of stuff, food, it was refugees, it was a lot of things.

Q: This was the period when the Europeans said we'll take care of Yugoslavia.

WHITMAN: That's what the Luxembourg foreign minister said.

Q: Did you have the feeling that there was an effort on the part of the Europeans to do something?

WHITMAN: Well, yes, they were doing more than we were at that time. Remember we were, the French were there and the Dutch were there, they had actual boots on the ground, whereas we were absolutely frantic not to put anybody in. To the point where it got kind of silly. But the French did it. Say what you want about the French, but they came across. Because it's Europe, of course. And I think there was also self-interest by the Europeans who definitely didn't wanted thousands of Yugoslav refugees sloshing around their continent.

I went back to Yugoslavia in 1998, the year when I worked for Cyrus Vance in his position as head of the International Commission for Missing Persons, which was created by President Clinton to help Bosnians locate the remains of their lost relatives. I worked for Cy at his law office (Simpson, Thacher) in Manhattan from Monday-Friday and returned to DC on the weekends. It was a wonderful job and he was a wonderful man. We traveled together to Yugoslavia that year for Commission meetings in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo and also to Osijek and Vukovar. The job ended when Cy was replace for health reasons by Sen. Dole.

I went back to the former Yugoslavia again in 2000, when we and NATO were bombing the Serbs. I was asked by EUR to go and work as the second person in a two-man mini-embassy in Dubrovnik. The other officer was Michael Scanlan who was the son of Jack Scanlan, my former DCM in Belgrade. We had an office and suites in the Hotel Excelsior and we were talking to the Montenegrans government because this was during the bombing, and Montenegro of course was part of Serbia/Yugoslavia. And we were monitoring events there. It was fascinating. Every night, late at night I'd stand out on my balcony overlooking the ocean and the F-15s would be going by back from raiding Titograd or wherever the hell they were bombing at the time. I did that for about three or four months.

Q: Weren't we being rather careful about not overbombing Montenegro?

WHITMAN: Yes, but you couldn't not do it because you couldn't be seen as completely leaving Montenegro, it would just get the Montenegrans in trouble with Belgrade.

Q: What sort of reaction were you getting in Dubrovnik about the fighting?

WHITMAN: Well in Dubrovnik the Croats were very resentful of the Montenegrins because it was the Montenegrin troops that were part of the siege. And it was the Montenegrin navy that came and shelled those hotels and the old city from point blank range practically. On the other hand, they had a lot of practical reasons for going along with them and mending things because that coastline is contiguous. It doesn't matter if there's a national boundary running through it or not. There are a lot of mutual advantages and interests in tourism particularly, in offering that up as a single region. And I understand that may have happened now, but back then the Croats were very nationalistic, especially when it came to their Montenegrin neighbors.

Q: Did you go into Podgorica?

WHITMAN: No, I never crossed the border. We were under orders not to cross the border. There was also at that point a disputed piece of land between Croatia and Montenegro, a peninsula near Herzeg Novi. That we did go to. That was not far from Cavtat. And the UN was patrolling that, there was a New Zealand battalion there. So we kept in touch with them too. But there was a desire to keep things going as much of an even keel with Montenegro as we could given the fact we were bombing them and we were also bombing their pals in Belgrade. And of course the whole question of independence came up at that point too.

Q: What was your feeling about the ability of Montenegro to be independent?

WHITMAN: About the same as Macedonia. It was going to be tough sledding because even when they were immersed in the greater Yugoslavia, which had some heft, these as individual economies didn't have much in the way of natural resources, farmland, tourism. Tourism you could do with Montenegro. Wine you could do with both. But it was very hard. It was a tough row to hoe. And it was odd because when I was in Skopje I would go to leave to the open air Sunday markets and a lot of people were down from Serbia selling stuff. And just to show you how interlocking these things were, when I was in Skopje the wine business, the wine production line stopped bottling. And the reason was there was no more glue for the wine labels, which came from Belgrade, or some place in Serbia. And when they used that up, that was it, and there was no trade with Serbia. The Serbs cut them off. So these economies, whether it's Montenegro or Macedonia were very much interlocked with Serbia.

Q: Back to the time when you were dealing with refugees, what were we doing for refugees during the siege of Sarajevo?

WHITMAN: We were taking a lot of refugees in. I don't remember how many, but it was not insignificant. Other parts of the same Euro were working with the UN to locate them, to place them. So we were doing quite a bit I think. Maybe some people say not as much as you should, I don't know how much that would be. But of course, Bosnia was a major, major issue and I think everybody would have loved to see the Europeans handle it by themselves.

Q: Jim Baker had said we don't have a dog in that fight, but obviously at a certain point we had to do something.

WHITMAN: You can't really say that, when the allies had a dog in the fight and they ask you for help, they really want you to support them. It's kind of hard to say well sorry, that's not our deal because the whole question of a joint, NATO, whatever relation it is, is a question of burden sharing. You can't say, I'll just pick and choose my burden.

Q: You mentioned these two times, you didn't go on any more of these sort of missions?

WHITMAN: The Yugoslavia stuff. No, about this time I was starting to do a lot of work for OIG (Office of Inspector General).

Q: What were you doing for them?

WHITMAN: I was an inspector, still am actually. I did something early this year in China and in Washington. And I imagine I'll be called back maybe this fall, I don't know.

Q: What sort of inspections were you doing?

WHITMAN: The usual kind of inspection, go to a bureau and examine it piece by piece. Write an inspection report at the end, interview people about morale, about what they're doing, how they do it. Comment on whether the structure makes sense, essentially a McKinsey type examination done by people who know the system very well because most of us have been around a long time. So I've done a lot of inspections in the field, in the Caribbean, Germany, China, Africa a couple times. And in Washington six or seven times.

Q: Particularly during the Bush one and Clinton administrations and the State Department was really stretched for funding wasn't it?

WHITMAN: Yes, but I don't think that funding had a lot to do with the Inspector General, who had his own budget because the IG was supposed to be an independent entity with an independent budget.

Q: I was wondering whether you were seeing the effect on the Foreign Service operations of the cut down in funding during this era.

WHITMAN: Not so much. Not really. I think what you saw was less caused by funding than by management, was the question of open positions, and particularly in Africa which they have trouble filling positions, but as you know, the Foreign Service today, there's a great shortage of middle level officers.

Q: Was this a result of nonrecruitment for a period of time?

WHITMAN: I think it was nonrecruitment and also an effort through the LCE system and other ways to get rid of people. And they maybe got rid of too many people. But it sure shows. There are a lot of positions vacant. WAEs are doing an awful lot of work now. Maybe this will change as the vacancies move through and out. But right now, big shortage. Also, there's no surge capacity. You have people slotted against positions in embassies that are most of the time they're filled. But a Bosnia comes along, or Iraq, you don't have the search capacity, essentially WAEs do a lot of it, either by going into the jobs or backing up the people who are detailed to do them.

Q: Did you have any particular incidents that stick in your mind about during inspection times?

WHITMAN: Not really. This is fascinating stuff because you talk to people, they talk to you very confidentially and you're sworn to secrecy. I thought it was very interesting. There was no great revelation, but one of the things I certainly found out was the Foreign Service continued to get very good junior officers, and they put up with a lot. They go to run the motor pool in Kingston, and they still keep coming, and I'm pleasantly surprised. Because a lot of this, especially doing the Foreign Service 38 years, you get pretty jaded, and you tend to be skeptical about everything, cynical. And yet, it's a career that still appeals to very many great, talented, impressive people under 30. Which is good.

Q: How did you find the mix of the political versus the career appointees in senior jobs?

WHITMAN: We inspected everybody. We inspected career officers, ambassadors, and non-career in Beijing, and career in a lot of other places. I guess on balance you would find that the career officers make better ambassadors but they've certainly been seen in action, some non-career people who did quite well. And I've seen some career officers who've not done well at all. So I think the answer is you learn not to generalize. And I think that's part of the OIG and the inspector's mentality, is you don't walk into the embassy in Rwanda with a preconception, I mean you've done your homework, but you're not going to say, I heard this guy is no good so therefore I'm proceeding from that basis. I think you come in with some advance information, a lot of it as a matter of fact, but you have to evaluate it then on your own. There's an awful lot of stuff, biased information that turns out to be exaggerated or not true, or skewed because there are grudges concerned, jealousy.

Q: Well Bill is there anything else we should cover.

WHITMAN: Well I think we're right up to date. I'm hoping to be back in the inspection business the next few months. I wrote some stuff down here, but I think we've covered it pretty much.

Q: Thank you very much.

WHITMAN: You're very welcome.

End of interview